

# My First Murder



Dark, mythical stories about human weakness

'Death is stupid,' thinks one of the characters in Martin Michael Driessen's latest collection of short stories. He has survived a shipwreck, a Japanese POW camp and a shark attack, but now it seems that he will finally meet his end after taking a dive off his sailboat alone and realizing too late that he forgot to hang the swim ladder.

The central theme of *My First Murder* is death: although it may be stupid, it is above all impatient. At the beginning of the story, it's as if death doesn't have time to sit back and wait for the end to come. Death comes disguised as a stoic announcement: 'On the first day, he fell into a ravine.' That's it – no more words are wasted on the matter. There is no shortage of death in Driessen's work. It plays a role in almost every story, and in the novella *A True Hero*, it's particularly cruel.

The Italian brothers Beppo and Luigi are standing in line for decimation, a Roman punishment for troops who behaved cowardly in battle: every tenth man is executed. The soldiers have fled from an avalanche, and their brutal general decides that this time every fourth man will be killed. The clever Beppo starts calculating their odds. If he and Luigi stand next to each other in line, one of them will survive no matter what. But then there's a fifty per cent chance that one of them dies. They could also spread out and stand with three men between them – then there's a seventy-five per cent chance that they both live and a twentyfive per cent chance that they both die. Luigi doesn't understand. 'You decide,' he sobs. 'You're the one who decides everything anyway.' Luigi's statement turns out to be crucial once death has made its final countdown, and the story takes an unexpected twist.

Driessen's robust narrative style brings an almost mythical atmosphere to his stories, giving them a whisk of modern irony. None of these stories end as their classical settings initially lead the reader believe. *My First Murder* is an exquisite short story collection that celebrates the power of the imagination.

The fact that Driessen is an excellent classical storyteller is something we've known since his debut. [...] His latest collection of short stories, *My First Murder*, is the crème de la crème of Dutch narrative art.

With a steady, masterful hand, the writer places his characters in a battle for their lives and constantly confronts them with new twists of fate. Compelling and inescapable.

Trouw



## Martin Michael Driessen

Martin Michael Driessen (b. 1954) is a director of plays and operas, a translator and a writer. He made his debut in 1999 with the novel *Gars*, which was followed in 2012 by *Vader van God* (Father of God) and in 2013 by *Een ware held* (A True Hero), all of them acclaimed by the press and nominated for...

## Details

**Mijn eerste moord** (2018). Fiction, 165 pages.

Words: 36,000

## Publications

10 Books from Holland (Spring 2019).

## Publisher

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