

## **Blood Bound: The epic storyteller Sweden has been waiting for**

After an acclaimed first novel, Augustin Erba is back with an autobiographical novel inspired by fairytales. With astonishing tenderness, *Blood Bound* depicts parental oppression, rough childhood years in a rundown neighborhood, and a family tree full of princesses and nobility.

Journalist Augustin Erba's debut novel, *Ensamhetens broar*, was published in 2009 to great acclaim. A few years later he contributed to the anthology *Mor, mamma, morsan*, with an epistolary text directed to his mother. Erba laid out that she only ever met her grandchildren on three occasions; that the kids stopped asking why they never met their grandmother; that she always had migraines; always said she wasn't fit to live; that she only ever hugged him once – the day after his father died, when Erba was ten years old. "That was the only time you hugged me, as far back as I can remember. I am sorry I didn't hug you back." It is one of the most heartbreaking portrayals of a parent-child relationship I have read.

In *Blood Bound*, Augustin Erba has mustered the courage to delve deep into that theme. Although originating from personal experience, *Blood Bound* is a novel with fairytale-esque qualities – not least thanks to all the blue-blooded princesses and vice dukes among his ancestors.

The story of young Amadeus (which is one of the author's many middle names) growing up in Fisksätra with a Hungarian princess for a mother and an Egyptian physicist for a father, is interlaced with a present day narrative, in which the adult Amadeus is a journalist who eventually gets married and has two children. Erba deftly portrays how Amadeus is tormented by the certainty that he will fail in life, and beset by the fear that he is forever bound by his blood; that he is doomed by his family heritage.

Due to the risk of turning out like his parents, Amadeus doesn't want to have children, so he keeps a close watch on his girlfriend's menstrual cycle. When he eventually does become a father he fears he will become violent toward his children. One of many powerful scenes in the novel is when Amadeus, upon his father's death, more than anything feels relieved that he will never be beaten by him again.

Despite all the heavy subjects – oppressive parents, poverty, bullying (unseen by the adults), class differences, segregation, sorrow, terrifying heredity, and painful romantic relationships – the book is a tremendously enjoyable read, without a trace of vindictiveness or hate. It encourages reflection upon the small world within the family, as well as how family history makes us behave in the outside world, in interactions with other people. Simply put, that puzzling art of being – and surviving as – a human being.

It is a novel written with astonishing tenderness toward Amadeus' parents, even though they do almost nothing right. At the same time, it is a love letter to all those people one can find outside of the biological family and with whom one can create a new, extensive, supportive and loving family – without blood ties.

Augustin Erba is the answer to the early 2000s many desperate calls for new, Swedish epic storytellers – he demonstrated that already with his first novel. He performs no advanced linguistic pirouettes, simply crystal clear prose, and his love of storytelling shines through in every well-crafted and flowing paragraph. Like Amadeus, he seems to become immersed in

”a feeling of space” just by writing a title on a blank piece of paper. ”I was a small, curly-haired boy who escaped from the raucous drunks in Fisksätra into the inner life of my mind.”

With the anthology piece about his mother is the back of ones mind, one can sense how much anguish this novel must have cost, how much blood, sweat and tears that were shed. Augustin Erba doesn't appear to have shied away from anything. He deserves an August Prize nomination solely for that. 'Cause what an outcome it produced! I truly hope that this book reaches a wide audience. I finished the last pages of the more than 500-page novel late at night. I didn't want it to end, but I do want it to end well for Amadeus and everyone subjected to such a painful start in life.

Lina Kalmteg, *Svenska Dagbladet*