Publishers weekly

My Father’s Arms Are a Boat

Stein Erik Lunde, trans. from the Norwegian

by Kari Dickson, illus. by Oyvind Torseter.

Enchanted Lion (Consortium, dist.), $15.95

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It’s quiet, it’s winter, it’s night, and a

boy can’t sleep. He makes his way to the

living room, where his father sits, not listening

to the radio; he holds his son, and

they discuss the birds and foxes outside.

“Granny says the red birds are dead people,”

the boy tells readers, a line that

rings out like a shot. Then the

silence and the gaping sense of

absence in Torseter’s inkscratched,

cut-paper dioramas

become clearer. “Is Mommy

asleep?.... She’ll never wake up

again?” the boy asks when they

go out into the snow to look at

the stars. Lunde’s first book to

be published in the U.S. doesn’t soften

the way that the death of a parent and

spouse irrevocably alters life. His writing

is lovely in its spareness, but also hardedged,

even in the story’s many moments

of tenderness (“We look straight into each

other’s eyes. His eyes, black as night, are

dark and deep in his face”). Pain is never

far from the surface, yet when the boy’s

father assures him, “Everything will be all

right,” in the final scene, readers will believe

him. Ages 4–up. *(Feb.)*