

## Poetic fable about borders

# Here

JOKE VAN LEEUWEN

'Here' is set in a village in a forsaken mining region near the border of an unnamed country. Patriarch and his dog guard the lonely border against locals smuggling luxury goods from the wealthy neighbouring country. Patriarch won't make friends with anyone in the village, because then they might expect him to turn a blind eye to their illegal activities. After all, rules are rules. His son Bardo, who lost his mother as a boy, grows up in this isolated world, falls in love with Mara, and together they have a daughter called Little One.

The townspeople are only welcome in the neighbouring country as a source of cheap labour. Until one day the Head of State seals the borders. No one is allowed to leave; resources become increasingly scarce. Bardo follows in his father's footsteps to become a military border guard and learns that protecting his country is of paramount importance, no matter the cost. He gradually becomes estranged from his wife and daughter.

**A new highpoint in her oeuvre \*\*\*\*\***

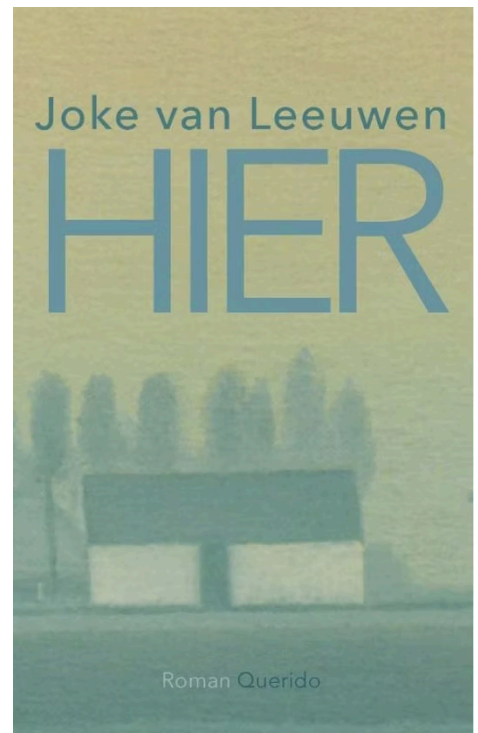
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'Here' contains the elements that makes all of Joke van Leeuwen's work so powerful. In her poetic prose, with its ostensibly simple sentences, she evokes a mythical world we see mirrored in contemporary issues such as xenophobia, migration and totalitarianism. She asks what it means to be an outsider. What is freedom and what are we prepared to do in return for it? Above all: where do we find freedom? There, across the border, or here, in our head?

**A subtle novel, stripped of all context.**

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DE VOLKSKRANT

**AUTHOR**

**Joke van Leeuwen** (b. 1952), who studied history at the University of Brussels, performs in cabaret and theatre shows as well as writing stories and poems for children (which she illustrates herself) and fiction and poetry for adults. A Dutch author, she has lived in Antwerp since 2002. From 2014 to 2017 she was chair of PEN Flanders. She has received innumerable awards for her multifaceted work, including the prestigious Theo Thijssen Prize, a three-yearly Dutch prize for children's and young adult literature, and the Constantijn Huygens Prize. For her adult novel 'Celebration of the Beginning' she won the AKO Literature Prize. Photo © Koos Breukel

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