

Love in times of paranoia

I'm Not Here

LIZE SPIT

Leo, a girl who lives in Brussels, has been together with her boyfriend Simon for ten years. Right from the start, their love story was marked by loss: the fact that they'd both lost their mothers created a strong bond. They're happy in their own little world: they don't need anyone except each other and their cat Daan. Leo works in a maternity wear shop – just until her writing career takes off – together with her best friend Lotte, who is herself pregnant. Simon is a graphic designer at a hip Brussels agency. But when he comes home excitedly one evening after a night out, sporting a brand-new tattoo behind his ear, their happiness is shattered. From then on, he behaves ever more strangely. It's as if there's someone else in Simon's body. Someone who's growing ever more dangerous. Someone who's capable of stealing Lotte's newborn baby.

Simon's sudden odd behaviour turns out to be the prelude to a psychotic episode, caused by a bipolar disorder. Spit convincingly portrays the oppressiveness, manoeuvrability and exhaustion resulting from life with a psychotic partner. You feel sorry for Leo, who's having to keep so many balls in the air that she effaces herself completely. At the same time her behaviour isn't entirely innocent either; she develops into an unreliable narrator.

'I'm Not Here' is a thrilling read. Spit guides you to the denouement with an assured touch, expertly dispensing information and clues. At the same time she succeeds in creating three-dimensional, sensitive portraits of Leo and Simon, two damaged individuals. After the international success of 'The Melting', the author once again shows herself to be a master of suspense. The book starts out like a thriller, but develops into a love story that's simultaneously brutal and gorgeous.

Spit grabs you by the throat. A real page turner.

NRC ****

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LIZE SPIT



AUTHOR



Lize Spit (b. 1988), living in Brussels, gained a master's degree in screenplay writing and has also written prose and poetry, published in several magazines. In 2013 she won both the jury prize and the readers' prize at WriteNow!, a prestigious writing competition. Her debut novel *The Melting* was published to widespread acclaim and became an instant bestseller both in Flanders and beyond. Rights have been sold to more than 10 countries. Listen to Lize Spit on 'Kopje Koffie' ('Cup of Coffee'), a podcast produced by The Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Dutch Foundation for Literature, in cooperation with Flanders Literature and the General Representation of the Government of Flanders. Photo © Keke Keukelaar

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