FICTION

Battle for a dignified life on the underside of Europe

Harvest

SIEN VOLDERS

The Romanian Alina travels to Sicily with her eleven-year-old son Lucian to work in tomato cultivation, in order to earn money that's badly needed at home. They have high hopes, but the reality is shocking. They are housed in an almost uninhabitable shed, the work in the hot greenhouses is inhumanly arduous and all kinds of trivial expenses are deducted from the pittance Alina earns. They have fallen into a trap of severe exploitation and ethnic discrimination. There is no point in protesting, since an abundance of cheap labour is available. While Alina keeps having to lower her hopes and expectations, Lucian quickly integrates and soon becomes friends with the Tunisian Anwar and the Sicilian Paolo.

In response to the abuse very many Romanian women passively accept, Alina gradually develops a strength that is very different from the front she puts up for her mother. She refuses to let others dominate her and develops a quiet assertiveness. Just at the point when Alina seems to be regaining control of her life, the carefully constructed, fragile world she and her son inhabit comes crashing down. When Lucian finds her in the arms of Paolo's father, she falls off her pedestal as far as her son is concerned.

This socially engaged page-turner is characterized by a smooth narrative rhythm and an ingenious composition. With her vivacious writing style, Volders demonstrates an ability to create an atmosphere with just a few strokes of the pen. 'Harvest' is not just a book about contemporary labour migration, exploitation and oppression, it is above all a story of resilience and friendship, about the power of motherhood and women's self-reliance.

> **A heart-rending, harrowing book. Rhythmical prose, with great authority. ******
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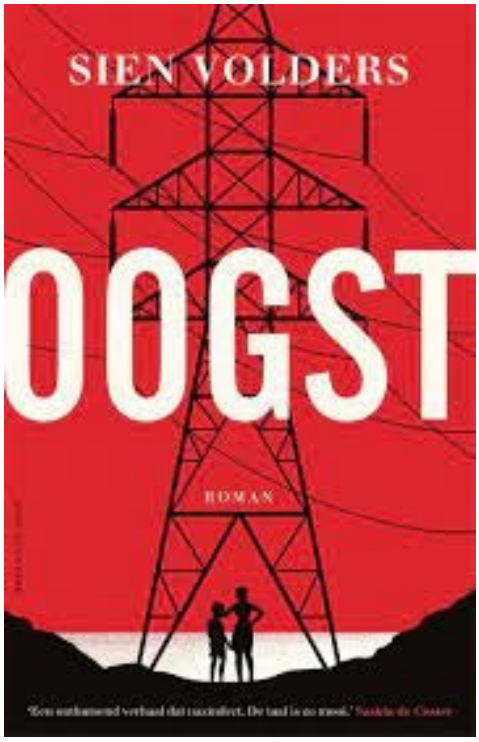

AUTHOR

Sien Volders (b. 1983) studied art history and anthropology. While working as an editor and interior designer, she began writing her debut novel, North. The inspiration for the novel came from her visit to Dawson City, a small, inhospitable former gold mining town located in the Yukon, not far from the Alaskan border. *Photo © Lieve Blancquaert*

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