

Magnificent epic about migration and homecoming

The Rest of Our Lives

ELS BEERTEN

Fredo Santoro is destined to become a barber, like so many Santoros before him. When the First World War ends, poverty prevails in Italy, so little Fredo and his father emigrate to Liverpool. Although Fredo wants to become a boxer, and has the necessary talent, that's not an option. He's going to be a barber, and the best barber too. *Santoro and Son* soon have their hands full – until Mussolini sides with the Nazis and suddenly every Italian in Britain is suspect. His father is interned, but Fredo manages to get away. He spends the rest of the war in the countryside, with Penny, whose husband is at the front, on her farm and in her bed. Penny has never made any false promises, but Fredo's heart is broken when she shows him the door on hearing that her husband has survived the war. His friend Luigi persuades Fredo to travel to Italy with him, where he will be welcomed by his wife Gloria and their son Vito. Gloria, however, turns out to have been changed utterly by a recent traumatic experience, and it's her sister Carlotta who is caring for Vito. When Gloria and Luigi move to Belgium for a while, Fredo and Carlotta are left behind with little Vito, who cannot understand what's going on.

Splendid true-to-life characters

HET PAROOL

In her utterly unique style, Els Beerten immerses us in the life of Fredo, who keeps having to find a place for himself in the world. Against the background of twentieth-century Europe, she describes how Fredo grows from a child into a man and also gives us the voice of Vito, who interprets events in his own way. The atmosphere in the English-Italian barbershop, the hesitant love between Fredo and Carlotta, the all-consuming poverty and the influence of the mafia in Italy are evoked in flowing sentences, in short chapters that invite us to keep on reading. Beerten's sharply delineated characters and the profound psychological insights that we detect between the lines add up to a magnificent epic about migration, parent-child relationships and homecoming.



AUTHOR



Els Beerten's (b. 1959) oeuvre ranges from middle grade to YA. Her masterpiece is without a doubt *We All Want Heaven*, which has won her just about every prize imaginable, at home and internationally, and which was nominated for the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis. It has been translated into many languages and has won the hearts of YA and adult readers. Her work is characterized by deep psychological insight and her great ability to dissect the human soul. *Photo © Thijs Jaspaert*

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AGE 15+

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