

A sensitive story about freedom and feeling at home

The Birds

MARLEEN NELEN

It's 1874. Mika is happily growing up in a house on a hill in Transylvania. Shortly after his thirteenth birthday, his mother suddenly dies. Overcome by grief, his father Ayan can no longer manage to pay the rent, and after getting into a fist fight with the housing steward, they flee in a horse and cart. Soon they meet a small group of Rom, and Mika enters into an intimate friendship with Vali. But Ayan wants to travel on with his son alone. When he is sentenced to a year and a half of forced labour because of his clash with the steward, Mika is left on his own. In the icy winter he is found on the brink of death, starving and chilled to the bone. Mika finds a new home with Irina and Jure, and he falls in love with Hajna, a girl from the village. But then Vali and the Rom find him again and he is torn by the choice between two lives. Where does his loyalty lie? And will he ever see his father again?

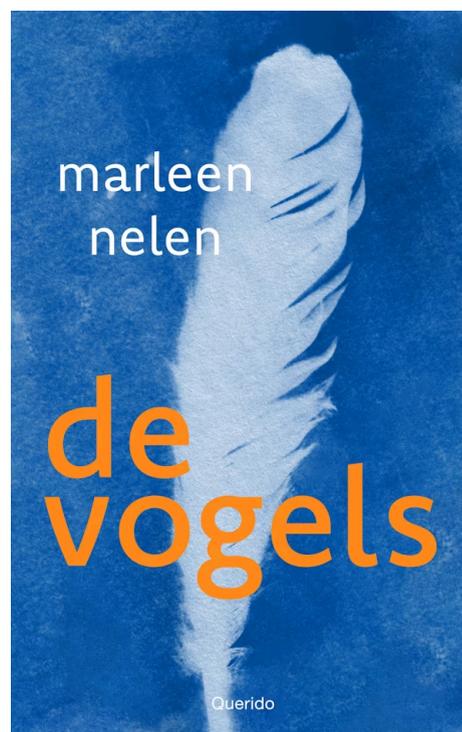
Marleen Nelen has a very measured writing style, which is seemingly simple but very moving. A marvellous book

MAPPALIBRI ON 'ALL THINGS LIGHT'

Marleen Nelen depicts the travelling life beautifully. Mika is a sensitive boy who pays exceptional attention to his surroundings, a sharp observer capable of capturing the beauty around him on paper. His mother taught him all about birds and he feels more than at home in the natural world. But which people does he belong with? In spare prose, Nelen brings nineteenth-century Transylvania completely convincingly to life. 'The Birds' is a moving, unostentatious adventure novel about freedom and finding your own way.

Able to capture human relationships at their most intense, with a good balance between direct expression and suggestion

JAAPLEEST ON 'ALL THINGS LIGHT'



AUTHOR



Marleen Nelen (b. 1971) started out as a writer for adults but found her voice as a YA writer. Her style is poetic and image-packed, her observations sharp and her characters and settings true to life. She is also a photographer and visual art often inspires her. Photo © Anna Van der Burght

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