

Claustrophobic village novel set at the start of the 20th century

Woesten

KRIS VAN STEENBERGE

'Woesten' recounts a suffocating story full of village gossip about a family in which fate strikes with a heavy hand, leaving no-one unscathed.

Elisabeth, the daughter of the smith in Woesten – a tiny village near Ypres – marries the young doctor, Guillaume. It is not destined to be a happy marriage. When Elisabeth gives birth to twins eight months later, the firstborn turns out to be a beautiful son, Valentijn. The second child is so deformed that Guillaume refuses to give him a name. Nameless survives, regardless. His appearance makes his father and the villagers recoil, so Nameless goes about veiled.

And then World War I breaks out. The future no longer looks the same for anyone, especially once Woesten is struck by the grisly murder of Elisabeth.

Bathed in an almost Beckettian beauty

KNACK FOCUS

'Woesten' tells its compelling tale from the alternating perspectives of protagonists Elisabeth, Guillaume, Nameless and Valentijn. It portrays a realistic, almost naturalistic image of a typical rural village in the early 20th century and offers a nuanced view of the psychology of intriguing characters. The story of Elisabeth and her family is set in the lead-up to World War I, but the war remains constantly in the background, like a black backdrop for an even darker play.

It is not ink in Van Steenberge's pen, but gunpowder. Enchantingly beautiful.

DE WERELD DRAAIT DOOR



AUTHOR



Kris Van Steenberge (b. 1963) made his debut in 2013 with the novel 'Woesten', which was inspired by the author's grandfather's stories about the Great War. 'Blindly', Van Steenberge's second novel, is a humane, poignant tale of beauty and decay, deeds and dreams, the chosen and the damned. *Photo © Johan Jacobs*

ORIGINAL TITLE Woesten (2013, Vrijdag / Podium, 384 pp. 22nd print run in 2020)

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