

# ELS BEERTEN

## WE ALL WANT HEAVEN

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### HEARTBREAKING CHOICES IN TIMES OF WAR

1943. IT'S THE HEIGHT of the Second World War. A hard battle is being waged against the Russians on the eastern front. The Germans suffer huge losses and urgently require reinforcements. Younger and younger men – naive and idealistic as they are – hear the call and set off for the frontline, full of notions of heroism. Ward is one of those who choose the 'wrong' side and goes off with the Germans to fight against the Bolshevik troops. His best friend Jef Claessen ends up on the 'right' side, but it's certainly not out of any definite conviction. He's actually a coward, who becomes a war hero entirely by chance. When Ward returns to Flanders after the war, the one-time friends find that they are now diametrically opposed.

WE ALL WANT HEAVEN is not purely a historical depiction of the horrors of war on the frontline. Author Els Beerten also paints a convincing picture of everyday life in the trenches and elsewhere through the fortunes of the Claessen family and other characters, who are connected by family ties, friendship or fate. Four first-person narrators relate the story: brothers Jef and Remi Claessen, their sister Renée and their friend Ward Dusoleil. In her detailed and believable psychological portraits, Beerten maps out their hopes, dreams and desires. Will they have to wait until the war is over to start living their own lives?

THE AUTHOR shuttles back and forth between war and post-war history, between present and past, between soldiers and ordinary villagers. This complex, but unobtrusive structure increases the impact of the events in her moving and subtle portrayal of the darkest pages of our history. The central issue is the consequences and validity of heart-breaking decisions and moral dilemmas.

THE NOVEL is written in rich and vivid language, full of traditional wisdom and images that remain with the reader. The Dutch-language press has praised *We All Want Heaven* as a new 'classic for young readers', but this book can hold its own as a cross-over novel for adults too.