

★ **Ixelles****Johannes Anyuru****Nichola Smalley, Translator**

Two Lines Press (Oct 8, 2024)

Softcover \$20.00 (468pp)

978-1-949641-69-1

Young lovers run up against the limits of their abilities to control their own destinies in Johannes Anyuru's melancholy novel *Ixelles*.

Ruth should know a lie when she hears one: she lies for a living, helping brands and politicians attract the “right” kind of attention. Yet when she hears a rumor that cannot possibly be true—that her boyfriend Mio, who was stabbed to death years ago, is still alive—she is compelled to investigate. In the process, Ruth admits painful truths about Mio's fate and the lies littered throughout her own history. Further, Ruth's son, Em, is now old enough to demand answers about his idolized father; he seeks out his own, more dangerous, source of information.

Mio's trail leads to stories of the Nothingness Section, a mythical place that is said to welcome the kind of downtrodden, forgotten people that Mio and Ruth once were. Through aching prose, Ruth's investigation reveals her longing for the past and the future—anywhere but the present, where she feels trapped by uncertainty. And even as Ruth yearns for the past, she seeks to destroy it: her job is to reconstruct reality to suit the needs of high-powered, often unscrupulous clients, including the developers who want to tear down the impoverished, immigrant-majority neighborhood in Antwerp where she and Mio grew up. This contradiction drives Ruth further from Em.

Ruth and Em's story is tender and tense. They are split apart before being brought back together. The truth remains elusive; still, they learn to be comfortable with what they do know: that they love each other, and that Mio would want them to have a better life than he did.

*Ixelles* is a reflective novel about the dangerous allure and empowering vindication of using fiction to cope with reality.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2024)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*