

On a Woman's Madness

Astrid Roemer

Lucy Scott, Translator

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In Astrid Roemer's novel *On a Woman's Madness*, a Black woman struggles to find happiness in a world designed to push her down.

Noenka, already a misfit because of her race and family history, becomes a true outcast when she leaves her husband. After being forced to leave her job at a Christian school, she exits town to escape further judgments. Then she meets Gabrielle, a housewife with her own traumas to bear. The women enter into a relationship that both completes them and tears them apart.

The narrative moves back and forth in time, showing Noenka's present circumstances and the tumultuous upbringing that helped mold her into the woman she is. The only lasting bright spot is Gabrielle, whose reputation as an alcoholic obscures her personal struggles, her resilience in the face of loss and discrimination, and her deep loyalty to those she loves. But the women's happiness is threatened by factors beyond their control: their husbands, social expectations, homophobia, and their own haunted pasts. Noenka recalls troubled relationships with her spouse, friends, religion, and sexuality, and the one inescapable fact that affects them all: her Blackness. The legacy of colonialism and slavery affects both Noenka and her nation, Suriname, as she fights to escape her brutish husband and stay with the one she truly loves.

The dialogue flows as if from another world: grand and old-fashioned. Noenka's story unfolds in similar fashion, with dramatic twists and terrible revelations. She and Gabrielle find each other against all odds, but only the most extreme measures offer them even the slimmest hope of freedom—and only they can decide if that freedom is worth facing another kind of prison.

On a Woman's Madness is a novel about the difficulties of life as a queer Black woman in a colonized country.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2023)

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