

Roxy

Esther Gerritsen

Michele Hutchison, Translator

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At the opening of Esther Gerritsen's *Roxy*, twenty-seven-year-old Roxy, a famous novelist and former tabloid fodder, learns that her husband has died. What follows is her unraveling.

Introspective as it traces Roxy's tragic fall, the novel is arresting for reasons that are hard to pin down. There's skill and nuance involved in how its all-woman, ensemble cast is assembled. Here, womanhood is as inherent as a personality; it's also performed as femininity, and it is embodied in all of its complexity by characters who represent a range of ages.

The novel does not quite pass the Bechdel test: the men in it exist only for the development of its entrancing women. Yet Roxy's deepest longing is not for men's attention, but for women's friendship. This motivation results in a radical quality within the novel, even when Roxy fills the emptiness with meaningless sex instead of friendship.

Easy to recommend while in its midst, but harder once complete, this novel invites investment but offers a shrug of a payoff. There's joy in getting lost in its poetry, if not its plot; its heartbreaking humanity has a Grecian quality, and it can be read like an epic poem about a woman of privilege meeting a fall. Roxy's internal monologue is a car crash that's impossible to look away from, and her story is over before you realize you've stopped breathing to consume it.

Rich and a little bitter, *Roxy* is powered by the monumental weight of Esther Gerritsen's intense and insatiable prose, which is beautifully translated by Michele Hutchison. Consume it with coffee, dark chocolate, or red wine; follow it up with something that reminds you of the joy of being alive.

JESSIE HORNESS (March / April 2020)

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