



by Maja Haderlap
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Fiction

🏆 Shortlisted for the
Austrian Book Prize 2023

Women at Night *Nachtfrauen*

review

Women At Night is an evocative, multi-layered novel about mother-daughter relationships and identity, set in the Austrian-Slovenian borderlands.

Haderlap's vivid, wryly humorous prose brings to life the inner worlds of her characters, the setting of rural Slovene Carinthia and its complex past. Protagonists Anni and Mira are a mother and daughter whose relationship is shown in all its glorious contradictions: distant yet intimate, full of tension and misunderstanding, but also love and respect.

Mira's brother summons her back from Vienna to her home village in Carinthia, on the border with Slovenia. She is tasked with clearing the house where her mother Anni has been living for decades, and with moving Anni into a care home. For Mira, this is a journey into her own past and into a community and identity she has left behind. As she sorts through her mother's belongings, she finds her own diaries and letters, and goes back over choices she has made: her decision to leave her Slovenian heritage behind, her fraught relationship with Anni, an abortion, and her failing marriage.

Mira embarks upon an affair with her former boyfriend, Jurij, and wonders whether it is too late in life to make a fresh start. Mother and daughter finally confront the defining moment of Mira's childhood – her father's death. Mira decides that Anni cannot go into a care home

and finds her a small apartment instead. Once the move has been planned, it is time for Mira to return to Vienna. She spends a last night with Jurij, and sets off late, knowing that her husband Martin, who seems to care about all the wrong things, will be furious that she will not arrive in time for dinner. On the drive home she is distracted by a text message and crashes into the safety barrier.

Anni receives an emotional phone call from Martin to let her know that Mira is in hospital and is first terrified, then relieved. There has been no lasting damage. Waiting to move house, Anni starts sketching her memories. Anni recalls her relationship with her own mother, revealing a chain of mother-daughter tensions reaching further back into the past.

Women At Night explores themes of identity and ageing, showing how family dynamics and roles can be perpetuated through time, and revealing opportunities for reconciliation. Anni and Mira's perspectives build on and complicate each other, exposing misunderstandings between the women, but also similarities and love. The backdrop of Slovenian history adds to the interest of the book.

Domestic Rights Sales: German Audio Book (DAV), German Entire Radio Reading (HR & SWR)

Find out more here:

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about the author



Maja Haderlap was born in Bad Eisenkappel / Železna Kapla (Carinthia, Austria). After reading Theatre Studies and German Philology, she lectured at the University of Klagenfurt and was Head Dramaturg at the Stadttheater Klagenfurt for many years. She published poetry in Slovenian before winning the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis 2011 for an excerpt from her subsequent German debut novel *Engel*

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des Vergessens [Angel of Forgetting].
Further prestigious prizes followed,
including the Max Frisch Prize 2018 and the
Christine Lavant Prize 2021. *Nachtfrauen* is
her first book with Suhrkamp.

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