



The Nettle Spinner

Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer

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In her early twenties, Alma met a tree-planter and fell in love — not with the man but with his strangely romantic work. Now, after several seasons of planting trees out west, the tough-minded hero of Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer's visceral first novel has come home to northern Ontario to help reforest the ravaged landscape with a gang of filthy ex-hippies and idealistic students. Baking by day in the hot sun and tormented by mosquitoes and black flies, Alma and her fellow planters relieve their backbreaking toil at night with sex, dope, and alcohol. But her brief passionate affair with a charismatic newcomer named Willem raises the ire of Karl (whose amorous attentions she has deflected in the past), and he viciously rapes her. Pregnant and alone, Alma flees to an abandoned mining camp where she and Willem once made love. There, with the help of the camp's single weird inhabitant, she constructs for herself and her unwanted baby an increasingly ominous new life. Weaving together Alma's story with an ancient Flemish folktale about a peasant girl's magical hold over a lustful count, Kuitenbrouwer links the power of narrative with the passion for self-realization. *The Nettle Spinner* is a gritty, sensuous debut that portrays sex with startling clarity and violence with peculiar tenderness.

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