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Red Hen Press

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The Healing Circle

A NOVEL BY

Coco Picard

Winner of the Red Hen Press Women's Prose Prize

Bad New Age mother seeks miracle cure in Germany but encounters her past with an aloe plant instead.

A mother abandons her family in California to pursue a miracle cure in Munich. Once she gets there however, she wonders if she might have already died. Bedridden with a terminal diagnosis, memories, nurses, immoral doctors, foreign television broadcasts, and phone calls from children intrude upon her consciousness. An aloe plant called Madame Blavatsky is her primary companion.

ADVANCE PRAISE

"*The Healing Circle* is a far-reaching, honest, and funny novel about dying and living, a kind of pilgrimage to wholeness through uncertainty and disorientation. Full of resonance, it asks what it means to heal, to be in pain, to be a person."

—**Amina Cain**, author of *Indelicacy*

"*The Healing Circle* is wry, subtle, and daring. Coco Picard has written a vivid novel about living, dying, and remembering."

—**Meg Wolitzer**, author of *The Female Persuasion*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Coco Picard is a writer, cartoonist, and curator based in New Mexico. She is the author of two graphic novels, *Meowsers* (2022) and *The Chronicles of Fortune* (2017), which was nominated for a DiNKy Award. Art criticism and comics have otherwise appeared under the name Caroline Picard in *Artforum*, *Hyperallergic*, *The Paris Review*, and Seven Stories Press, among others. She started the Green Lantern Press in 2005, received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute and was a Bookends Fellow at Stony Brook University.



Photo Credit: Becca Grady

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FROM THE HEALING CIRCLE

The handlers tell everyone not to touch the Holy One. “It’s like strippers,” Lena jokes. “You can be touched but not touch.” Mother and the rest of the Healing Circle stand in line with a few hundred others in a long since closed Ross Dress for Less. Everyone shuffles forward to see the guru and there she is—a stout woman sitting cross-legged on several silk-tasseled pillows like a voluptuous chicken. The Holy One pulls Mother’s head to her breast automatically and already Mother is crying like a lamb with hiccups, pressing into Her Holiness’s chest. “*Ma Ma Ma Ma*,” the guru says, mechanically, “*Ma Ma Ma*,” bleating with a fuller voice. Everything is warm, a little too much. Mother stares at the fleshy linoleum tile and notices the faded silhouettes of former shopping aisles. She used to come here to find shoes. *Ma Ma Ma*. Surrounding members of the crowd shift and sway. Mother feels the pressure of the Holy One’s arms, the pliancy of her skin. The guru smells like sweat, sugar, a hint of Tiger Balm, and incense. Mother sobs. “How can I live? How can I survive? What am I surviving? My mother never loved me,” Mother says. She is just about to let go of everything—all the tension, sorrow, resentment—to find redemption or solace, or whatever—to have one of those moments where she might experience her unburdened, light-soaked, profound true self—and be healed!—when a handler abruptly picks up Mother by the shoulders and moves her to the side, setting her against Nancy’s back, where Mother slumps into weeping.

It is Lena’s turn to be touched, Mother turns to see. “*Ma Ma Ma Ma...*”

Andrea is behind Lena, glowing with expectation.

Mother turns. Devotees whisper beside her. “The Holy One was beaten as a child, did you know? It’s on her website. Nobody understood her gifts.”

“Women always pay the price,” someone else agrees.

Mother might go back to the beginning of the line and do it all over again.



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