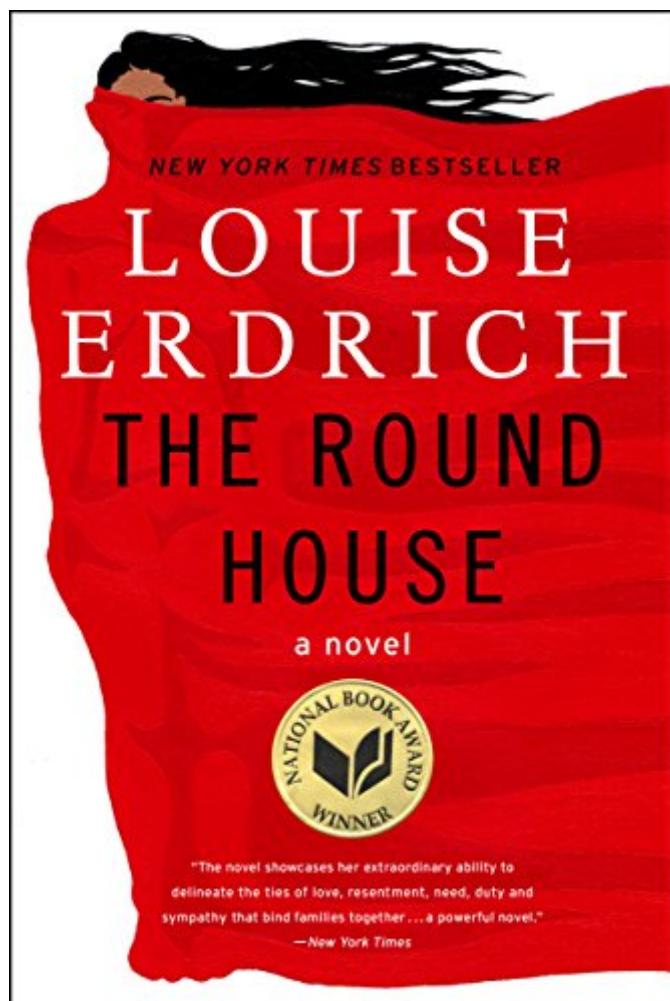


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The Round House: A Novel



Synopsis

The Round House won the National Book Award for fiction. One of the most revered novelists of our time—“a brilliant chronicler of Native-American life”—Louise Erdrich returns to the territory of her bestselling, Pulitzer Prize finalist The Plague of Doves with The Round House, transporting readers to the Ojibwe reservation in North Dakota. It is an exquisitely told story of a boy on the cusp of manhood who seeks justice and understanding in the wake of a terrible crime that upends and forever transforms his family. Riveting and suspenseful, arguably the most accessible novel to date from the creator of Love Medicine, The Beet Queen, and The Bingo Palace, Erdrich’s The Round House is a page-turning masterpiece of literary fiction—“at once a powerful coming-of-age story, a mystery, and a tender, moving novel of family, history, and culture.”

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Customer Reviews

The Round House digs deep into unearthing the very nature of justice in a world that is rarely just and seldom fair. Our narrator - an Ojibwe lawyer named Joe Coutts - recalls his 13th summer from

the perspective of time. Joe's position as the only child of tribal judge Bazil Coutts and tribal clerk Geraldine Coutts kept him feeling loved and secure until his mother is brutally and sadistically raped as she attempts to retrieve a potentially damning file. Although the rapist is rather quickly identified, the location of the rape--in the vicinity of a sacred round house - lies within that "no-man's land" where tribal courts are in charge and the neighboring Caucasians cannot be prosecuted, no matter how heinous the crime. Thrust into an adult world, Joe and his best friends Cappy, Zack and Angus are propelled to seek their own answers. This novel shines for many reasons, particularly because of the urgency and power of the descriptions. The aftermath of the rape is described in unflinching and dynamic prose - no manipulation, and no turning away. One of the ancillary yet important characters - the damaged and conflicted Father Travis, a war veteran - is so beautifully and powerfully fleshed out that it is impossible to not be riveted to the page. Each character, in fact, is realistically drawn, complete with the ambiguities that reside in each of us. This is a finely nuanced novel that, like a Rubik's cube, examines violence and our responsibilities in a number of ways. One of them is through the prism of religion: the Roman Catholic belief that every evil ultimately can be transfigured to good as opposed to tribal justice traditions. Ms.

Author Louise Erdrich, a member of the Chippewa (Ojibwa) nation, here writes one of her most powerful and emotionally involving novels. Though it starts as a crime story on the reservation, it quickly becomes an intense search for justice on all levels. It is also an examination of the lives of her characters, both old and young, as they face the challenges of reservation life. Their lives, as she shows in this novel, are seriously restricted by 1988, when this novel's action takes place, and any Native American who wants to honor the "old ways" on the reservation must now survive on infertile lands which cannot support him. Their culture has been seriously compromised by the arrival of Catholic missionaries who have weaned them away from their myths and traditions. Significantly, legal jurisdiction over crimes involving Native Americans now involves tribal officials, state police, and even the FBI. In a powerful opening scene, filled with symbols and portents, thirteen-year-old Antone Basil Coutts (Joe), only child and namesake of Judge Coutts and his wife Geraldine, is helping his father to pull tiny seedlings from cracks in the foundation of their house, awaiting Geraldine's return from her office. When she finally arrives at home, she is almost unrecognizable, so badly beaten she can hardly see, reeking of gasoline and so traumatized by rape and other crimes that she has become mute. Young Joe knows that it will be up to him and his father to identify who has done this. They begin to study his father's old cases searching clues. Joe is still a child, however, and though his empathetic father wants to protect him as much as possible,

Joe becomes obsessed with getting his mother "back," determined to find and punish the rapist on his own.

The Round House takes the reader back to an Indian reservation in North Dakota in 1988. Thirteen year-old Joe Coutts lives with his father, a tribal judge and his mother, a records clerk on the Ojibwe reservation, a job which required her to "know everyone's business". One Sunday afternoon as Joe and his father were pulling weeds from the garden the mother mother, Geraldine heads out to her office to retrieve a high profile file. When she doesn't return by the time dinner time approaches, father and son become concerned and prepare to go look for her. They find her stunned, beaten and bleeding and smelling of gasoline, yet sitting in her car in the driveway of their home. Who attacked her, and why isn't Geraldine willing to talk about her attack? Why are things so secretive and why isn't Joe told something about the attack at least? Of course bit by bit information about the attack, where it happened or who might be responsible is slowly shared behind the scenes, but from the perspective of Joe, the thirteen year old narrator, all he sees is his once happy and active mother holed up in her room, spiraling into a deep depression and afraid to even leave her room. "Her eyes were black pits...." Joe feels helpless and is not sure what he can do to make his mother feel safe again. Joe has an idea and enlists the help of his buddies, Cappy, Zack and Angus in trying to find out who attacked his mother and plotting what they feel would be appropriate revenge. Although the theme of this novel is a dark one and one might think it would make for a depressing read, that is not the case. There is so much to hold the reader's interest in this story.

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