

Circle of Animals

Sadie Hoagland

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In Sadie Hoagland's novel *Circle of Animals*, a woman goes through cycles of trauma, motherhood, complicated love, and perseverance in a misogynistic culture.

Sky's life is unusual thanks to her free-spirited, unpredictable mother, Edi. However, when Edi goes missing during the same week Sky is assaulted by a coworker, Sky worries that something more insidious is at play than one of Edi's usual jaunts. The more Sky uncovers about her mother's past, the more she realizes the true scope of what women go through every day.

Sky's and Edi's characterizations, both as individuals and in relationship to one another, are gut-wrenching in their realism. Sky's childhood memories of Edi are imperfect, tender, bitter, and sweet—roiling with so much unresolved hurt that it's impossible to look away. The different traumas and subsequent fallouts are described in aching but necessary detail; they follow the women in ways they don't expect.

Even with the heaviness at play, there are moments of joy and hope that permeate the narrative. The women in Sky's life, including her best friend Liz and Edi's longtime friend Deb, uplift her. And while Edi is an unruly mother, there is an undeniable charm and humor baked into her personality. There's a spark in Sky, too: she refuses to give up or give in, and she is stubborn about finding Edi at all costs. Moreover, there is intense love in the mother-daughter relationship, despite its complexities and baggage.

A daughter's love directs her search for her missing mother in *Circle of Animals*, a bracing novel about womanhood and survival as an act of defiance.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN (September / October 2024)

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