

The Painted Drum



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When a woman named Faye Travers is called upon to appraise the estate of a family in her small New Hampshire town, she isn't surprised to discover a forgotten cache of valuable Native American artifacts. After all, the family descends from an Indian agent who worked on the North Dakota Ojibwe reservation that is home to her mother's family. However, she stops dead in her tracks when she finds in the collection a rare drum -- a powerful yet delicate object, made from a massive moose skin stretched across a hollow of cedar, ornamented with symbols she doesn't recognize and dressed in red tassels and a beaded belt and skirt -- especially since, without touching the instrument, she hears it sound. From Faye's discovery, we trace the drum's passage both backward and forward in time, from the reservation on the northern plains to New Hampshire and back. Through the voice of Bernard Shaawano, an Ojibwe, we hear how his grandfather fashioned the drum after years of mourning his young daughter's death, and how it changes the lives of those whose paths it crosses. And through Faye we hear of her anguished relationship with a local sculptor, who himself mourns the loss of a daughter, and of the life she has made alone with her mother, in

the shadow of the death of Faye's sister. Through these compelling voices, "The Painted Drum" explores the strange power that lost children exert on the memories of those they leave behind, and as the novel unfolds, its elegantly crafted narrative comes to embody the intricate, transformative rhythms of human grief. One finds throughout the grace and wit, the captivating prose and surprising beauty, that characterize Louise Erdrich's finest work.

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