

★ **Ring****André Alexis**

Coach House Books (Sep 28, 2021)

Softcover \$17.95 (224pp)

978-1-55245-430-5

André Alexis ruminates on romance and matrilineal legacies in his eloquent novel *Ring*, in which Torontonians' lives are touched by a mysterious ritual.

Fusing chance encounters with myth, poetry, and questions of faith and love, this original tale begins during a picturesque winter, when twenty-nine-year-old Gwen meets Olivier and Tancred. She's introduced to their mutual friend, a wealthy doyenne, as well. The quartet experiences gourmet dining, art, and a poetry reading, throughout which Gwen observes Tancred. When Gwen's mother intuits that Gwen has fallen in love, she decides Gwen is ready to receive an heirloom ring with the power to change three aspects of a woman's beloved.

The understated narration grounds the otherwise fantastical elements. The ring's history, and details about Gwen's ancestors, reveal the unpredictable outcomes of desire. Women make sacrifices in exchange for the ring's use, and these are thought-provoking riffs on the classic adage to be careful about what you wish for—with the refreshing twist that, most often, the wishes do work out. Still, through fascinating philosophical inquiries and cross-generational translations, observations, and refutations, the women avoid determining whether the ring is a curse or a divine gift.

Evoking the pleasure and hesitancy of Gwen and Tancred's early relationship as they ascertain each other's feelings, the ethereal novel is full of quiet humor. Gwen weighs the possible consequences of her wishes in ways that are both absurd and wise; she faces Tancred with uncertainty, hoping for confirmation. And the couples who surround Gwen make her think about people's tacit relationship negotiations, and how love is seldom a certain act.

Told with a sense of inevitability and fate, *Ring* is an enchanting and sophisticated fable in which love is transformative.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2021)

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