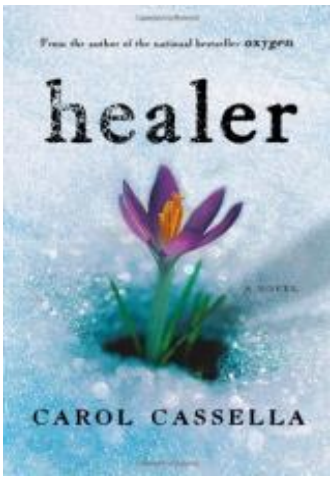
Healer

by Carol Cassella



About the Book

From national bestselling author Carol Cassella comes the story of one doctor's struggle to hold her family together through a storm of broken trust and questioned ethics.

Claire is at the start of her medical career when she falls in love with Addison Boehning, a biochemist with blazing genius and big dreams. A complicated pregnancy deflects Claire's professional path, and she is forced to drop out of her residency. Soon thereafter Addison invents a simple blood test for ovarian cancer, and his biotech start-up lands a fortune. Overnight the Boehnings are catapulted into a financial and social tier they had never anticipated or sought: they move into a gracious Seattle home and buy an old ranch in the high desert mountains of eastern Washington, and Claire drifts away from medicine to become a full-time wife and mother.

Then Addison gambles everything on a cutting-edge cancer drug, and when the studies go awry, their comfortable life is swept away. Claire and her daughter, Jory, move to a dilapidated ranch house in rural Hallum, where Claire has to find a job until Addison can salvage his discredited lab. Her only offer for employment comes from a struggling public health clinic, but Claire gets more than a second chance at medicine when she meets Miguela, a bright Nicaraguan immigrant and orphan of the contra war who has come to the United States on a secret quest to find the family she has lost. As their friendship develops, a new mystery unfolds that threatens to destroy Claire's family and forces her to question what it truly means to heal.

Healer exposes the vulnerabilities of the American family, provoking questions of choice versus fate, desire versus need, and the duplicitous power of money.

Discussion Guide

1. Claire's new life in Hallum seems a cold reality compared to her wealthy life in Seattle --- a perception only

compounded by the harsh winter weather. She feels out of touch with her husband, who spent their life savings without telling her, out of touch with her teenage daughter, Jory, who is much less communicative with her than with Addison, out of touch with her profession, where she experiences both a language barrier and a lapse in practice of several years. At one point, she even explains that she, along with the rest of her family, "had forgotten how heartless the universe could be" (p. 70). In a sense, Claire had been living in a protective, sheltered bubble, cut off from reality. How do you think this bubble was created? How does she deal with her new life?

2. How does Claire's job at the clinic help get her out of her protective bubble?

3. Claire's work at the clinic, caring for her patients, also leaves her less time to care for her daughter, Jory. She thinks "time travels faster for a forty-three-year-old than a fourteen-year-old" (p. 129). Do you agree? How well do you think Claire handles this difficult situation?

4. There are references in **Healer** to deserving what is coming to you. Addison believes that "Angiovastin deserved production, deserved its market share and more," (p.155) and, by way of creating the drug, he deserves a lucrative payout. Even Claire, when they hold the estate sale in their old home, "recognized how deserving she had grown to feel" (p. 167). Contrast this perspective with what Claire observes in Dan, "a placid acceptance that paths have been laid out for all of us and there is no point beating about for alternatives" (p. 58). How do the themes of fate and free will play out in the story?

5. Claire is shocked and angry to learn the extent of Addison's financial gambling, and feels betrayed that he hid it from her. However, Claire also hides her true feelings from Jory, so much that it exhausts her. Why do you think she does this?

6. What role does money play in the relationship between Claire and Addison?

7. The story provides several examples of the relationship between mothers and children: Claire and Jory, Miguela and Esperanza, and Frida and her son. How are they similar and different? How do these relationships illustrate the sacrifices made for the sake of family?

8. How does Miguela's struggle, her quest to find out what happened to her daughter, affect Claire's perspective and her relationship with Jory?

9. Do you think Addison is a dreamer? Is he selfish? Is he more scientist or more businessman?

10. Claire considers Addison's actions, and "one bright flash before the moment of sleep revealed how much the illusion of his superiority mattered to her, and how much it was anchored by trust. Until all of this, until all was stripped bare, she had not seen it" (p. 168). Addison needed Claire to believe in him, but she also needed to believe. When he gambled away their money he jeopardized that trust. Were Addison's actions to blame for all the trouble in their marriage?

11. How do their shared experiences affect the relationship between Claire and Addison by the end of the story? They leave lasting scars, but do they also make it stronger?

12. When considering the words "I love you," Claire thinks, "maybe those three words can mature and grow old just as the union itself grows old, no longer pristine and fresh but still vital. Maybe it proves that love is like any living thing ---

capable of almost unrecognizable change over the decades, scarring over astonishing wounds, so the words can still be true, just not in the way they began" (p. 128). How does the meaning of those words change for Claire?

13. Do you think Claire's use of the money from the sale of her engagement ring was a way to get back at Addison? Or is it simply a much-needed gift to Miguela?

14. Do you think Claire, Addison, and Jory will stay in Hallum after the story ends?

15. The first page describes how "Claire still understands the human body. She understands the involuntary mechanics of healing. But how an injured marriage heals --- that remains a mystery." Do you think the resolution, the healing, of Claire's marriage to Addison by the end of the story was voluntary or involuntary?

Author Bio

Carol Cassella, MD, is a practicing anesthesiologist, novelist and speaker. She majored in English Literature at Duke University and attended Baylor College of Medicine. She is the bestselling author of the novels OXYGEN, HEALER and GEMINI, all published by Simon & Schuster. Carol lives on Bainbridge Island, Washington, with her husband and two sets of twins.

Healer
by Carol Cassella

Publication Date: September 7, 2010
Genres: Fiction
Hardcover: 304 pages
Publisher: Simon & Schuster
ISBN-10: 1416556125
ISBN-13: 9781416556121