

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Karleigh Frisbie Brogan. *Holding: A Memoir About Mothers, Drugs, and Other Comforts*. Penguin Random House, 2025.

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Karleigh Frisbie Brogan's memoir, *Holding*, opens with a 21-year-old Brogan asking strangers for money at a Valero in Santa Rosa, California. Some passersby believe her when she says it's to gas up her broken down car. Others know she needs it for drugs. Brogan's shame over the panhandling compounds when one of the passersby turns out to be her own mother. Shame morphs into fullblown abandonment after her mother denies her the six dollars she asks for and leaves her at the station. It is in this single scene that Brogan captures the nature of her heroin addiction. "To use heroin was to mother myself. To self-nurse."

Brogan is neither the hero nor villain of her own story. Both her past and present selves are obsessed with the nature of shame, yet the memoir itself is an act of love and forgiveness—to herself and her family, loved ones and strangers. Brogan recognizes a fundamental truth within her own and others' addictions—that they are a response to lack, substitutions for something needed and not received. Brogan's story, while deeply personal, is tragically common, bound deep into the global fabric of one of history's oldest substances. It is as much a story of a single addict's recovery as it is the story of "the [poppy] farmer to the junkie, the dealer with her stack of cash, or the cook with his useless bandanna tied around his face—toxic fumes a tolerated threat, nothing compared with a bullet to the head, a remote grave." Brogan tackles monumental questions of how race, class, gender, and nationality feed lack and abundance, addiction and recovery. Raw and yet deeply introspective, Brogan's voice is distinct and to the point. Heavy yet unflinching, *Holding* is a love story that recognizes the power of accepting the parts of others and ourselves we are terrified to receive.