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REVIEWS

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NOT IN THE PINK

Tina Martel

Self (192 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

This debut illustrated memoir tells the story of an artist's battle with breast cancer.

When Martel walked the annual Run for the Cure in honor of her mother's fight with cancer, she had no idea that in less than a year she would return to the event to commemorate her own battle. Diagnosed with Stage 2B breast cancer, the Canadian artist documented her cancer bout by creating drawings, photographs, and paintings that expressed her feelings during that time. The end result is this colorful account (Martel calls it a "graphic narrative") full of vibrant illustrations and the artist's conversational notes, from diagnosis to life after cancer. There will be no girly pink for this survivor—she prefers, instead, the motto "Fuck Cancer." But who can blame her? The author suffered severe side effects from chemotherapy and radiation, like mouth sores, hemorrhoids, nausea, bone-crushing fatigue, and peeling/burning skin. This unblinking cancer journey is full of sarcastic wit and dark humor, as when Martel jokingly compares her radiation peel to a bad sunburn at Chernobyl. At times, her words have a poetic feel. In a meeting to discuss her life choices, she writes that "the words skim off my skin and swirl around the room." The author also describes insensitive comments she had to endure, including people who told her stories about others who had died of cancer. Still, she's thankful for the supportive folks in her life, such as friends, family, and her loving husband, Doug. Ranging from dark to playful, Martel's vivid artwork is memorably edgy; for example, a collage of women's legs in trash cans symbolizes a bad chemo day. In contrast, a pair of animal print heels at the book's conclusion has a much more upbeat, kicking cancer's ass feel to it. Newly diagnosed readers may be terrified by some of the gritty medical details, like the 12-inch fluid drain inserted into her arm. But the author's strong spirit is undeniably inspirational.

A beautifully sassy survivor tale with a punk rock vibe.

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