



The Ice Queen: A Novel

By Alice Hoffman

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Be careful what you wish for. A small town librarian lives a quiet life without much excitement. One day, she mutters and idle wish and, while standing in her house, is struck by lightning. But instead of ending her life, this cataclysmic event sparks it into a new beginning. She goes in search of Lazarus Jones, a fellow survivor who was struck dead, then simply got up and walked away. Perhaps this stranger who has seen death face to face can teach her to live without fear. When she finds him he is opposite, a burning man whose breath can boil water and whose touch scorches.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A solitary New Jersey librarian whose favorite book is a guide to suicide methods is struck by lightning in Alice Hoffman's superb novel, *The Ice Queen*. Orphaned at the age of eight after angrily wishing she would never see her mother again, our heroine found herself frozen emotionally: "I was the child who stomped her feet and made a single wish and in so doing ended the whole world—my world, at any rate." Her brother Ned solved the pain of their mother's death by becoming a meteorologist: applying reason and logic to bad weather. Eventually, he invites our heroine to move down to Florida, where he teaches at a university. Here, while trying to swat a fly, she is struck by lightning (the resulting neurological damage includes an inability to see the color red). Orlon County turns out to receive two thirds of all the lightning strikes in Florida each year, and our heroine soon becomes drawn into the mysteries of lightning: the withering of trees and landscape near a strike, the medical traumas and odd new abilities of victims, the myths of renewal. Although a recluse, she becomes fascinated by a legendary local farmer nicknamed Lazarus Jones, said to have beaten death after a lightning strike: to have seen the other side and come back. The burning match to her cool reserve—her personal unguided tour through Hades—Lazarus will prove to be the talisman that restores her to girlhood innocence and possibility.

Hoffman's story advances with a feline economy of language and movement—not a word spared for the color of the sky, unless the color of the sky factors into the narrative. Among the authors who have played with the fairy tale's harsh mercies (e.g. Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter), Hoffman has the closest understanding of the primal fears that drive the genre, and why, perhaps, we never outgrow fairy stories, but only learn to substitute dull, wholesome qualities like personal initiative or good timing for the elements that raise the hairs on our neck and send us scrambling for the light switch. --*Regina Marler*

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. "Be careful what you wish for. I know that for a fact. Wishes... burn your tongue the moment they're spoken and you can never take them back." Thus begins Hoffman's (*Practical Magic; Here on Earth*) stellar 18th novel about healing and transformation. As an eight-year-old, the unnamed narrator makes a terrible wish that comes true; remorseful for the next 30 years, she shuts down emotionally to become a self-proclaimed ice queen. Unlike her brother, Ned, who relies on logic, math and science to make sense of the world, the loner librarian fears the chaotic randomness of existence and is obsessed by death. Then lightning strikes, literally. In a flash, she's jolted out of her rut, noticing for the first time all that she's been taking for granted—even the color red, which after the strike she can no longer see: "How could I have been so stupid to ignore everything I'd had in my life? The color red alone was worth kingdoms." The novel turns sultry when the slowly melting ice queen seeks out reclusive Lazarus Jones, a fellow lightning survivor who came back to life after 40 minutes of death: "I wanted a man like that, one it was impossible to kill, who wouldn't flinch if you wished him dead." Blanketed in prose that has never been dreamier and gloriously vivid imagery, this life-affirming fable is ripe with Hoffman's trademark symbolism and magic, but with a steelier edge: "Every fairy tale had a bloody lining. Every one had teeth and claws." Both longtime fans and newcomers will relish it. *Agent, Elaine Markson. 10-city author tour. (Apr. 4)*

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—At the age of eight, the narrator learns the power of a spoken wish. Angry at her mother, she wishes never to see her again. When the woman dies in a car accident, the child resolves to be quiet and imagines her own fairy tale: a girl turns to ice and her heart becomes hard and unbreakable. As an adult, she

becomes a reference librarian and an expert in death and ways of dying. Indifferent and unfeeling, she is unable to have meaningful relationships. She allows her brother to move her to Florida, where another wish is fulfilled: she is struck by lightning. Her hair falls out, she limps, she loses the ability to see the color red, and her heart freezes. Enrolled in a study of lightning victims, she learns about a local recluse who was dead for 40 minutes, then walked away. The nameless woman seeks him out; she wants to know what her mother experienced at the moment of death. They begin a passionate love affair. As opposites (she is ice, he is fire), the only way they can touch is in water. Hoffman incorporates elements of fairy tales (The Snow Queen, Beauty and the Beast), chaos theory, and magic realism. Although the story borders on the trite and the dual imagery (fire/ice, heat/cold, red/colorless) is sometimes overdone, the narration is powerful and the ending is satisfying if a bit predictable. Hoffman's fans will find much that is familiar and appealing.—*Sandy Freund, Richard Byrd Library, Fairfax County, VA*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carol McElroy:

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Jamie Treat:

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Robert Hensley:

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