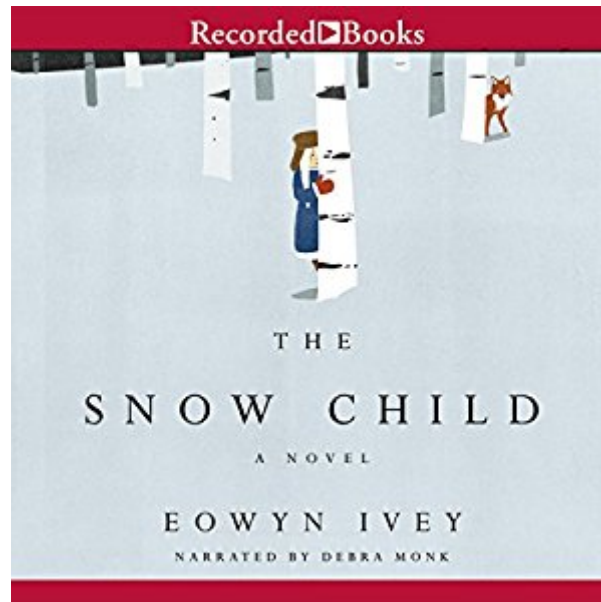


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The Snow Child



Synopsis

Debut novelist Eowyn Ivey's experience living in the Alaskan wilderness brings a palpable authenticity to *The Snow Child*. Alaska in the 1920s is a difficult place for Jack and Mabel. Drifting apart, the childless couple discover Faina, a young girl living alone in the wilderness. Soon, Jack and Mabel come to love Faina as their own. But when they learn a surprising truth about the girl, their lives change in profound ways.

Book Information

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Literature & Fiction > Literary

Customer Reviews

Having lived in Fairbanks, Alaska for 44 years, I was very anxious to read this book. It has an Alaskan theme and is touted as being written in the style of magical realism. I love literary fiction that is rich in characterization and language and this book has an abundance of both. It is bound to be one of the best books I'll read in 2012. The story is beautifully rendered and rich with metaphor. I could hardly bear to put it down. Mabel and Jack are homesteaders who come to Alaska rather late in their lives. They are both close to fifty years old when they begin their Alaskan venture near the Wolverine river way in the backcountry. The story opens with Mabel contemplating suicide. She describes Alaska after her failed suicide attempt as a place of "beauty that ripped you open and scoured you clean so that you were left helpless and exposed, if you lived at all". She and Jack are growing apart rather than closer and she misses him desperately. Slowly, they become friends with their closest neighbors, Esther and George, and this helps Mabel some. However, she says of Jack, "they were going to be partners, she and Jack. This was going to be their new life together. Now he

sat laughing with strangers when he hadn't smiled at her in years". Mabel comes from an intellectual family - her father is a professor of literature at the University of Pennsylvania. She feels lonely and empty in her cabin. Just before they came to Alaska she gave birth to a stillborn boy. This was one of the primary reasons she wanted to get away from her family. She felt they were always looking at her and judging her as wanting, talking about her as not being a strong woman. Jack is busy with clearing and farming the homestead and he won't let Mabel help with this.

Jack and Mabel live in a time where children were expected in a marriage. Mabel so wants to be a mother but she has only had one pregnancy and that ended in an early delivery of a child that did not survive. She and Jack didn't talk about it they just thought a fresh start was in order so they pulled up roots and started a homestead in Alaska. She with one set of dreams, he with another. Both not expressing them, both not talking, both afraid of the past, both trying to escape, both still yearning for a child. Mabel sees Alaska as a way to escape from all of the pity she sees in the eyes of family and friends. She just wants life to be her and Jack. Jack knows they can't make it in such a harsh land alone. He is too old to be breaking the land. He needs help. Mabel feels at fault for her inability to give him children but Jack does not blame her... Just at the right time a boisterous family comes into their life to help them manage their homestead. A family with three strong children. A woman who starts to bring Mabel out of her shell. Also at this time their appears a mystical child. A child that appears the day after Jack and Mabel make a small snowgirl. Is she real or is she a manifestation of all of Mabel's hopes and dreams? I cannot tell you the joy I found in this book. Despite the overall sadness of the main theme there was much to celebrate within. Faina, the snow child was a delight! In writing her dialog no quotation marks are used so you "hear" it in your head and wonder if she is real or not. She came to me as a whisper on a breeze. I felt as if I had been dropped into a snowglobe and was living in some kind of mystical snow world. The writing almost surrounded me and then fell like the little pieces of snow.

Does anyone really belong to you? If you think of children or spouses in this regard, *The Snow Child* will stop you cold. In the 1920's Mabel and Jack settle along the Wolverine River in Alaska. They hope the challenge of homesteading in the wild will wipe away years of grief and give them a fresh start. Instead, they find that work and isolation rule. The hardship of everyday life cuts away at their spirits. Cash is scarce. Hope dimmed. As the cold bites, each tries to survive in their own way. After a fresh snowfall, they build a snow child in a moment of much-needed frivolity. When they awaken the next morning the snow child is demolished and the hand-knit mittens and scarf they draped on it

are gone. Jack sees a small girl running in the snow. When Mabel glimpses the blond girl, it unifies them. Jack hunts for a moose to keep them from starving in the winter. When he is ready to give up, the magical little girl appears and leads him to a moose. Food for winter is secured. The little snow girl, Faina has frosty lashes, a cool blue stare, and is always accompanied by a red wolf. She seems otherworldly and Mabel and Jack find her appearances and disappearances disconcerting. They continue to try to maintain contact with her, but she remains elusive. Faina dictates the terms upon which the relationship grows. She brings to them physical gifts, but most importantly she offers hope and love. The writing in this enchanting book is beautiful. Its direct simplicity reflects the austerity of the Alaskan atmosphere. The wilderness itself is an important character. Jack reflects on the land flowing with milk and honey that was to give up moose, caribou and bears. "What a different truth he found. Alaska gave up nothing easily.

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