



The Ice Queen

Alice Hoffman

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From the bestselling author of *Practical Magic*, a miraculous, enthralling tale of a woman who is struck by lightning, and finds her frozen heart is suddenly burning.

Be careful what you wish for. A small town librarian lives a quiet life without much excitement. One day, she mutters an 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 her opposite, a burning man whose breath can boil water and whose touch scorches. As an obsessive love affair begins between them, both are forced to hide their most dangerous secrets--what turned one to ice and the other to fire.

A magical story of passion, loss, and renewal, *The Ice Queen* is Alice Hoffman at her electrifying best.

The Ice Queen Details

Date : Published January 3rd 2006 by Back Bay Books (first published 2005)

ISBN : 9780316154383

Author : Alice Hoffman

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From Reader Review The Ice Queen for online ebook

Emily says

When I worked in publishing, I would often read books just out of curiosity about what the author's style was like, or what drew their fans in. One author I was familiar with, but never read, was Alice Hoffman. I recently read *The Ice Queen*, which is about a librarian, so hey, why not.

The protagonist loses her mother at age 8, for which she blames herself. She grows up into a sort of nonperson, with no friends, only a lover whom she keeps at arm's length. After the death of their grandmother, her brother moves her to his town in Florida, but shortly after arriving, she is struck by lightning. Her perception of the world around her changes, she begins to notice elements of magic around her, and she develops new relationships. After being frozen by her mother's death, the fire of the lightning strike eventually turns her into a real person.

This is the kind of midlist book that is exactly clever enough to sustain one reading club session, but no more. For example, after the lightning strike the nameless protagonist loses the ability to see the color red (she sees it, nonsensically, as white). She embarks on a torrid love affair, which has no effect on her, but when she seals a real friendship, suddenly she can see red again. Gee, I wonder what that means.

I found myself irritated by the implausibility of the details. The protagonist's brother is supposed to be a meteorologist but he gives a paper on fairy tales and chaos theory (I don't think Hoffman knows what this is) at a meteorology conference and is received with a standing ovation. I don't go to a lot of meteorology conferences, but I'm pretty sure this wouldn't happen. One character is supposed to be majoring in architecture, which involves building models of Greek temples, like in the seventh grade. And the library stuff! Ugh!

Rick says

If you too are slogging through this and think the author may be just a wee bit too enamored with her love for metaphor and symbols, and you think the main character is not sympathetic, but kind of a pitiable loser, then you're thinking as I did through almost the first 3/4 of this wonderful and touching novel. I write the above because if you're tempted to abandon the book before you get to the end (as I did), you'll be cheating yourself out of an amazing, meaningful, and completely touching personal journey that will totally bring you to tears. Sometimes, you have to stick with a book, as you might stick with a precocious but bratty child, to come out rewarded on the other side. *THE ICE QUEEN* is like that.

Mindy says

This is one of the most depressing books I've ever read. It is also one of the best. Before I stumbled on this at my local used book shop, I'd never read Alice Hoffman. After I read the last page, with tears streaming down my face, I knew I would read every bit of her work. Her writing style is lovely, simply structured yet poetic and deeply insightful.

This story is depressing, but also uplifting. It is dark, and yet there is light to be seen everywhere, if you remember to look for it. It is chaotic, yet serene in its own unique way. It's a very difficult book to describe without spoilers, and I try hard to avoid those in my reviews.

The summary of "Chaos Theory and Fairy Tales" sums it up perfectly. This is essentially a contemporary fairy tale, complete with magic and wishes and dark things and death. The fairy tale loving, 8-year-old main character makes a wish that leads her to believe she is responsible for the death of her mother. She carries this belief, and her unexpressed grief, into her adult life and it shapes the woman she becomes and seeps into everything she does. Anyone who has experienced deep grief that they have been unwilling or unable to express will understand her in both expected and surprising ways.

We travel with her on her emotional journey from that cold, icy night when she thinks she wished her mother dead, through life events that change her and force her to eventually see her pain and face it. It is not an easy path, for her or us, but it is one that's worth walking, until the very end.

Read it with a box of tissues.

Darlene says

"Be careful what you wish for. I know that for a fact. Wishes are brutal, unforgiving things. They burn your tongue the moment they're spoken and you can never take them back. They bruise and bake and come back to haunt you....."

I read 'The Ice Queen' by Alice Hoffman years ago but recently I stumbled across the audio version and decided to listen. I really liked reading the book but listening to this audiobook narrated by Nancy Travis was a whole different experience... different in a good way, that is.

The story begins on a cold January night... the 16th of the month, in fact. It is told in the first person so we never actually know the narrator's name. What we DO discover is on that January evening, the storyteller, an 8 year-old girl makes a wish that will forever change the course of her life. It turns out that January 16 is her mother's birthday and her mother was to meet a couple of girlfriends for a celebratory dinner. The night was rainy.... and the rain, as it fell, had begun to freeze. Following her mother onto the porch, the girl begged her mother to stay home and braid her hair and read from her favorite book of fairy tales. When her mother simply kissed her goodbye, the wish that had been in her head quickly slipped out of her lips.... "Right away I could feel it burning. I could taste the bitterness of it; still I went ahead. I wished I would never see her again....". And the next morning, well.. the girl awoke to the news that her mother had never arrived at her birthday dinner. Her car had gone off the road and her mother was never coming home.....

This young girl who had lived so much of her short life immersed in fairy tales believed in the power of wishes. She believed that her wish, made in anger and yes, selfishness caused her mother's death. And from that moment on, the ice that had covered the ground, the trees and the road her mother had driven on seemed to encapsulate her heart. She and her older brother Ned went to live with their grandmother and from the outside, their lives went on.... but the girl remained steadfast in her belief that her heart was justifiably frozen.

The story takes us through the many years of the girl's lonely life. She grows up and becomes a librarian

mainly because of the isolation that position allows her. She develops an obsession with death and begins researching and reading everything she can find about all the ways there are to die. Eventually, her grandmother, with whom she had been living all these years dies and she has no idea what to do. Her brother Ned, who has become a meteorologist and has moved to Florida brings her to Florida and arranges a life for her there... a simple life as a librarian in the local library. Ned works at Orlon College where he is a consultant to physicians and neurologist who work with survivors of lightning strikes. Orlon is the 'lightning strike capital of the world' Ned tells our narrator on their way to Florida. Almost flippantly and without considering her words, she once again makes a wish.. that lightning should strike her and put an end to her pitiful life. But given her strongly held belief in the power of wishes, of course, it one day comes true. Alone in her house on a particularly hot and muggy evening, a ball of lightning no bigger than a tennis ball travels through her window and with a brilliance like that of the sun, she is struck.

Another wish comes true.... or at least it does in part. Our narrator survives the lightning strike. She finally leaves the hospital broken and damaged.... with her heart fluttering and skipping a beat, numb on one side of her body, a constant, maddening clicking sound in her head, an inability to see the color red, and a physical chill which seems to have seeped into her very bones. Attending a support group for lightening strike survivors, she learns of a man the townspeople refer to as Lazarus Jones, another lightening strike survivor who receives the name Lazarus because after being struck he had been dead (no pulse or heartbeat) for 40 minutes.. before being thrust into a bath of ice which forced him back to life. Still obsessed with death, our narrator sets out to meet this man whom she believes had faced down death. What she discovers when she find him catches her by surprise... he was her kindred spirit and yet her opposite. Whereas she felt a constant bone chilling coldness, Lazarus emanated intense heat.. able to boil water simply by breathing on it. Her coldness kept her from experiencing human touch and Lazarus radiated so much heat that he had been unable to touch anyone since he had been struck. But touch these two did, beginning an obsessive and intense love affair.. meeting again and again to immerse themselves in baths filled with frigid water. She returned home from these encounters covered with burn blisters but the pain she felt seemed finally like the proof she needed that she was actually alive. She was discovering that the ice she had encased herself in so many years before was finally being chipped away... one touch at a time. Yes, she and Lazarus were both broken and damaged people and both were closely and greedily guarding the dark secrets they held but slowly they were helping each other to come back to life... almost as if they had been in suspended animation.

I have never been a person who enjoyed reading fairy tales.. not even as a child; and although this novel is a kind of fairy tale within a fairy tale, I was amazed by the imagery Alice Hoffman utilized in this story. Mainly, Ms Hoffman cleverly made use of imagery created by the magnificent power of nature. I could FEEL the pinpricks of the ice on the narrator's young bare feet as she hurried onto the frozen front porch after her mother. I could SEE the brilliance of the ball of lightning which entered her window, blinding her before striking. I felt chilled as I imagined her sad little girl's heart encased in ice... an ice which kept her figuratively imprisoned in suspended animation for many, many years. I loved Ms. Hoffman's use of the frightening power of lightning.. its incredible power when its heat and energy both infuse the earth with necessary nitrogen which enriches the soil so that the earth's inhabitants may find nourishment; but at the same time its capability to destroy everything it touches, even stopping the heart of a human being.

But I think what I loved most about this novel is its message of redemption and second chances. There is a school of thought which espouses that human beings create everything they experience in the world through the power of their thoughts... whatever you think, is what you experience. I don't know that I believe that even if it IS interesting to think about. But I thought about that 'philosophy' while listening to this story and I couldn't help but hope that the universe, in all of its infinite capacity to inflict harshness on its inhabitants, wouldn't be so cruel as to punish a young girl who uttered thoughtlessly and perhaps selfishly a wish without truly understanding the consequences of that wish. This story was also about guilt and the everlasting self-

loathing that that seems to flow from feeling a guilt that you can never hope to eliminate because for whatever the reason, there is no chance of ever asking for forgiveness. This story shows that the magical powers of connections formed between human beings can transform and transcend the power of even the most ferocious forces of nature... including our own guilt and grief.

I highly recommend listening to the audio version of this book. I'm not sure why but I found that listening allowed me to really appreciate the imagery displayed within this beautiful story.

Jake says

I just read this really great book by Alice Hoffman. It's titled The Ice Queen.

From the get-go I was hooked. Hoffman has the knack for creating a narrative that is compelling. The main character, who remains nameless through the whole book, is a woman obsessed with death. As a young girl, she gets mad at her mom as she is driving away. In a moment of fury, she wishes her mom dead. It is the dead of winter and the next day, the young girl wakes up to find that her mom was killed in a car accident. Her wish had come true.

Later in the story, the girl moves to Florida with her brother. Florida is the lightning capital of the world. The woman is fascinated by lightning. So fascinated she wonders what it would be like to be struck by it. So she wishes, out loud, that she would be struck by lightning.

It happens.

Hoffman describes the effects of lightning strikes on people. The narrator, for instance, can no longer see red after she is struck. She is also constantly cold and she begins to refer to herself as an ice queen because she can no longer feel.

Then she meets Lazarus. A man who was struck by lightning, died, and then came back to life. She is fascinated by him because he could be someone that would not be affected by her death wishes. An odd romance ensues between the narrator and Lazarus.

There is more but I will not spoil it for you. Go find it and read it. It is really a story about the redemptive power of love.

I loved how Hoffman made the surreal and the real entwine. It felt like a magical book but there really was no magic in it. I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading Jodi Picoult or other authors like her.

Tilbatilba says

I loathed this book. According to a snippet from a "Times" review on the front cover, it is meant to be a wonderfully erotic love story. It is neither erotic nor a wonderful love story as far as I'm concerned !

The main character is a bitter and twisted librarian. She has good reasons for being bitter and twisted. That I don't mind. However her main love interest, Lazarus Jones, is so thinly drawn, that I had zilch interest in the love story.

The story is part fantasy (a fairy tale), which would be OK except that there is no "internal logic". For instance, Lazarus Jones has a very unusual lightening strike side affect: his body is extremely hot. In fact so hot, you can't imagine how the the heroine and he could have had sexual relations without her ending up in a burns unit, and yet she seems to get by without too many difficulties.

Maybe some readers just accept this rot and run with it, but I just couldn't suspend disbelief.

A lot of the writing is cliched and just plain silly.

A friend recommended this book to me as she knows I'm an Alice Munroe fan. I've also read that if you like one of these authors you're sure to like the other. I don't understand why (both North American authors who write about women who share the same given name??). Alice Munroe is a fine writer, while AH just writes drivel as far as I can see (based on the reading of two books).

Will Byrnes says

The logic of fairy tales was that there was no logic: bad things happened to the innocent, children were set out in the woods by their parents, fear walked hand in hand with experience, a wish spoke aloud could make it so.

I wept while reading the final chapter.

Our first-person protagonist, in a spat with Mom on Mom's 30th birthday, wishes her dead. Mom's demise that night defines the eight-year-old girl. She will express no love, no affection. She will listen only, go along. She embraces death, removing herself from emotional investment. Many years later, after her grandmother passes away, her brother, now a meteorologist living in Florida, persuades her to come south to live near him. In the heart of lightning country she is struck, while swatting flies inside her small home, losing the ability to see red, and is largely paralyzed on one side.

Alice Hoffman - from OrderofBooks.com

Mom's mishap took place on an icy January night. Ice defines the girl from that point on. She remains cold, inert to the life around her. After being struck by lightning, her altered perception broadens her iciness in that it removes much from what she can even perceive of life. She sees grays where everyone else sees red. Life has literally been drained from what she can see. It is no big stretch to see her existence as bloodless.

The theme of Fairy Tales permeates the story. Lazarus Jones was also struck by lightning and the image of an old man was fused onto his skin. The protagonist believes that wishing her mother dead caused it to happen. One character wonders whether a wounded mole would grant wishes if one only saved him. Another lightning strike victim has gold fused into *his* skin. Magic is used in at least two ways. Magical imagery is incorporated throughout the story, and rises like a transcendent being from the death-fixation that links the

entire story to a burst of life at the end. I loved it! Major recommendation.

Read – 2005

Reviewed – 2008

Published – April 2005

=====EXTRA STUFF

Links to the author's personal and FB pages

Other Alice Hoffman books I have reviewed

-----Blackbird House

-----The Dovekeepers

-----Green Angel

-----Local Girls

-----The Red Garden

July 18, 2017 – New York Times – when it happens in the real world - Hit by Lightning: Tales From Survivors – by Lizette Alvarez

Sarah says

Well, I'll be damned.

For years, I've been avoiding Alice Hoffman, because, you know...Sandra Bullock.

As it turns out, I love her! (Alice Hoffman, that is.)

(And I now officially have 50 favorite books.) *confetti*

Lynn says

3.5 stars rounded up.

It took me a while to get into this book. It is ostensibly about characters who have survived lightning strikes and how they cope with life afterwards, but it is more about how people deal with their emotional scars and facing their mortality. The book is populated with some very damaged characters, each in interesting ways. When two of the more damaged characters enter into a relationship, there are unintended consequences for more than just the two of them.

The book has some interesting twists in it, and once I got past the initial parts that dragged a bit for me, it became a compelling read.

In typical Alice Hoffman fashion, this book has some magical aspects to it that add a wondrous element to the story. In the end I enjoyed it more than I expected to, which is always a happy experience.

Sofia says

I was pleasantly surprised when I started reading this book. I loved her writing, it's beautiful. I love that the supernatural was introduced discretely.

I loved that the main character was a librarian and that her favorite Grimm tale was Goose girl, just like me. I didn't feel depressed like so many other readers felt. I fell in love with her storytelling.

I am looking forward to exploring her other works, I only fear to read some of them because I have as a translation in Portuguese. But I could tell by the first 30 pages that she would become a favorite author.

This book centers around a woman who was always slightly different. The action becomes to unravel after she is struck by lightning. Her story is told in the first person. It can make you feel that you are reading a fairy tale for adults. It has a mystical element without overwhelming it.

Carolyn F. says

Audiobook.

Oh my gosh! First of all I've liked the narrator/actress Nancy Travis on TV and in the few movies I've seen her in but I have never realized what a great actress she is. The bitterness, hurt, love, yearning, etc all come across so wonderfully. I am for sure going to listen to more of her audiobooks and definitely watch more of her movies. I'll have to do a search for her works and I'm probably going to be pleasantly surprised by all of the movies she's done.

Now for the book. Great! A little girl makes a wish and everything in her life changes. And as she gets older, you'd think the wishes wouldn't exist anymore but if she says something out loud it happens, sometimes with horrible repercussions. Then at the end of this book, you find out maybe it wasn't wishes at all (or maybe it was). I love Alice Hoffman's books. If you like some pretty dark, with glimpses of lightness, books, you'll enjoy her books.

Maria says

I think we've all been asked a thousand times about our favorite books. I've always found it hard to answer and so I would mention my favorite authors instead. But then I found this book. I don't really know what happened... I think it was love at first sight. This is one of those books in which every single word matters. I know that's supposed to happen in every single novel but this book is different... each word is a precious piece in the brilliantly built puzzle that is this story. The emotions, so raw, so beautiful, so real... It's actually hard for me to put in words what I felt while and after reading it. This is a love story... between two people, between family members, yes, but also between life and death. The fear so well known yet so well hidden by us plays an amazing role in this story and helps the novel reach out for the reader. The writing is magnificent and so meaningful that at times hurts.

I borrowed this book from my sister's collection but am now going to get myself a copy. I want to be able to read and re-read it until I know every word by heart.

Jen | Jen Talks Audiobooks says

This book made me realise that I do believe in magic as a real thing. The "magical realism" part of it didn't seem fictional to me.

Hoffman intersperses a lot of philosophical musings about self-identity and value throughout this story. It's a reflection of the fairy tales she references in the book, full of a melancholy darkness that ends well despite the cost. It's the journey of someone who thinks she did something unforgivable to her self-acceptance upon realising that she can't control everything. Or anything.

It is so well written that I had to notate several quotes. And most interesting about Hoffman's writing, for me, is how much she says without saying it. It's like she writes a box around a feeling or a occurrence and frames it without ever really touching it directly.

"A stranger in his own life."

"I'd always felt safer with stories than with flesh and blood."

"Keep a cloak, that was fine, the thing to do; present a disguise, the outside you, the one you want people to believe."

"The truth was, I didn't want to interfere. Why should it be up to me to touch anyone's life, guide someone right rather than left, off the road instead of on? Get involved and you made mistakes. Inevitable. Who knows where our advice, interest, love might lead? Start and it might be impossible to stop."

"Because what someone reads in a library is nobody else's business."

"I didn't want to get to know him, or the other one, the young woman. I didn't have any space for anything more than I was already carrying."

And from Hoffman in an interview, regarding writing:

"It's the dream that goes where the real you wouldn't go."

Chana says

Exquisite, I really love Alice Hoffman's writing, all that magic, beauty and love she puts into it makes it something to savor. We have to deal with a significant amount of pain in this one as well, as a little girl who is burdened with the guilt of believing that she has caused her mother's death begins the process of learning to feel again through the cataclysmic event of getting hit by lightning when she is an adult. Weather often plays a large part of Alice Hoffman's stories, it really is a magic phenomenon, and this story is no exception. I have lived in Florida and Alice describes Florida's weather so well. As she says, "no outsider could be

prepared for Florida." Getting hit by lightening, ah what a terrible thing! And it is so random, in a world where we persist in thinking that if we do things right then the bad things won't happen to us. Sometimes what we think is bad though turns out for the good, and our control is illusory anyway.

Nadir says

Oh. My. God.

This book. It was never ending! The style of the writing was dull. Yes, some of it did have a poetic twist about it, but really? It was depressing. That's pretty much all that can be said for it - the author can force the reader into depression. When I read the main character's emotions, I actually felt like I was on a down spiral. Yes, that's a good skill. But Alice Hoffman doesn't stop! It is *all* misery. Not just understandable misery, either. Misery about the stupidest, childish things. I couldn't stand another page of it.

I am disappointed. It started like *Wicked: The Life And Times Of The Wicked Witch Of The West* but it didn't take off, and I felt no connection to the nameless protagonist. I got midway, where Lazarus Jones is talking about his past to the nameless she. I ended up reading one sentence per paragraph and I was still depressed and bored of the lack of emotions.

(some time later)

So, I did finish it.

It was as anticlimactic as a story without a upward curve of anticipation can be. It wasn't worth the time, even when I only read one sentence in three.

I'm glad it's over.

Janet says

If I could, I'd give this a firm 3 & 1/2 stars because I'm not sure I loved it but I more than liked it. I like/love most of her books. I like fairy tales and this book was full of fairy tale references - the story itself is really a fairy tale. It is short and it is a quick read. I had great trouble warming to most of the main characters but this was meant to be. The last pages made me cry because, in the end, I really felt for those same characters. Any book that elicits tears deserves, I've decided, the full 4 stars. One small problem I had with the copy I read - someone made the bad decision to put a review on the cover that included the comment "An electrifying novel" a great deal of the story involves survivors of lightning strikes so this was either a very bad joke or it was not intentional - someone at the publishers should have caught this because bad joke or unintentional, it was wrong.

Yodamom says

4.4 stars

This book ripped my heart out then threw it against the wall only to pick it up, stomp and kick at it with steel toed boots.

In the misery, the bleakness and the dark hole that became my chest there was a light weak but bright. The author was able to keep me focused on that little light, it wasn't hope of a HEA it was much deeper it was the spark of life to breath to continue. Her words are beautifully sewn together, visual and emotionally charged. Depressing stories are my kryptonite normally I would have dropped this after the first chapter but I couldn't put it down. Would I ever read it again ? Hell no, I'll never forget it. It was so beautifully sad and haunting.

Mmars says

How does one go from giving three stars to a Booker prize winner to giving this inconsequential book a four star rating?

First, tell a story well. Second, describe everything vividly and throw in a little wisdom. Third, be the kind of book one is looking for. I was looking for a page-turning escape and I got it.

Being the bearer of two “I wish you’d die” wishes coming true, the nameless narrator grows up fearful of and fascinated by death, obtaining knowledge that is tapped into by a local police detective. She refrains from intimacy and closes her heart to the world. Thankfully, her four years older brother provides security in home and employment in their adult years for her psychological state teeters on the edge.

When she is struck by a lightning ball her focus of fascination shifts to lightning survivors who have died and come back to life, due in part to her participation in a study her brother is leading at a Florida university. And it is through other survivors that she is able to recover from her traumas and accept both life and death.

It is winter and ice in New Jersey when her mother dies and summer and heat in Florida when she has her affair with Lazarus Jones, a lightning strike survivor. She is ice, he is fire. Their lovemaking is pure trashy magical realism.

Hoffman has some surprising and brilliant denouements in the book, so to say more would likely spoil the fun. Be forewarned, this book is a bit of Highlander romance and a little more depth could have been added here and there to raise its literary value. There are, however, a number of themes running through it and enough food for thought for me to recommend it to the right readers.

Mark says

This is one of those books which creep up on you unawares. I had finished it months ago but it was only as I finally rejoined the GR reviewers and sat down to write this that I realized it was still reverberating gently in my mind.

It is a love story but not a straightforward one. There is an underlying theme of the need to come to terms with bitterness and self hatred. There is the recognition that gradually dawns for characters and readers alike as to how misunderstanding, misrepresentation and misreading of situations and people can cripple and maim horribly and yet it might one day only take one decent act of generous love, one seemingly insignificant show of patient understanding to transform and melt a frozen life.

The heroine, by one childish word spoken in a petulant bad temper, feels she wreaks havoc in her heart because words once spoken echo round and around and if the chamber begins to freeze then the echo bounces and rebounds and builds in strength until the whys and wherefores and even possibility of love and relationship get drowned out and the easiest way to deal with the echo is to slam the chamber shut and leave it so.

The story is the unpicking of the implications of this bolted door and uses images of lightning strikes and glacial freezes to conjure the battle undergone by those who, through unconscious choices or misunderstood acts of others, have fixed obstacles and barricades as protections and defences.

It is a genuinely moving story of rediscovery and second chances and, if it is not too over-sentimental, it is the description of the oft sneered at thought that it is never too late and that the miraculous does not necessarily mean the same to every person.

ps. As avid readers will know it is interesting how you can suddenly find a personal theme occurring over a period although only noticing it as you look back. 'The Ice Queen' began the theme of monarch butterflies which seemed to flutter gently through much of my reading in shy glimpses over these last few months. With hindsight this coincidentally was building up to my sponsored cycle across Costa Rica in early April where I encountered these beautiful creatures. Indeed for one memorable time, as I cycled along a busy main road, I was accompanied by one particularly muscular specimen powering along at my side. Sadly I was unable to stop as there was no verge so photographic evidence remains unachieved.

Karina says

3.5... I read some of the reviews and I agree with the likes and dislikes. Overall it was interesting and good. Was a bit repetitive and I skimmed a few pages but I like the authors way of seeing things. It was an unexpected love story.
