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May **18** 2012

Ivey, Eowyn. The Snow Child

Childless middle-aged couple Jack and Mabel take advantage of the cheap land deals to buy a homestead in Alaska in the 1920s. Dreaming of a new start, a life of meaningful labor and simple pleasure, the couple instead find a punishing and brutal land with interminable winters and bug-ridden summers. Mabel contemplates suicide as Jack nearly kills himself to get the planting done. In a fit of playfulness one cold winter evening, however, Jack and Mabel build themselves a girl from the year?s first snow and decorate her with a scarf and mittens. In the morning, the scarf and mittens are gone and the couple begin to spot a real young girl in the woods around their cabin?a girl none of their neighbors have seen, or know about. And she is wearing the scarf and mittens. Mabel convinces herself that their love and longing brought the snow-girl to life as happened in a Russian fairy tale she read as a child, but Jack suspects the reality to be darker than Mabel?s magical tale. As the years pass, the girl, Faina, becomes as a daughter to the couple?but as Mabel knows, the fairy tale of the snow child never has a happily-ever-after ending.

Told in spare but poetic language, the novel dances artfully around the question of Faina?s origins?magical, or not? But the real stand-out in the novel is Ivey?s description of Alaska, a landscape both punishing and spectacular?and humanity?s relationship with a place so wild. Recommended for fans of historical fiction and minor magical realism.

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