



One Great Book: Volume IV, Episode 6 *The Snow Child* by Eowyn Ivy

[Show Notes](#)

[00:00]

One Great Book Volume IV, Book 6: *The Snow Child*

[UPBEAT INTRO MUSIC]

Hey readers, I'm Anne Bogel, and you're listening to *One Great Book*, the short-form podcast from the team behind *What Should I Read Next?*, where each week I pull one stand-out selection off my personal bookshelves and tell you all about it in ten minutes or less.

[MUSIC]

Readers, I wholeheartedly believe in bookish serendipity. I love it when the right book finds me at exactly the right time. How do these books “find me?” Well, sometimes a librarian recommends a title, sometimes a friend presses a book in my hands over coffee. Sometimes a book falls off of a shelf while I'm rearranging the living room, and I take that as a sign to sit down and read it (occasionally right away, neglecting the rest of my to-do list, it happens). As I wrote in “The Books That Find you,” a chapter from *my book I'd Rather Be Reading*: “Sometimes I feel compelled to read a book -- or someone feels compelled to recommend it -- for reasons I can't discern, and only later do I find it's essential to me, right then. Not before I started reading it, but after. The book may seem random when I choose it, but halfway through I realize, I need this right now.”

For an author, finding the right book at the right time might lead to a stroke of inspiration not just for their reading, but for their *writing* as well. In the case of today's book, a serendipitous bookstore moment led to a magical fairytale retelling. Based on a Russian fairytale, *The Snow*



Child by Eowyn Ivy is an atmospheric story about love, loss, and the wildness of nature. It's perfect for cozy winter reading, and it is One. Great. Book.

[MUSIC]

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Eowyn Ivy calls it “one of those rare, lightning strike moments.” One day, she was at work, shelving titles at Fireside Books in Palmer, Alaska, when she came across a children's book that



depicted *The Snow Maiden*, a Russian fairytale in which an old man and woman build a girl out of snow ... and she comes to life. Although she hadn't heard of the story before, she knew immediately that it was the basis for a novel. Ivey had always wanted to write a magical story set in Alaska, and now, finally, due to fate or destiny, she knew exactly how to go about it.

[03:40]

Ivey says that every book she ever writes will be set in Alaska. She can't imagine setting a story anywhere else, and seeks out stories that "let her explore the Alaskan landscape." The land she loves. As someone who loves an immersive setting, I particularly enjoyed reading about people who survive in a place that's beautiful *and* terrifying. Ivey believes that you can't understand Alaska without understanding how these two things go together—and *The Snow Child* wouldn't be what it is without both: the beauty of the landscape, and its ever-present danger.

The main characters, Jack and Mabel, are new to Alaska's dangerous wilderness. They start out as eager homesteaders, moving to Alaska from the east for the new opportunity and desperately needed change of scenery it provides. But now that they've been here for two winters, they're finding the reality lacks any trace of the romanticism they'd once imagined. Working the difficult land consumes Jack; he is exhausted, though he has little to show for his efforts. Mabel's desire for a child, coupled with her bitter isolation, leaves her feeling desolate. In their long years together she's been pregnant but once, a pregnancy that ended in miscarriage back east. She had hoped that their drastic relocation would jar something loose in her soul, but instead she's overcome with loneliness, and grief.

One cold winter night, in a sudden bout of silliness, Jack and Mabel build a little girl out of snow, just for fun. They need the lightness, and laughter. They go all out: Jack even carves a little face into the child, and at the last minute, they add a scarf and mittens.

In the morning, their snow child is gone, but they spy a little blonde-haired girl running through the trees near their property. She calls herself Faina, and she seems to have been raised by the woods. An otherworldliness surrounds her, and the childless couple grapples with the mystery of where she came from, and who she might belong to. And they wonder: is the snowy



landscape, the stark isolation getting to them— and might they have imagined this girl into being?

[MUSIC]

[05:39]

Whatever the answer, the girl brings Jack and Mabel new life and new love—love that warms their little trio, and even, finally, extends beyond it. Ivey never fully answers the ambiguous question at the heart of the story: how much is fantasy, and how much reality? Reader that’s up for you to decide because the novel, like the girl herself, hovers in the space between the two.

Traditionally, fairy tales teach children an important lesson about how the world works. Ivy says that with her Alaskan wilderness fairy tale, she wanted to probe the idea “That life is mysterious and wild and sometimes terribly sad”—and make no mistake, this story is deeply permeated with sorrow. “But despite that, or perhaps because of it, there is beauty and friendship and love. There’s nothing new about this lesson, and yet,” Ivey says, “I seem to have to learn it over and over again.”

If you need to be reminded of life’s beauty, and friendship, and love, or if you just want to read a magical fairy tale, well-told, then consider this episode your bit of bookish serendipity for the day. With its wintry atmosphere, endearing characters, and deeply human themes, *The Snow Child* might just be the next great book you’re looking for.

[MUSIC]

Readers, visit modernmrsdarcy.com/onegreatbook that’s O-N-E to learn more about *The Snow Child* and all of the great books in this volume. This is our last episode of this volume and for the year, and readers, I’ll be honest—I don’t know when this show might be coming back to your main feed.



For updates on all the podcast news and happenings, visit modernmrsdarcy.com/onegreatbook and sign up for our newsletter. We have some great things planned in 2020 that you won't want to miss. That's at [modern mrs darcy dot com slash one O-N-E one great book](https://modernmrsdarcy.com/onegreatbook).

[07:28]

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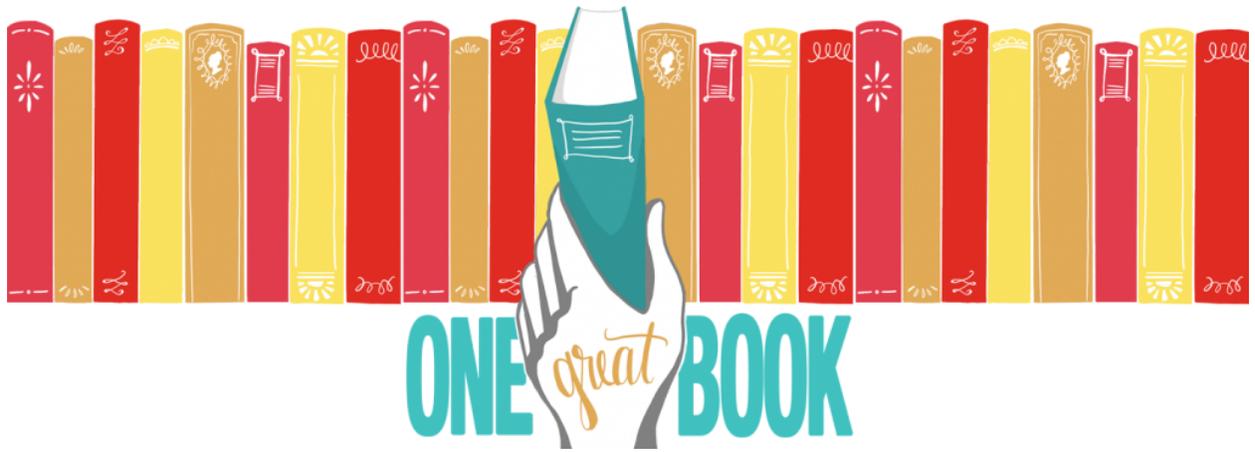
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Thanks to Kellen Pechacek for his sound design on today's episode.

Readers, that's it for today, thanks so much for listening.

And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading."



Happy reading, everyone.