



The Honey Queen

Cathy Kelly

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To discover the sweetest things in life, you sometimes have to lose your way...

It's easy to fall in love with the beautiful town of Redstone – the locals wave and chat to each other, the shops and cafes are full of cheerful hustle and bustle. And amidst all this activity, two women believe they are getting on just fine.

Francesca's boundless energy help her to take everything in her stride, including a husband who has lost his job and the unwelcome arrival of the menopause, which has kicked in – full throttle.

Peggy, on the other hand, has always been a restless spirit. But now, focused and approaching thirty, she has opened her own knitting shop on the town's high street. It's a dream come true, but she still feels adrift.

When Australian-raised Lillie finally makes it back home to Ireland, she is drawn right into the heart of Redstone's busy, close-knit community. But what she thought would be an ending is actually just a beginning – all is not quite as it seems in the picturesque town.

Soon, Lillie's hard-earned wisdom will be called into play as she helps new friends navigate unchartered territory...

The Honey Queen Details

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From Reader Review The Honey Queen for online ebook

Shonel Teke says

Like Maeve Binchy, Cathy Kelly's works too seem to underline her pride in her Irish roots. This book is a heart-warming, affectionate story of different women at different stages of their lives, trying to deal with their loves, lives, work and passion.

At the heart of it all, is the recently widowed Lillie, who has suddenly discovered that she has a family beyond the mother who gave her up for adoption all those years ago. At the behest of her sons and daughters-in-law, she decides to visit her brother Seth, hoping to learn more about her Irish roots. She soon settles down and realises that there is no bitterness in her heart for the mother she never knew and the brother who welcomes her into his life with open arms. Settling into the small community, she soon builds close ties with Bobbi the hairdresser, young Freya with an old soul and the rest of the inhabitants around Sorrento House.

Peggy is the young girl with stars in her eyes, yet fear at the core. She is too scared to love and has a dark secret that she cannot let go off. Yet, she is determined to succeed with her little knitting shop, but she is struggling, and that does not go unnoticed.

Seth was sacked from his last job and his wife Frankie is struggling to make ends meet. In addition to that, her hormones are all over the place and her job is terribly demanding.

Opal is a lovely quiet old lady with darling sons, and a wonderful daughter-in-law to-be. However, the bride's mother is a monster, all set to create havoc on the wedding day.

Enter, Lillie, and her passion for bee-keeping, stemming from her husband's hobby before he died. And the beauty of how she slowly and surely influences the entire community is a testament to good nature.

The book is a bit long and could have been crisper in some places, but perhaps the length just adds to the allure of the story. This is one of those books that immerse you, include you as an active participant in the narrative and make your eyes sparkle with the reality of it all.

Wonderful, indeed!

Susan says

A lovely warm, reassuring "feel good" book, It was so reminiscent of Maeve Binchy with life in a small Irish community and a wealth of characters whose lives were interwoven. The characters and story lines are so well drawn and well handled, the book never became confusing - and all ended happily!

Mireya says

Although not being a bad book, there are too many characters in it to be able to get close enough to any of

them. I enjoyed the read, but could have done with getting deeper into some stories and skipping others altogether. The end is far too easy to predict.

Liz Balaam says

Cathy Kelly draws you into life in a rural Irish village in her own inimitable way. Her characters are as usual a mixture of happy and sad, downtrodden, upbeat and madcap people, who come to know each other and share their loves, lives, troubles and joys throughout the book. I just love Cathy Kelly books, and she truly is the Queen of Irish Women's fiction. However, the only problem I had with the book was the title. I thought there would be more of bees and beekeeping, but this really only popped up once or twice and again at the end. However, that should not detract the reader as the book is a joy to read.

Nicki says

Done with this book. People are comparing it to Maeve Binchy. An author I always found boring. Too gentle and convenient. Damn, and I normally like Cathy's books. This one is just too quaint for me.

Julie says

Ce petit roman feel good avait tout pour me plaire en ce début d'été. Une histoire "simple", des personnages attachants, une bonne dose de bons sentiments, et une happy end inévitable. Pour autant, j'ai justement trouvé qu'il y avait trop de bons sentiments. J'ai vu venir beaucoup de choses et me suis surprise à lever les yeux au ciel à plusieurs reprises en me disant "mon dieu c'que c'est cul-cul!" C'est le genre de lecture que j'adore habituellement, surtout en été, mais je crois que j'ai aussi mes limites, qui ont été dépassées avec celle-ci.

L'histoire en elle-même est plutôt sympathique, quoique je trouve que le résumé de la 4ème de couverture n'est pas véritablement représentatif. Finalement, si Lillie est bien présente dans le roman, j'ai eu le net sentiment qu'Opal prenait énormément de place. Ce sont deux personnages que j'ai énormément aimé et dont la sympathie et la générosité m'ont beaucoup touchée. Ce sont finalement plusieurs histoires entremêlées que l'on suit au travers ce roman et toutes ont un petit quelque chose de "trop" qui ont fait que je me suis un peu lassée sur la fin.

Si j'ai fini ma lecture avec plaisir, elle a néanmoins été entachée d'un côté un peu trop niais à mon goût. L'écriture de l'auteur y est aussi, je pense, pour beaucoup. Bien qu'agréable, la plume de Cathy Kelly n'a pas grand chose d'extraordinaire et rend l'ensemble assez plat.

Mack says

I liked this easy read that did not come together until right at the end. The characters were hard to track in the beginning but it was a lovely gentle novel and portrayed that there was a lot of goodness in all the characters that lived in the small village of Redstone, along with many realistic life problems.

Stephanie (Stepping out of the Page) says

Whilst this was only the second book written by Cathy Kelly that I've picked up, I was very excited to see what it was like. Cathy Kelly has already got a firm place in my mind as an author that I can turn to when I want something that I can really get absorbed into. This is a book that I felt I could unwind with and read all day.

Though this is a book that I could easily relax with, that doesn't mean that it's lacking in substance. Kelly seems to have an ability to hook you in and feel comfortable with her stories, even if she is tackling some very difficult or taboo subjects at the same time. I love books that explore everyday problems and it is great to see them being explored in such a good, well thought out manner. There are a lot of things going on in this book - from one character mourning the death of her husband to the stabilisation of a rocky marriage and even to the issue of past abuse. Most of the characters mentioned are interlinked in some way - relationships understandably play a large part in this book and it's interesting to see how they interact and come together.

Although I admire the author for being able to create so many well developed and complex characters with their own subplots, this was also, partially, a flaw in the book. Kelly introduced so many characters into this book that the first chapters felt quite confusing and even a little overwhelming - I think that most people will struggle to remember so many names and stories at first. Thankfully, as the book progressed I did find myself being more quickly able to identify each character. It is certainly worth persisting with this book, even if you do become a little confused at first. Though there are a vast array of characters, Kelly manages to give them all very distinct and multi-layered personalities, which is such an impressive achievement.

I can't say that there was a particular character or story that I connected with most, which is actually quite a great compliment - I connected with each and every character and subplot. Though some of the characters were initially a little more difficult to relate to, I did grow to like them all, each in their own way with their own quirks - including the lesser mentioned supporting characters.

Although I've only read one other Cathy Kelly book (so far!), I would certainly imagine that if you're a fan of hers, you will enjoy this one - it does draw a lot of parallels from others, dealing with similar issues. It is so clear that Kelly is a talented writer and that she has a lot of experience alongside it. I'd certainly recommend this book to any adult who enjoys reading realistic fiction and/or books that deal with real-life problems.

Fiona says

I have read most of this author's work and loved it so much I keep the majority of her books however this one left me feeling rather cold. There seemed to be too much going on giving it a rather disjointed feel. Too many characters with dilemmas but I guess what she was doing was making the main character of Lillie the balm that helped to soothe the others. It picked up for me in the last 100 pages and I caught glimpses of the author I love but on the whole a rather disappointing read.

Dale Harcombe says

Four and a half stars. A good light read, despite dealing with some serious issues. Just what I needed at the time. Sometimes you just want a book that leaves you with a warm satisfied feeling and with likeable characters you care about. If that's what you're looking for then The Honey Queen will fit the bill. In Australia, Lillie's husband has recently died and she is struggling to come to terms with that when she finds out she has a half brother and his family in Ireland. After finding this brother and contacting him and receiving a positive reply inviting Lillie to visits, Lillie's sons, Martin and Evan pay for her to go to Ireland. Lillie's brother Seth is facing his own problems after having been retrenched. He lives with his wife Frankie in the town of Redstone, which sounds like the friendliest town out. But all is not well in the marriage between Seth and Frankie.

Then there is Peggy who has come from an abusive childhood and as a result doesn't do trust men. After saving for years, she opens her own knitting shop in Redstone and thinks she is finally getting her life together. But then David enters the scene leaving her confused.

The town of Redstone is dotted with a lot of other characters as well, like Opal who is always interested in others. With the exception of Peggy's father, Opal's daughter Meredith and Opal's future in law Miranda, everyone else is so nice. I especially loved Freya, the young girl who coming from a precarious background, has made her home with her aunt Opal and her uncle Ned. Freya is just one of many likeable characters in this novel. It's a novel that stirs the emotions and Lillie is the kind of friend everyone wishes they had but very few people do. So is Opal. This is a real feel good novel and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Margi says

This was a really light and enjoyable read. I got to like the many characters for their good spirit, honesty, struggles and triumphs. I loved the hint of Irish humour and their warm ways and sayings. This was one of those feel good books that had me wanting to return to with lots of happy endings.

Anita Johnson says

I read this in Ireland, which made the story more personal. Cathy Kelly is probably my favorite author and I have loved every one of her books. I bought this in Dublin since our local library doesn't have it and it was probably the best buy I got in the country.

Lynda says

A truly awesome read..I lost myself in the characters and already miss them.

Monique Mulligan says

Cathy Kelly has a knack of writing feel-good novels perfect for curling up with and her latest offering The

Honey Queen is no different. It's the kind of book that gives you a warm, fuzzy feeling ... much like a nice drop of wine. I read this after a few particularly emotive novels and it proved to be just what I needed.

The Honey Queen weaves a number of different characters and lives together in the Irish town of Redstone. It's a friendly place where the locals wave and chat to each other, the shops and cafes are full of cheerful hustle and bustle. New shops are popping up and the area is starting to have quite a different feel to it. Lillie comes to the town to meet the brother she only recently discovered she had; she's still grieving the loss of her husband and her half-brother, Seth, suggests that coming to Ireland might be good for her. She arrives to a house that's not in the best shape – Seth and his wife, Frankie, bought the house as a "fixer-upper", but when Seth lost his job during the financial crisis, all their grand plans were put on hold. Lillie is quick to realise that things are tense between the couple – Seth is depressed and Frankie doesn't really understand how losing his job has affected his psyche. She's got her own worries, like an empty nest, peri-menopause and rumblings of a takeover at work. Lillie wants to do something to help – after all, they've welcomed her, practically a stranger, into their home – but what?

Peggy is approaching thirty and has always been restless. But now, she has enough money to open her own knitting shop in the town. While other young women dream of meeting the right man and settling down, Peggy has other ideas – to her the shop is a dream come true. Meeting David, was not on the agenda; after a night together, scared by the feelings she's experiencing for him, she leaves abruptly without giving him a reason. His efforts to see her are spurned, leaving him heartbroken and her refusing to admit her true feelings or reasons for her fears. And then comes something else she never expected.

Freya is 15 and lives with her aunt and uncle. Her father died years before and her mother just can't cope with responsibility. Older than her years, Freya is settled in the life she now leads. So why is she so unsettled by the news that her cousin Meredith is moving back home? Lillie soon befriends Freya and a host of other characters and as it turns out, she's just the right person to help them navigate uncharted territory.

The Honey Queen is a character-driven book in which Lillie is at the centre of all that's going on. It's as though she is the queen bee in the centre of a honeycomb (a sweet place with lots of depth) and she's the glue that brings the buzzing community back on track. Kelly's characters are likable and well-developed – even Meredith, who comes across as selfish and unappreciative of her family, is changed by the experiences she has. All of the key characters undergo a process of refining and change, some more than others, but in a way that feels right and real. Kelly is adept at creating characters who you wouldn't mind knowing yourself ... maybe even having a cuppa with, or going with for a haircut at Bobbi's shop. Even the minor characters had a bit of a story – the gay couple who own the delicatessen and the childless baker and his wife.

Kelly brings all the different stories and characters together with ease; there's no disjointed feeling, just a transition as smooth as honey. She creates a sense of place so well that you feel like you're there, part of the community. While it is for the most part a light read, Kelly laces the story with issues including emotional abuse, unemployment, mother-daughter relationships, unplanned pregnancy and more. The two that stand out the most and were insightful in their portrayal were those of emotional abuse and unemployment. Often when people think of domestic violence they think in terms of physical abuse. Domestic violence has a much broader definition, including emotional abuse and financial abuse; forms of domestic violence other than physical are played down and ignored by many – even within the legal system. Kelly explored the emotional violence aspect sensitively and without judgement. The other issue, unemployment, stood out because it highlighted how important a man's sense of purpose and job really is. When that is taken away, when he has no purpose, his sense of self is eroded. It's a complex issue and lightly touched on, but nicely done. I think it's important for women to get that insight.

If you're after a book that will make you feel good and lift your spirits, this is a great choice. It's available from good bookstores and Harper Collins. This copy was courtesy of Harper Collins.

Rachel Gilbey says

I found *The Honey Queen* a very slow to get into book. It is the stories of Lillie, Frankie and Seth, Opal and Ned, Meredith, Peggy and Kathleen, and Freya.

Those are all the main characters and that is a lot of characters to get to grips with, especially when they aren't especially interwoven.

I think this book would have almost been better had it been 4 or 5 shorter stories dealing with each set of characters and then a few overlap chapters. Would have definitely made it easier to remember what background and circumstances you are dealing with in each case.

Lillie, in Australia, has recently been widowed and has always known she was adopted. Her sons manage to trace her birth family, and discover she has a half brother Seth in Ireland. They communicate with Seth and he offers Lillie a place to stay for as long as she wants to get to know her, and to let her know about her birth mum.

Seth is having troubles of his own having recently been made redundant, and he and his wife, Frankie, had just bought a new house, a fixer upper. Lillie's visit is a blessing in disguise for many reasons.

Peggy has secrets of her own, but starts up her own Knitting and Crochet shop, and does have a few links to the other characters. There is a lot to Peggy's story but I feel like she was the neglected character and that more could have been made of her situation.

Opal, is mother of 3 grown up sons, and grown up estranged daughter Meredith. Opal and her husband Ned, also have taken in their niece Freya, who is 15 years old, and could no longer live at home, after her mother Gemma had a breakdown, following the death of her husband, Freya's father. Opal is a loving character, who is central to the book.

There are a lot of threads of stories in this book, but once you get into it, , the book is a lovely read, and by the end incredibly emotional.
