

Cold Spell

Deb Vanasse

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The Alaskan wilderness described richly in this novel is as layered and emotive as Vanasse's flawed yet sympathetic characters.

Voiced alternately between daughter and mother, *Cold Spell* is a beautifully written work detailing what happens when life throws the two a curve, and how each deals with the aftermath. Author Deb Vanasse has called Alaska home for thirty-six years, and it's evident that she cares for her adopted land and its denizens very much.

Sixteen-year-old Sylvie Sanders enjoys living in her hometown of Pine Lakes, Minnesota. Her mother, Ruth, still reeling from being left by her husband five years earlier, has become fixated on an Alaskan glacier—and an untamed Alaskan native, Kenny. Mother and daughter wage a silent battle when Ruth uproots the family to move to the Great North.

Vanasse depicts Ruth as a determined but sensitive woman, hoping to fill in the cracks of her broken psyche with Kenny's love, but she's also naïve. She flounders to fit in with the locals, including Lena, Kenny's judgmental and church-going mother, and Darla, a neighbor who is dealing with cancer.

Sylvie just wants her old life back, although the brooding Brody Prince piques her interest. She's also conflicted about her feelings for Kenny—she hates him for being a part of her family, but she's also drawn to him in a way that scares her. As the linchpin in the story, Kenny is a multilayered, innovative backwoodsman. He knows what he wants and goes after it, whether it's baiting a bear, building an off-road wheeler with its own specs, or falling in love.

The twenty chapters are nearly all given one-word titles, each a term associated with glaciers. With this unique touch, the chapters appear to parallel the action of the novel.

Vanasse is talented: she can turn ordinary words into the sublime. For example, Ruth looks out the window of her new home: "Though the sun shone bright, the shadowed cliffs on the far side of the river seemed to accuse her, and the trees huddled in an unwelcome way."

Readers who enjoy richly drawn characters trying to make sense of their surroundings will enjoy this cool and refreshing, yet haunting, glimpse of flawed souls.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (Fall 2014)

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