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Foreword Review SCIENCE FICTION

How Icasia Bloom Touched Happiness

Jessica Bell
Vine Leaves Press (Sep 21, 2021)
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In Jessica Bell's science fiction novel, a woman on the fringe of society discovers the love and community that she once considered unattainable.

In the not-too-distant future, the world is controlled by the Jacobson Movement, which focuses on population control and living by The Book. People are euthanized at a certain age, and their souls are kept in limbo; their children are expected to release their souls into a second life phase only after they find true happiness, an event announced by the arrival of The Letter. Never reaching this state means annihilation, for both a person's soul and the souls of their parents.

Icasia Bloom had always flouted The Book and society's rules, bartering for goods while assuming her soul would never be saved. When she meets a bakery owner, Selma, her isolated, unconventional life is turned upside down. Selma's husband, Jerome, has not yet received The Letter, and has mere months to save his soul and those of his parents by finding self-fulfillment. Bored with his job and on shaky ground with his family, Jerome has all but given up on the prospect of finding happiness, leading Icasia and Selma to scheme up a way to save his soul from destruction.

The exploratory, frightening scenarios in the novel speak to themes of government control, social compliance, and the pressures of productivity and satisfaction; they are supported by plausible science. Cultural norms are introduced with an emphasis on how shocking unethical treatment becomes normalized. Icasia and Selma's relationship wavers from friendship to something more, though threads of their relationship are abandoned by the end, whose reasonable resolution is followed by a curveball epilogue.

In the dystopian novel *How Icasia Bloom Touched Happiness*, satisfaction is a matter of the soul's survival.

DELIA STANLEY (September / October 2021)

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