



Ice Queen

Felicia Farber

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Ice Queen is a compelling young adult romance that illustrates some of the most serious perils and pitfalls of dating in the digital age.

Felicia Farber's young adult novel *Ice Queen* is a powerful cautionary tale about the dangers of sexting and cyberbullying.

Although Blair is academic and athletic, she's relegated to "Class C status" at Westberry High School, where the Ice Queen, Krystal, keeps her subjects in line with a rigid rating system and vicious bullying tactics both online and in real life. Blair earned the Ice Queen's ire and her dismal social status over a misunderstanding their freshman year, and things only get worse when she inadvertently catches the attention of the Ice Queen's boyfriend, David.

Blair's banishment doesn't happen immediately, though, and her initial connection with David deepens into a sweet summer relationship after the Ice Queen breaks up with him for associating with a Class C girl. Blair approaches his attentions with wariness since her high school experiences have been characterized by rejection rather than romance, and the cautious courtship helps to round out both characters. They begin to share their thoughts, hopes, and dreams over dates and a day trip to the beach. The dialogue stays true to the teens' limited life experiences and fits itself between activities like body surfing in the Atlantic and playing games at the virtual reality center in the mall, adding to the book's authentic feel because it doesn't go to soul-searching depths.

The plot pivots on the first day of senior year, when both Blair and David are arrested for sexting and charged with creating and distributing child pornography. The incident exacerbates Blair's worst fears about David's intentions and signals an all-out cyberwar between Blair and her friends and the Ice Queen and her most loyal subjects. It is at first unclear who is on which side, who was responsible for sending out a compromising photo of Blair, and who turned the photo over to the police, resulting in intrigue. The twist takes the story beyond its ugly duckling fairy tale narrative, and teens on both sides of the cyber battle make questionable decisions about how to handle digital information. Their actions are realistic and impulsive, with good kids sometimes making bad choices.

The book's foreword, written by a clinical psychiatrist who teaches at Harvard, is aimed most toward parents, educators, and other adults, rather than at the book's intended audience, and its preface also has a formal tone that isn't echoed in the novel itself. Neither feels essential to understanding the entertaining and educational narrative. However, the discussion questions at the end of the book are good starting points for conversations about the perils of sexting and cyberbullying, if they evade the reasoning behind teens' potential responses.

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CHARLENE OLDHAM (June 22, 2020)

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