

The Flower Bowl Spell

Olivia Boler

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With a fine command of language, Boler takes readers on a magical roller coaster ride through the supernatural.

With a deadly sense of humor, Olivia Boler alternately explores and ridicules Wiccan procedures in *The Flower Bowl Spell*, weaving whimsy and murder into an otherworldly escapade into the realm of magic.

Memphis Zhang is a Chinese-American witch living in San Francisco. One of the last of her kind, she wields powers that members of her disbanded coven have lost, but refrains from using her gifts. Memphis, a journalist by trade, does not see her abilities as a blessing. She blames herself when a friend she wants to protect ends up dead. Feeling cursed, she tries to live an ordinary life, until the threat of a power-mad witch forces her to return to her supernatural practices.

An eccentric cross between literary quirkiness and young adult fiction, this carefully crafted novel illuminates what the uninitiated human cannot fathom: fairies, auras, and spells. A fine command of language is evident throughout this lighthearted, yet simultaneously serious, story. Boler writes with precision, placing every word like a dollop of color on a canvas. Enter an enchanted mindscape where inanimate objects come to life and mythological beings appear out of nowhere. Her narrative transforms urban terrain into mystical wonderland.

"I hear a snicking sound, like small scissors at work. My eyes open and there's the fairy floating right in front of my face, his wings rapidly beating," Boler writes. "He's maybe five inches away, the closest I've ever been to one. His face is smooth and brown like a polished seed, and he wears a fawn-colored tunic and pants."

Though sober, Memphis lives in a hallucinogenic haze that only practitioners can see. The author's comedic touch softens the protagonist's against-the-clock race to stop a rogue witch intent on destruction. Written from a humorous, first-person standpoint, this candid glimpse into the thoughts of a reluctant sorcerer will delight fans of fairy tales. With impending doom threatening her whimsical scenarios, Boler adds a mature edge to lift the plot from the category of juvenile fiction.

A tendency to veer in many directions gives the book a somewhat erratic, bouncing effect, which will either attract or repel readers. Rapidly moving from place to place and from detail to detail, the pace is comparable to a roller coaster ride. Enjoyment is a matter of preference.

Boler holds a master's degree in creative writing from the University of California-Davis. *The Flower Bowl Spell* is her second novel. Without the grit of streetwise urban fantasy, this exceptional story stands out from typical genre fiction, begging to be read for its captivating charm.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (June 29, 2013)

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