



The Melting Queen

Bruce Cinnamon

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Adam Truman is overwhelmed by a shift that he's perceived within himself, and he's spent the long winter unable to identify what's going on. Desperate to break free of his internal and external monotony, Adam takes drastic action, throwing himself at the North Saskatchewan River's ice because, in Edmonton, the day the ice breaks, spring begins. Adam succeeds, and Edmonton launches into its traditional twenty-four-hour bacchanal that culminates with naming a new Melting Queen. However, in Bruce Cinnamon's *The Melting Queen*, Adam has done more than knock spring loose; they've emerged from the ice as River Runson, and their name is about to be called.

Part fertility goddess, part saint, the "Melting Queen is Edmonton's perfect mother," and, as River predicts, "Everyone loves a man in a dress on Melting Day, when inversions and perversions are queen ... Come tomorrow the candy-coated veneer of tolerance will be shattered just like the river." When it becomes clear that River's nonbinary, genderfluid identity is there to stay, emotions run high, and River is made both symbol and target.

Reconciling their place within friend groups, themselves, and their city means confronting transphobic radical feminists, their relationships' foundations, and the Melting Queen mythology itself. River's self-discovery can skew didactic, and characters' reflections occasionally seem stilted, as if they're talking to an audience more than to each other. Yet the novel also illustrates that there's no perfect way to navigate the unknown, especially when those who have come before have been denigrated, broken, or lost.

Heartfelt, flawed, and beautiful, *The Melting Queen* is a modern fairy tale. Cinnamon creates a lost history, writing a legacy for River Runson that honors missing ancestors and gives Edmonton a second chance to confront the truth of its hypocrisy around oppression and expression.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May/June 2019)

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