



The Matchstick Girl

Suzanne Hocking

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Yelena walks the line between cold and poverty. Then for a brief moment fortune shines on her and Yelena catches a glimpse of hopes and unknown joys that she never imagined could have been within her reach. But as soon as it appears, it is taken from her. Obsession takes hold, and as the years pass, she grows to want far more than what the life of a young girl of the streets can offer. Through luck and deceit, she lands a place at the esteemed Smolny Institute for Noble Girls where the young women of the Russian court are taught mathematics, literature and science and where Yelena hopes to light a fire under Russian society. **THE MATCHSTICK GIRL** brings LGBT undercurrents to nineteenth-century Russia, as the young protagonist struggles with class differences, schoolgirl relationships and her search for self-empowerment.

The Matchstick Girl Details

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From Reader Review The Matchstick Girl for online ebook

Inga says

Such a lovely, thoughtful, colorful, warm book! So many characters that stuck with me, like Slava & Ivan in the beginning (Slava! gah!), later Vasya, whose death was a bit of an unexpected blow (reading on the subway & choking up is what happened there), but also Sasha & Lilya. Not to mention at Smolny; I want to know more about Ina & her charge. Smolny also makes me curious about the women that came out of that school in the past, and wonder what could become of Yelena if she returned there.

And then there's the matter of the beautiful, lyrical language that guides the reader alongside Yelena, sharing her rather dreamlike view of her environment. She seems to be easily susceptible to the supernatural, always touching on something just slightly otherworldly and pulling us into that with her. This was such a pleasurable companion for the last few days. Even though Yelena has gone through a bit of a change in her ambitions and what she considers important in her life, this feels like only the beginning of her story.

Marizela says

It's a really good book with a interesting story, hard to put it down.

Bellish says

Hocking has a beautiful lyrical style that transports you into her protagonist's world and world view: I experienced Yelena's trials and tribulations viscerally on my humdrum but comfortable commute. Heavy on imagery and reflection, *The Matchstick Girl* reads as the work of a poet. The tale explores the actions of seemingly inconsequential individuals affect those around them, and how women have helped other women to move through the world even at times when their opportunities and their agency are severely limited.

I hope there is more from this author in the future.

Nina says

The Matchstick Girl is about a young girl, Yelena, with fantastic ambitions - and very unfortunate circumstances. It made me feel all sorts of things: uneasy, frustrated, hopeful, grateful and most of all it reminded me that children are cruel.

Yelena wants more from life and slowly makes her way up. Thanks to Hocking's brilliant writing the struggle feels painfully real and made the book unputdownable for me.

I really want to know what's going to happen next!

My thoughts were like the three hands on a clock - the core of me solid, hour after hour, dogged by minute-thoughts, circling cleanly, and out beyond them, the wildly skittering seconds of my worries over Lilya.

Ines says

I liked this book so much!

The matchstick girl tells the story of Yelena, a Russian girl living in poverty, who will make anything that it's possible not only to improve her life but also the lives of those around her.

This book perfectly sums up what society is like (even today): the pauper, the rich, the huge differences between them...

We are so used to the "world" where we're born (social and economically) that, sometimes, we don't realise that we can actually change our situation (with a lot of hard work, though). In Yelena's society, Russia in the nineteenth century, it was harder than today (much harder, actually). We should strive to do better, without forgetting who we are and where we come from.

To finish, I'd like to say that I wasn't expecting this ending. It was a really good book!

Sarah says

Suzanne has such a wonderful way with words, she brings beauty and magic to even the smallest of moments or gestures. Every page of this book felt like a poem, the cadence and imagery were so lovely. The story and characters were compelling too, giving a satisfying balance between style and content.

My only regret is that it wasn't longer. I would have loved to stay with Yelena for a few more dark winters evenings!

Anna says

Pretty darn heartbreaking, but brilliant!

8th House Publishing says

THE MATCHSTICK GIRL brings LGBT undercurrents to nineteenth-century Russia, as our young protagonist struggles with class differences, schoolgirl relationships and her search for self-empowerment.

Archit Ojha says

Dear Ending : I didn't see you coming!!!!

Set in the nineteenth century in Russia, Yelena, a five year old girl, the protagonist, the matchstick girl, stands in front of a door where her papa has left her. Not knowing where she was and what she had to do, she made peace with the fact that her father is never coming back for her.

Soon she finds out that this place where she'll live for the rest of her life, which she calls her home is termed

brothel by the educated people. She has to become a matchstick girl. Selling matchsticks and earning bread for her masters.

Once or twice, fortune showers kindness into her, she is full of hope and euphoria but soon realizes that her life is not to be simple at all. Life of a matchstick girl, should not be considered as ordinary. She finds her caretaker in Lilya, a prostitute who will be staying with Yelena's ups and downs.

Always in the lookout for an escape plan from this bad world, The Matchstick Girl is a heart-wrenching story of the wrestle of this poor girl with her fate. Her passion to learn new things, read books, seeking self-empowerment, she desires and works for her better future.

But every time she comes one step closer to her goal, fate plays dice and hide and seek with her. Will she be able to overcome these misfortunes and acquire her dreams?

Reading this book was a magnificent experience for me. Right at one time I was a guy from 21st century and just another second, I was in Russia, sympathizing and supporting the protagonist. The deductions I made from my expedition into this story, were surprising and magical.

Poetic manner of storytelling, descriptive narration, The Matchstick Girl brought out loads and loads of emotions in me. No wonder, this book will win various prizes for its theme and the sincerity it contains.

Full of originality and beauty, I recommend The Matchstick Girl highly.

Lil says

This is one of those books that can seem challenging if you aren't in the right headspace for it; and that, if you are, can transport you to another world that seems as tangible as the one you're in. The language is lyrical, so dense and textured that a single line can encompass so much beauty and so much ugliness. The life of Yelena is not easy and it's not romanticized. The force of her will makes her vulnerable at times and unlovable at other times, but always compelling. And there are so many other lives here, all of them feeling genuine and some of them (Lilya and Vasya especially) leaving an ache in my heart that won't be going away any time soon. It makes for an epic read that will haunt me as I imagine where life might take Yelena next.

Marianne says

A bewitching, lyrically-written novel that brings 19th century St Petersburg to vibrant life.

A fitting final book to end my 2015 reading challenge - it will be a difficult to find something better to start 2016 with!

Yelena Belikova is a re-imagined matchstick girl who longs to escape her life of poverty and fear in the brothels and gutters of the city to attend the prestigious institute for the education of noble girls in Smolny. She wants a better life, but her predilection for kindling fires in those around her is never extinguished and ultimately it leads her to realise that there is no joy in running from who she truly is.

Full of original imagery and quietly beautiful writing, delicate symbolism runs through Yelena's story and ties it all together towards the final climactic scenes.

This thin volume is simply delicious to read. Well worth taking your time over.
