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Oh My Stars

by Lorna Landvik

About the Book

I am convinced that at birth the cake is already baked. Nurture is the nuts or frosting, but if you're a spice cake, you're a spice cake, and nothing is going to change you into an angel food.

Tall, slender Violet Mathers is growing up in the Great Depression, which could just as well define her state of mind. Abandoned by her mother as a child, mistreated by her father, and teased by her schoolmates ("Hey, Olive Oyl, where's Popeye?"), the lonely girl finds solace in artistic pursuits. Only when she's hired by the town's sole feminist to work the night shift in the local thread factory does Violet come into her name, and bloom. Accepted by her co-workers, the teenager enters the happiest phase of her life, until a terrible accident causes her to retreat once again into her lonely shell.

Realizing that she has only one clear choice, Violet boards a bus heading west to California. But when the bus crashes in North Dakota, it seems that Fate is having another cruel laugh at Violet's expense. This time though, Violet laughs back. She and her fellow passengers are rescued by two men: Austin Sykes, whom Violet is certain is the blackest man to ever set foot on the North Dakota prairie, and Kjel Hedstrom, who inspires feelings Violet never before has felt. Kjel and Austin are musicians whose sound is like no other, and with pluck, verve, and wit, Violet becomes part of their quest to make a new kind of music together.

Oh My Stars is Lorna Landvik's most ambitious novel yet, with a cast of characters whose travails and triumphs you'll long remember. It is a tale of love and hope, bigotry and betrayal, loss and discovery?as Violet, who's always considered herself a minor character in her own life story, emerges as a heroine you'll laugh with, cry with, and, most important, cheer for all the way.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the novel's structure. Does having Violet add commentary in the present change your perspective on the events that took place? Does the foreshadowing?for example, in the Prologue she reveals that she has a daughter?enhance the narrative or detract from it?

2. It "consoled" Violet "to think of her suicide, to think that there was going to be an ending to this life that sadistically had teased her with a taste of something wonderful, only to snatch it away, leaving her with her usual helping of pain and disappointment." At what point does Violet stop entertaining thoughts of suicide? Why?

3. When Violet leaves the Hedstrom's house the morning after the bus crash, why does Kjel go searching for her and bring her back to his house? Does he want to "save" her? Why does Violet decide to go with him?

4. Leona is displeased when Kjel brings Violet back with him that morning, and yet as the years pass she and Violet become like mother and daughter. Why do the two women forge such a close relationship?

5. Violet's mother left when she was a child, abandoning her to the cruelty of her father. How does Violet's upbringing impact her? Does she ever get over her mother having left her? How would you describe Violet as a mother?

6. After the fight at the gas station, Violet feels as if she is "part of the team" with Kjel and Austin. How does this incident alter the trio's dynamic? How about for Violet in particular?

7. What makes Violet such an adept manager for the Pearltones? Would they have achieved the level of success they did without, as Austin says, Violet's "genius for show business"?

8. Violet happily takes on the role as the Pearltone's manager, but why is she so reluctant to give her own dream of designing clothing a chance?

9. At the beginning of chapter five, Violet (in the present) asks the reader, "What are your thoughts on nature vs. nurture? Do you believe that we come of the chute with our personalities already in place, or do you believe that our upbringing is the bigger determiner of our natures?" How does this apply to Austin and Dallas, and even to Violet, who endured an abusive childhood?

10. Austin says to Kjel, "I was saved by my music?and by my need to help rather than hurt our poor mother, and certainly by books?what a comfort it is to read about someone whose problems outweigh your own by tons." For you, is there any truth to Austin's statement about books?

11. Austin is plagued by guilt because Dallas is indirectly responsible for what happens to Kjel. Is Austin at fault? Do you think he would kick his brother out of the band if he had the chance to do it over again? Do you have any empathy at all for Dallas?

12. When they first meet, Violet and Austin do not get along. Why do they dislike one another so intensely? What turning points can you identify in their feelings toward one another?

13. Birdie asks Violet if she would have gotten together with Austin had Kjel lived. Do you believe they would have become romantically involved had Kjel not died?

14. Do you think Violet truly loved Kjel, or was it the idea of him? On some level, was she aware of her feelings for Austin before Kjel's death?

15. Given the time period in which the book is set, race is a crucial part of the story. How does the author deal with the issue of race? Is it effectively portrayed? Could the cruelty and insensitivity shown toward Violet because of her amputation also be considered a form of prejudice?

16. How does being a child of mixed race affect Austin and Violet's daughter, Miri? How about when she's an adult?

17. Violet suffered from a condition known as tinnitus, although she did not know that for many years. How did the buzzing sound in her ears affect Violet's perception of herself and also the world around her?

18. How do you interpret Violet's dream of Kjel near the end of the story? Is there any connection between the dream and the buzzing in her head disappearing?

19. Which character resonated with you the most? If you could use only one word to describe **Oh My Stars**g, what would it be?

Author Bio

Lorna Landvik is the author of 12 novels, including the bestselling PATTY JANE'S HOUSE OF CURL, ANGRY HOUSEWIVES EATING BON BONS, OH MY STARS and the recently published LAST CIRCLE OF LOVE.

Landvik's checkered (but legal) past includes working as a chambermaid in Bavaria, winning a trip to Tahiti as a contestant on "The $25,000 Pyramid" (MacGyver was her partner), temping at the Playboy Mansion (it was strictly a clerical position), and walking across the country as a member of The Great Peace March.

She has acted in many theatrical productions, including a half dozen shows she conveniently wrote for herself. Her all-improvised show, PARTY IN THE REC ROOM, is a local legend, due in no small part to the margaritas she mixes up onstage.

She has one husband and two daughters and lives in the beautiful blue and green state of Minnesota.

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