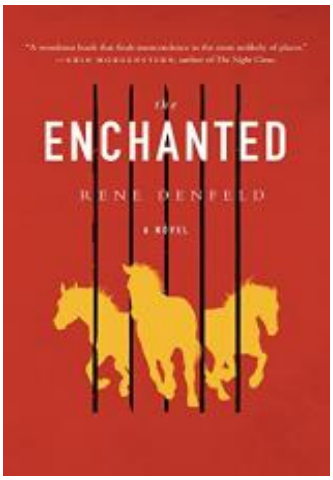
The Enchanted

by Rene Denfeld



About the Book

This is an enchanted place. Others don?t see it but I do.

The enchanted place is a high security prison and is relayed through the eyes of an inmate on death row who escapes his surroundings by immersing himself in books, and by re-imagining the world that surrounds him. Instead of focusing on the cloudy medical vines that snake across the floor, empty and waiting for the warden?s finger to press the red buttons, our narrator sees golden horses as they run deep under the earth, heat flowing like molten metal from their backs.

A woman and fallen priest haunt the prison halls --- an unnamed female investigator only known as the Lady who is known for discovering information relating to soon-to-be executed inmates? backgrounds that can be used to overturn their sentences. She is put on the case of a man named York and as she digs into his past, the experience brings up ghosts of her own and threatens to destroy everything that she has come to know about the enchanted place.

THE ENCHANTED is a magical novel about redemption, the humanity that can lie within what is monstrous and the human capacity to transcend and survive.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel opens with the line, ?This is an enchanted place. Others don?t see it but I do.? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word ?enchant? as ?to attract and hold the attention of (someone) by being interesting, pretty, etc.; to put a magic spell on (someone or something).? Why does the narrator call this place enchanted? What beauty does he find in his surroundings that others do not? What does this tell us about the narrator?

2. Talk about the main characters: the narrator, the lady, the priest, and York, the prisoner on death row at the center of the story. How are these characters? lives and their fates intrinsically connected? What do we learn about the lady and

the priest from the narrator?

3. Why does York want to die and why does the lady want to save him? Is he worth saving? How does she go about gathering evidence to understand his case, knowledge that might prevent his execution? What propels her choice at the novel?s end?

4. Think about York. What were your first impressions about him when he?s introduced? As you discovered more about his story, did your outlook towards him change? How does the experience of investigating York?s past affect the lady and her outlook towards York? How does it shape how she sees her own life?

5. What draws the lady and the priest to one another? Why do you think each chose the career they pursued? How do their callings sustain them emotionally? Are they good at what they do --- even if the priest is himself fallen from grace?

6. What has being locked inside done to the narrator --- and for him? What about some of the other prisoners he watches? Do you believe in rehabilitation? Do you think our prison system today encourages rehabilitation? Is there something else we can do besides imprison those who commit crimes?

7. One of the Ten Commandments is ?thou shalt not kill.? Isn?t executing someone --- even someone who committed a heinous crime such as taking another?s life --- going against morality? Why is the death penalty still used in the United States compared to most other modern democracies?

8. Do you believe that we are products of our circumstances? How much can free will mitigate terrible damage that inflicted in a person?s youth, when he or she is most vulnerable and impressionable? Why do people do such terrible things to each other and to innocent children? ?There is too much pain in the world, that?s the problem,? the lady tells the priest. What causes so much of the world?s pain and can we, both individually and as a society, do to help alleviate this suffering? How much responsibility do we carry for our fellow men and women?

9. What do you think is the worst punishment that the prisoners in the novel face being locked away? ?It is meaning that drives most people forward into time and it is meaning that reminds them of the past, so they know where they are in the universe. But what about men like me? For us time doesn?t exist.? Think about time in your life and in the narrator?s. How do you respond to him? What can give a life that is not measured by the events of time real meaning? How is such a life measured? Think about not being able to touch someone or see the sky. How would that affect you for a day? A week? A year? A lifetime?

10. What happens to people when they are incarcerated? How can we make the prison system more humane? Should it be humane or do convicts, regardless of the level of their crimes, ?deserve what they get?? As a society, do we see prison more as punishment or as retribution? How can we save people from having failed lives? Is it possible to save someone?

11. Do you think that death offers release for men like York and the narrator? Did they find peace?

12. Like the lady, Rene Denfeld is a fact investigator in death penalty cases. How do you think her work shaped the story? Did reading THE ENCHANTED alter your view of prison?

13. Rene Denfeld touches on many issues and themes: Mental illness, justice, time, kindness, remorse, forgiveness, the

need for love and connection, life and death itself. Choose one or two and trace them through the novel, using examples from the novel to enrich your analysis.

14. Why did you choose to read this novel? Did the novel surprise you in any way? Explain why or why not. What did you take away from reading THE ENCHANTED?

Author Bio

Rene Denfeld is a bestselling author, licensed investigator and foster mother. She is the author of the novels THE TALKING BONE, SLEEPING GIANTS, THE BUTTERFLY GIRL, THE CHILD FINDER and THE ENCHANTED. Her novels have won numerous awards, including a French Prix, and *The New York Times* named her a 2017 hero of the year. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

Critical Praise

?A striking one-of-a-kind prison novel?[with] rich, haunting prose?A stunning first novel from an already accomplished writer.?

?*Publishers Weekly*

?[An] impressive debut? Read this magical book, and prepare to be spellbound.?

?*Library Journal* (starred review)

?[An] evocative first novel?Denfeld?s humanizing of the potential for horror that is within all of us and her insistence that the reader see the beauty in the darkest corners of life sizzles through her sharp prose, which both makes us flinch and invites us to imagine.?

?*Booklist*

?THE ENCHANTED wrapped its beautiful and terrible fingers around me from the first page and refused to let go after the last. A wondrous book that finds transcendence in the most unlikely of places, enshrouding horrible things in a gossamer veil of fantasy with a truly unforgettable narrator. So dark yet so exquisite.?

?Erin Morgenstern, author of THE NIGHT CIRCUS

?THE ENCHANTED is unlike anything I?ve ever read. Its exquisitely constructed web is spun in that least exquisite locale, Death Row. The powerful central story arches over multiple, piercing sub-plots, and devastating fables that stare straight into the face of horror. But it is the opposite of depressing; it?s a jubilant celebration that explores human darkness with a profound lyric tenderness and not one jot of sentimentality. It?s probably mad to perceive and convey so much beauty in the midst of the vile, but this particular lunacy is contagious and seductive. The reader comes to see through Denfeld?s strange lens, and to savor the richness of the view long after the final page has turned.?

?Katherine Dunn, author of GEEK LOVE

?Rene Denfeld is a genius. In THE ENCHANTED, she has imagined one of the grimmest settings in the world --- a dank

and filthy death row in a corrupt prison --- and given us one of the most beautiful, heart-rending, and riveting novels I have ever read.?

?Donald Ray Pollock, author of THE DEVIL ALL THE TIME

?Rene Denfeld?s THE ENCHANTED is a book like no other?With Denfeld?s spare, quiet prose, it is one of the most gorgeous and stunning things I have ever read?THE ENCHANTED will break your heart but will also knit it back together.?

?Powell's Staff Pick

?THE ENCHANTED is indeed both a beautiful and a painful read, one that explores the complexities of many crucial issues, including how we treat our children and the vulnerable and the consequences of our actions. It also makes us ask whether our personal behavior, social policies, and the justice system perpetuate more pain than otherwise for humanity.?

?*New York Journal of Books*

?Denfeld has done a wondrous job of taking us into the gruesomeness of death row and giving us the visual tour through the eyes of one who has been able to find the beauty inside?If you enjoy mystery and suspense as well as a bit of magic and horror you will find it all here. The story is enthralling and keeps you reading far into the night. This would be a great book for a discussion group and create a great deal of argument and buzz, rounding out the feeling and thoughts of all those involved.?

?*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

?THE ENCHANTED is instead a testament to the power of words, of language and symbols to reshape one?s reality, and it is an extraordinarily empathetic look at the sorrows and joys of even the worst aspects of human life.?

?*The Oregonian*

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