



Ice


By Sarah Beth Durst


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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 8 Up—Novels with a fairy tale at their center are ubiquitous, but even in this crowded market, *Ice*, based on "East of the Sun, West of the Moon," is a standout. Cassie is the daughter of an Arctic scientist and lives in a research station on the ice. Her mother is dead, according to her father, but Cassie remembers a story her grandmother used to tell her about how her mother was the daughter of the North Wind and was stolen away by the trolls. As the story opens, the teen is pursuing a polar bear when it steps into the ice and disappears. Drawn by her feeling that there is something special about the animal, Cassie ventures out after it. The bear is a *munaqsri*, a keeper of souls for the polar bears. Cassie agrees to be his wife if he will rescue her mother. Although initially fearful, she develops a relationship with Bear based on real love and companionship. All is well until she ignores the prohibition against looking at his face while he is in human form at night. Bear becomes a prisoner of the trolls, and Cassie, now pregnant, begins her quest to travel east of the sun and west of the moon to rescue her beloved. This is a unique and cleverly spun romance for an older readership than Edith Pattou's *East* (Harcourt, 2003), with a splendidly courageous and smart heroine. Durst flawlessly weaves together romance, adventure, and a modern sensibility to create a highly inventive and suspenseful story of a girl on the cusp of adulthood. Readers will take Cassie and Bear to their hearts.—*Sue Giffard, Ethical Culture Fieldston School, New York City*

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About the Author

Sarah Beth Durst is the author of young adult novels *Conjured*, *Vessel*, *Drink Slay Love*, *Enchanted Ivy*, and *Ice*, as well as middle grade novels *Into the Wild* and *Out of the Wild*. She has been a finalist for SFWA's Andre Norton Award three times, for *Vessel*, *Ice*, and *Into the Wild*. Sarah lives in Stony Brook, New York, with her husband and children. *The Lost*, *The Missing*, and *The Found* are Sarah's first novels for adults.

Visit her at sarahbethdurst.com.

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Ice

ONE

ONCE UPON A TIME, in a land far to the north, there lived a lovely maiden . . .

Latitude 72° 13' 30" N

Longitude 152° 06' 52" W

Altitude 3 ft.

CASSIE KILLED THE SNOWMOBILE ENGINE.

Total silence, her favorite sound. Ice crystals spun in the Arctic air. Sparkling in the predawn light, they looked like diamond dust. Beneath her ice-encrusted face mask, she smiled. She loved this: just her, the ice, and the bear.

“Don’t move,” she whispered at the polar bear.

Cassie felt behind her and unhooked the rifle. Placid as a marble statue, the polar bear did not move. She loaded the tranquilizer dart by feel, her eyes never leaving the bear. White on white in an alcove of ice, he looked like a king on a throne. For an instant, Cassie imagined she could hear Gram’s voice, telling the story of the Polar Bear King. . . . Gram hadn’t told that story since the day she’d left the research station, but Cassie still remembered every word of it. She used to believe it was true.

When she was little, Cassie used to stage practice rescue missions outside of Dad’s Arctic research station. She’d pile old snowmobile parts and broken generators to make the trolls’ castle, and then she’d scale the castle walls and tie up the “trolls” (old clothes stuffed with pillows) with climbing ropes. Once, Dad had caught her on the station roof with skis strapped to her feet, ready to ski beyond the ends of the earth to save her mom. He’d taken away Cassie’s skis and had forbidden Gram from telling the story. Not that that had slowed Cassie at all. She’d simply begged Gram to tell the story when Dad was away, and she’d invented a new game involving a canvas sail and an unused sled. Even after she’d understood the truth—that Gram’s story was merely a pretty way to say her mother had died—she’d continued to play the games.

Now I don’t need games, she thought with a grin. She snapped the syringe into place and lifted the gun up to her shoulder. And this bear, she thought, didn’t need any kid’s bedtime story to make him magnificent. He was as perfect as a textbook illustration: cream-colored with healthy musculature and no battle scars. If her estimates were correct, he’d be the largest polar bear on record. And she was the one who had found him.

Cassie cocked the tranquilizer gun, and the polar bear turned his head to look directly at her. She held her breath and didn’t move. Wind whistled, and loose snow swirled between her and the bear. Her heart thudded in her ears so loudly that she was certain he could hear it. This was it—the end of the chase. When she’d begun this chase, the aurora borealis had been dancing in the sky. She’d tracked him in its light for three miles north of the station. Loose sea ice had jostled at the shore, but she’d driven over it and then onto the pack ice. She’d followed him all the way here, to a jumble of ice blocks that looked like a miniature mountain range. She had no idea how he’d stayed so far ahead of her during the chase. Top speed for an adult male bear clocked at thirty miles per hour, and she’d run her snowmobile at sixty. Maybe the tracks hadn’t been as fresh as they’d looked, or maybe she’d discovered some kind of superfast bear. She grinned at the ridiculousness of that idea. Regardless of the explanation, the tracks had led her here to this beautiful, majestic, perfect bear. She’d won.

A moment later, the bear looked away across the frozen sea.

“You’re mine,” she whispered as she sighted down the barrel.

And the polar bear stepped *into the ice*. In one fluid motion, he rose and moved backward. It looked as if he were stepping into a cloud. His hind legs vanished into whiteness, and then his torso.

Impossible.

She lowered the gun and stared. She couldn’t be seeing this. The ice wall appeared to be absorbing him. Now only his shoulders and head were visible.

Cassie shook herself. He was escaping! Never mind how. Lifting the gun, she squeezed the trigger. The recoil bashed the butt of the gun into her shoulder. Reflexively, she blinked.

And the bear was gone.

“No,” she said out loud. She’d had him! What had happened? Bears didn’t—couldn’t—walk through ice. She had to have imagined it. Some trick of the Arctic air. She whipped off her goggles. Cold squeezed her eyeballs, and the white was blinding. She scanned the frozen waves. Snow blew across the ice like fast-moving clouds. The landscape was as dead as a desert. When the cold hurt too much for her to stand it a second longer, she replaced her goggles.

Her radio crackled. She pulled it out of her parka pocket. “Cassie here,” she said, trying to sound casual. She’d chased the bear onto the pack ice without backup. If she’d caught him, all would have been forgiven. But now . . . How was she going to explain this? She couldn’t even explain it to herself.

“Cassandra Elizabeth Dasent, get home NOW.”

Dad’s voice. And he was not happy.

Well, she wasn’t happy either. She’d promised herself that she’d tag a bear as a birthday present to herself—she was turning eighteen in just a few hours. It seemed the ideal way for the only daughter of the head scientist at the Eastern Beaufort Sea Research Station to celebrate becoming a legal adult. When this bear had sauntered past the station while she’d been out fixing the radio antennae, it had felt like a gift. She’d never expected the chase to lead her so far out onto the ice, and she’d never expected the bear to . . . He couldn’t have gone far. He had to be somewhere just beyond the ice ridges. She checked the gas gauge. She had another three hours of fuel to spare.

“Cassie? Cassie, are you there?”

“I’m going after him,” she said into the radio. She revved the engine, drowning her father’s response, and headed across the ice.

* * * * *

Cassie abandoned the snowmobile in the shed. Slinging her pack over her shoulder, she trudged to the station. She ached from head to toe, inside and out. Even her fingernails ached. The sun hovered on the horizon, as it would for less and less time every day before it sank permanently for the winter. The low-angled light made her shadow look like a snow giant out of an Inuit legend.

She’d lost him.

She didn’t know how, but she’d lost him. She kept replaying the search in her mind as if that would make her envision the tracks she must have missed. If she’d just searched more carefully in the first few moments instead of speeding across the sea ice . . .

Owen, the station lab technician, met her at the door. She blinked at him—a potbellied man with a pepper beard. Clearly, he’d been waiting for her.

“Cassie, the case!” Owen cried in an anguished voice.

She glanced at her pack. The syringe case dangled out of the bag. It was encrusted in ice. Cassie winced. “He got away,” she said.

Owen rescued the bag and gun from her. “Do you know how much these cost?”

Cassie followed him inside through the double door entryway. As she shut the inner door behind her, the thick, sour warmth of the station rolled over her like a smothering wave. It was the smell of home, stale and stifling and comfortingly familiar. She wished she had been coming home victorious.

Clucking over the tranquilizer gun, Owen said, “You have to be careful with this equipment. Treat it like a baby.”

Her stomach sank as she watched him examine her equipment. She didn’t need another strike against her. She’d taken the snowmobile out onto the pack ice alone *and* she’d been careless with equipment. Dad was not going to be pleased. Peeling off her outer layers, she asked, “Where is he? Radar room?” She’d better get it over with. There was no point in delaying.

Owen didn’t respond. He was absorbed in cleaning the tranq gun. She could tell he’d already dismissed her from his mind. She almost smiled. He loved his equipment like she loved the pack ice. Both of them were a bit . . . single-minded. She could admit that about herself. “Jeremy?” she said. The new research intern looked up from his desk.

“He’s not a happy camper,” Jeremy confirmed. “He wants to talk to you.” He nodded toward the research lab door. “You’re welcome to hide here,” he added helpfully, pointing under his desk.

She managed a grin. Jeremy had been blasted by Dad his first week at the station for going out on the ice without the proper gear, and now he had a healthy respect for Cassie’s father’s temper. Of course, in that case, he had deserved it. She didn’t care if he was from UCLA—what breed of idiot went out on the ice without a face mask? You’d never catch her making that kind of newbie mistake. *No*, she thought, *I specialize in the more spectacular mistakes, such as misplacing a full-grown polar bear.*

Cassie pushed through the door to the research lab. She scooted between the boxes and equipment. She could hear Dad’s voice, deep and clipped, inside the radar room. Ugh, this was not going to go well. Here in the faintly sour warmth of home, it was going to sound like she was quoting Gram’s old fairy tale about the Polar Bear King. What seemed almost believable out on the sea ice seemed patently unreal here, back in the prosaic old station. Here, it seemed far more plausible that she’d imagined the bear walking through ice. She wished she’d imagined losing him.

In the radar room, Dad was in his typical position, half-perched on a stool, flanked by two other researchers. Cassie halted just inside the doorway, watching them. Her father was like the sun. People tended to orbit around him without even realizing they were. Scott and Liam were his most common satellites. She wondered if that was how she looked next to him—overshadowed and small. Not liking that thought, Cassie stepped farther into the room.

The door swung shut behind her, and Dad looked up at the sound. He lowered his clipboard. His face was impassive, but she knew he was furious. She steeled herself. She’d deliver her report as professionally as possible. How he reacted would be his choice.

Scott flashed a smile at her. “Ah, the little workaholic.”

“Could you gentlemen excuse us?” Dad said to Scott and Liam. “Family discussion.” Oh, that was not a good sign. She swallowed hard.

Cassie wondered, not for the first time, if her mother hadn't died, would that have softened Dad? Would she have been able to talk to him without feeling like she was approaching a mountain? So much could have been different if her mother had lived.

The two scientists looked from father to daughter, as if suddenly noticing the tension that was thick enough to inhale. Both of them bolted.

For a long moment, Dad didn't speak. His expression was unreadable. His eyes were buried underneath thick, white eyebrows. His mouth was hidden in a mountain-man beard. Six-foot-five, he looked impervious. Cassie raised her chin and met his eyes.

Finally, he said, "You know better than to go out on the pack ice without backup. I raised you to be smarter than this."

Yes, he had. One thing he'd always made sure of was that she knew the rules of the ice. Everything else in her childhood he may have left to others. With her mother dead soon after Cassie was born and Gram gone from the station when Cassie was five, she'd done a lot of her own raising—with only a sort of tag-team parenting from Dad, Max, Owen, and whoever else was passing through the research station. But he had made sure that she knew what to do when she stepped outside the station, and she was grateful for that. "I know," she said.

"You could have fallen into a crevasse," he said. "A pressure ridge could have collapsed. A lead could have split the ice, and you could have driven directly into ocean water."

"I know," she repeated. What else could she say? She wasn't going to make excuses. Maybe she would have a few years ago, but she wasn't a kid anymore. If she expected to be treated as a professional, she knew she had to act like one.

He continued to scowl at her.

Cassie felt her face redden, but she forced herself not to look away. She refused to be intimidated by him.

Dad sighed. "Report," he said.

"There's something unusual about this bear." Taking a deep breath, Cassie plunged into a description of how she had tracked him and how he had walked into the ice. She told Dad about searching the pressure ridge and failing to find tracks leading out of it. She told him how she had searched the surrounding area, crossing miles of pack ice, with no further sign of the bear. Finishing, she braced herself, waiting for Dad to tear apart her report.

Instead, she saw the anger drain out of her father's face. He dropped his clipboard to the table, and he hugged her. "I could have lost you," he said.

This was new. "Dad," she said, squirming. Anger she had expected, but hugs? They were not a hugging family. "Dad, please, I'm fine. I know what I'm doing. You don't have to worry."

Dad released her. He was shaking his head. "I should have known this day would come," he said. "Your grandmother was right."

Awkwardly, she patted his shoulder. “I’ll bring backup next time,” she promised. “I’ll catch the bear. You’ll see.”

He didn’t appear to be listening. “It’s too late for application deadlines for this year, but some of my friends at the University of Alaska owe me favors. You can work in one of their labs and apply for undergrad next year.”

Whoa—*what?* They’d agreed she would take courses remotely. She wasn’t leaving the station. “Dad . . .”

“You can live with your grandmother in Fairbanks. She’ll be thrilled to say, ‘I told you so.’ She’s been pushing for this since you were five, but I selfishly wanted you here,” he said. “I’ll contact Max to fly you there.”

She stared at him. “But I don’t want to leave,” she said. She loved it at the station! Her life was here. She wanted—no, *needed*—to be near the ice.

He focused on her, as if seeing her afresh. “You’re leaving,” he said, steel back in his voice. “I’m sorry, Cassie, but this is for your own good.”

“You can’t simply decide that—”

“If your mother were here, she would want this.”

Cassie felt as if she’d been punched in her gut. He knew full well how Cassie felt about her mother, how much she wished she were here, how much she wished she’d known her. To use that as a weapon to win an argument . . . It was a low blow. Cassie shook her head as if she could shake out his words. “I’m not leaving,” she said. “This is my *home*.”

Her father—who shied away from feelings so much that he had delegated her childhood to her grandmother and had left her puberty to a stack of bio textbooks—her father had tears in his eyes. “Not anymore,” he said softly. “It can’t be anymore.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kevin Adams:

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