



The Ice House

Nina Bawden

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At fifteen, Daisy, confident and cherished, is appalled to hear that Ruth's father locked her in the old garden ice house as a childhood punishment: no wonder her friend shelters in make believe. The revelation of that primitive cruelty cements a friendship in which protection plays no small part. Years later, middle aged, they remain close friends and live on the same street. So when Daisy's husband dies suddenly, Ruth's discovery that the marriage was unhappy is the first stage in the unravelling of the certainties she has wrapped around her adult life. Friendship, love, marriage and, above all, the scorching effects of adultery, come under the microscope in this dextrous novel. Journeying from a terrifying suburban household to its unexpected conclusion in the Egyptian Pharaoh's tombs, *The Ice House* is startling, tragic and humorous by turns.

The Ice House Details

Date : Published January 1st 1983 by St. Martin's Press

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Author : Nina Bawden

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From Reader Review The Ice House for online ebook

Pascale says

A satisfactory exploration of the familiar themes of female friendship and adultery. The main characters are Ruth, an only child who suffers abuse at the hands of her sadistic father, and her schoolmate Daisy, a rather shallow girl who befriends Ruth more or less out of guilt for having chanced on her unhappy secret. Fast-forward a few decades: Ruth and Daisy have married and remained friends and neighbors. When Daisy's husband commits suicide after being forced into early retirement, the ripples of the aftershock force Ruth into the realization that her husband has been having an affair with Daisy. Initially Ruth is destroyed by the betrayal, but eventually both her marriage and her friendship with Daisy survive, not on the same basis since Daisy wisely takes herself off to Australia.

Naomi says

Disappointing. It started off well with the two main characters becoming friends as young teenagers. However none of the adult characters are likeable, and as the story becomes one of betrayal and adultery, I lost interest in them. I liked Nina Bawden's style, and would attempt another of her novels.

Nancy says

A lot of betrayal here and an innocent pays the price. Very much of the 80s. Meh.

Valerie Rowe says

Wonderfully observed tale of love, adultery, friendship and human behaviour and elevates irony almost to an art form. Not for the fainthearted male though have to say chaps as this is what we really do think of you!

RD Chiriboga Moncayo says

Delectable, sardonic and witty novel of the English middle-class dealing with love, friendship and self-delusion.

Janis says

Well I finished The Ice House this morning...I was racing towards the end, not because I wanted to find out what happened, I had already figured that out in the first third of the book, but because I wanted to finish it and get on to something else...

Nina Bawden is an excellent writer, but like Iris Murdoch, her characters aren't always likeable...I couldn't find anyone to like in this book, with its almost murder, almost suicide, almost betrayals...everyone seemed to know everything and nothing at the same time, but Bawden keeps nothing from an astute reader...is this a flaw, or does she really mean us to know more?

Be that as it may this is typical of so many writers who start in one era and continue to write as times change...there was too much pandering to the times...characters used words which sounded forced and sat ill in the narrative, a sop to the contemporary reader who probably saw right through it and was amused where no comedy was intended..

All the angst, all the modern ideas that one should be true to oneself regardless of the pain of others was a recurrent theme...what saved it from being too much of the emergent 70s (it was written in the 80s), was the suspicion that there was probably a great deal more subtlety to the characters than first met the eye...but then again maybe not..

Jeanne Lucier says

For once..... likeable characters and a good story

Colin says

Like many readers of my age, I first came to the work of Nina Bawden through her children's books, and specifically through the wonderful 1974 television dramatisation of *Carrie's War*. I think that was the first book I read that woke me up to the fact that stories could be told in non-linear, surprising ways. It's only in recent years that I've read some of her many novels for adults.

The Ice House begins with an act of alarming corporal punishment on a young girl by her war-damaged father, witnessed with horror by her only friend, Daisy. Years later, they are still friends, married with children, and living only a few doors away from each other in a slowly gentrifying London neighbourhood. The sudden and mysterious death of Daisy's husband brings to the light a web of adultery and deception. The bulk of the novel takes place in a claustrophobic community, but its resolution occurs among the pyramids and tombs of the Nile valley at the time of the assassination of President Sadat.

This is finely observed, but at times is so intense, and focused on such a small world, that it can become tedious in the telling. A very good novel, with much to admire, but perhaps not quite my cup of tea

Ali says

Nina Bawden's 1983 novel *The Ice House* is a subtle exploration of friendship, deception and betrayal. There are four sections to this short, psychologically astute novel; friendship, marriage, love and the Ice house, which charts the changing nature of a friendship over the course of more than thirty years. I don't think this is the best of the Bawden novels that I have read, although I liked it immensely. She does seem to be a writer who divides opinion – but there is a lot to admire in these portrayals of marriage and friendship. I feel as if I often like her novels rather more than other reviewers – I like writers who are coolly observant, and so Bawden's style suits my tastes exactly.

David says

This was from a 'forgotten classics' list that I found on The Guardian website and I managed to pick it up second hand. It's a fine read and beautifully written. Three rather than four stars because I found the style rather mannered. It's very easy to read, the sign of a great writer when dealing with a complex subject. Maybe some of the characters are a bit two dimensional too, particularly the men.

Indeed one of the book's premises seems to be that one can love men, but they're a bit crap overall. One certainly can't trust any of them. Maybe this is true.

The story starts with two girls becoming friends in the face of one's father's horrific brutality. She is Ruth, I suspect a name selected because it means 'pity', and her horrified friend is the voluptuous Daisy. Thirty years later the two women are still close friends and have come to live on the same street. Historical references place the story in 1981. This is no poverty survival story; the parties are comfortable, or comparatively so. I wouldn't say there is a particularly strong plot; the book is basically middle-class, middle-aged people doing stuff: shagging each other, quite often.

Following a borderline unlikely death, Ruth discovers that her perception of her life is a chimera. An unforced admission of adultery sends the characters spiralling into another place. Frankly the way people behave is slightly unbelievable, but all have a lot to lose if things get too out of hand. There is an atmosphere of barely restrained nervous breakdown. At one stage the mistress realises that her lover might have had others, but that's only a hint. Secrets continue to be revealed until the end.

This book is not quite what I thought it might be: I thought I might learn something, but I already knew that people are rarely happy with what they have and tend to want what they shouldn't have. Apart from a husband who's a very minor character and detestable, all the characters are treated with some respect and understanding. This includes the evil father, most of whom's behaviour is down to his post traumatic stress disorder after WW2 experiences.

Once more well worth the time to read, but I doubt it will shake anybody's world to the core.

Shirley says

This was the first book I have read by Bawden, and I found the characters hard to relate to and not very true to life. I didn't really like any of them, and for this reason I gave this two stars. Having said that, I enjoyed Bawden's style, and would definitely try more of her books, in fact I have another on my shelf to try.

Beth (bibliobeth) says

This is the story of two friends, Daisy who is confident, alluring and popular, and her friend Ruth, who is quieter, and a slightly mysterious child with an aura of sadness which Daisy cannot quite understand. As children, Daisy is never invited to her friend's house, and always wonders why until the one time she is

invited and everything about Ruth's character slots into place and makes sense. As adults, they both appear to be happily married, until Daisy's husband is killed in a horrific accident one night. Ruth finds her friend's reaction to her husband's death peculiar and shocking, as she assumed they were happy. Slowly, secrets come tumbling out and Ruth finds herself looking to her own life, marriage, and happiness and asking questions that she may not want the answers to.

This is the first Nina Bawden novel I have read as an adult, she is also famed for her brilliant children's novels, amongst them *Carrie's War* and *The Peppermint Pig* which I remember vividly from my childhood, so I was looking forward to exploring her adult fiction, and wasn't disappointed. *The Ice House* is a very simple, but at the same time an incredibly complex novel about human interactions – friendship, love and marriage, and the darker side of these relationships. Not many of the characters in it are instantly likeable nor do we warm to many as the story continues, although I had a slight soft spot for Ruth. For me however, that is the sign of a good book – if we dislike a character that much then hasn't the author done their job?

I have to admit, I did know what was going on from the start, it appeared obvious but I'm not sure if this was meant by the author. This did not spoil my enjoyment of the novel though, as I just loved her writing style, and the sense of intimacy I got from it. It was almost like the author and I were two friends watching the drama unfold, while being privy to all the insider gossip and secrets. I do agree with those reviewers that it was a slightly anti-climatic ending however, which was a shame, as the author had completely carried my attention until then. But I can't wait to read more!

Please see my full review at <http://www.bibliobeth.wordpress.com>

Cassie says

This book was just not very interesting. I was expecting a powerful tale of strong females and an extraordinary friendship, and instead I got vitriol about unhappy marriages and unlikeable characters. I do not recommend it.

Michael says

There's two women, they're best friends since childhood, and then... adultery. Pretty good. A little soap operaesque. A little tedious. You have to be able to handle a lot mulling over feelings.

Found it on a guardian.com list: 10 Overlooked Novels. This one was supposed to make me hate men, but I thought she made the women look much worse. It was a good Brit read to follow *A Girl In Winter*.

Best Bit Character goes to Daisy's dead husband's mum, whatever her name was with the foul mouth.

Mary says

This is the story of Daisy and Ruth, two women who have been the best of friends for over thirty years. When Daisy's husband dies, the revelation of a romantic secret may threaten Daisy and Ruth's friendship. I liked this story very much, but in my opinion it was a slightly anticlimactic finish. I give it an A!

