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## ISABELLE of the Moon & Stars

by S.A. Jones

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### Some topics to consider while reading *Isabelle*:

- Mental illness
- Community
- Desire and longing
- Infidelity
- Relationships
- Travel
- WWII History
- Redemption

Ever since 'the incident' two years ago, Isabelle has been stuck in a dead-end job, trying desperately to keep it together and ward off 'The Black Place'.

Her best friend Evan is her safe place. They laugh at each other's jokes and take the piss out of each other with the ruthless efficiency of long acquaintance. Sex isn't an issue because Evan has made a bargain with God to keep it in his pants and Isabelle is still recovering from being deserted by her fiancé Karl. Then just as Evan reconsiders his vow, Isabelle contrives a bizarre Passion for her boss, Jack.

Everything implodes one suffocatingly hot Australia Day. Escaping the resulting chaos, Isabelle flees to Prague where she must finally confront her fears.



**S.A. (Sarah) Jones** was born in England and raised on a remote island off the Kimberley coast of Western Australia.

She holds a PhD in History from the University of Western Australia. Her career has spanned a broad and eclectic range of experiences. She has been an academic, a shadow-Ministerial staffer, a magazine editor and is regulatory analyst for a major transport company.

Jones currently lives in Melbourne with her husband and daughter, but previously lived in Perth.

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ISABELLE

## Discussion Questions

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- 1 Isabelle comes up with the notion that there is a finite amount of love in the world and it transfers itself between people. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 2 What motivates Isabelle's dalliance with Jack? Is it possible to reconcile her actions as a symptom of her mental illness? Is there a clear line between mental illness and moral culpability and, if so, does Isabelle cross it?
- 3 Is the rooftop renovation a metaphor for Isabelle's mental and emotional journey? Do you think her success with the rooftop reflects her progress with dispelling the dark place? Does she succeed? Why or why not?
- 4 Karl and Evan are polar opposites, dark and light, so to speak. What does this say about Isabelle's relationship decisions? Where does Jack fit in the dark/light relationship balance of Isabelle's love life?
- 5 Isabelle's fascination with Prague was triggered by a Christmas song about good King Wenceslas. Does Evan play the role of the good King Wenceslas in Isabelle's life, or does the song signify something else?
- 6 Isabelle believes The Black Place is not depression and anxiety, but rather a more sinister and ancient force. Why?
- 7 Is the Australia Day Party Isabelle's attempt at redemption? Discuss.
- 8 Isabelle worries that she is 'mad'. Is her world view any more 'crazy' than Evan's Catholicism or Jack's managerialism?
- 9 What does the novel suggest about our personal responsibility to the burden of history?
- 10 Why does Isabelle think she is wrong for Evan?
- 11 What is the role of the priest in Prague in helping Isabelle find peace? Does his appearance fill the role left by Evan's absence as religious counselor?
- 12 How does Prague's history help Isabelle find absolution?