

Queen Bee

William Morrow

By Dorothea Benton Frank

ISBN: 9780062861238

Introduction

"If I could only read one writer from now until the end of my life, it would be Dorothea Benton Frank." —Elin Hilderbrand, the *New York Times* bestselling author



Immerse yourself in the enchanting world of *New York Times* bestselling author Dorothea Benton Frank's Carolina Lowcountry in this evocative tale that returns at long last to her beloved Sullivans Island.

Beekeeper Holly McNee Jensen quietly lives in a world of her own on Sullivans Island, tending her hives and working at the local island library. Holly calls her mother The Queen Bee because she's a demanding hulk of a woman. Her mother, a devoted hypochondriac, might be unaware that she's quite ill but that doesn't stop her from tormenting Holly. To escape the drama, Holly's sister Leslie married and moved away, wanting little to do with island life. Holly's escape is to submerge herself in the lives of the two young boys next door and their widowed father, Archie.

Her world is upended when the more flamboyant Leslie returns and both sisters, polar opposites, fixate on what's happening in their neighbor's home. Is Archie really in love with that awful ice queen of a woman? If Archie marries her, what will become of his little boys? Restless Leslie is desperate for validation after her imploded marriage, squandering her favors on any and all takers. Their mother ups her game in an uproarious and theatrical downward spiral. Scandalized Holly is talking to her honey bees a mile a minute, as though they'll give her a solution to all the chaos. Maybe they will.

Queen Bee is a classic Lowcountry Tale—warm, wise and hilarious, it roars with humanity and a dropperful of whodunit added for good measure by an unseen hand. In her twentieth novel, Dorothea Benton Frank brings us back to her beloved island with an unforgettable story where the Lowcountry magic of the natural world collides with the beat of the human heart.

Questions for Discussion

1. Holly McNee Jensen is a beekeeper/wannabe grade school teacher on Sullivan's Island. She tends her bees with such care, as if they're her children: "Everyone knows honey bees are good for the environment, but few people know why or how their hives are organized. There's a division of labor for every stage of a honey bee's life." What is it about bees and their ways that is so appealing to Holly?
2. In the Prologue, our narrator tells us: "Maybe I want to tell you this story as a kind of cautionary tale. At the end of the day, you must live with who you've allowed yourself to become." How do you think this relates to the characters in the novel?
3. To what (or whom) does the title refer? Who's the "Queen Bee" in your life?
4. After years of being almost agoraphobic, why does Holly's mother suddenly perk up after Leslie's arrival?
5. What is at the heart of Charlie and Leslie's marital strife? Do they both try their best to make it work?
6. Leslie calls Holly a martyr: "I don't know why she always acts like she's being persecuted, but she does. She doesn't want to stay home with Momma? Well, Momma ain't home, so honey, go on, go over the causeway and go get that life you're always mumbling about not having." Do you agree with Leslie?
7. Early in the story, Holly states, "The only thing Leslie had ever cared about was getting out of here." How would you describe Holly and Leslie's relationship?
8. Is Archie a good father? Why does Holly have such a natural, maternal way with Tyler and Hunter?
9. What did you think of Leslie's plan to seduce Archie away from Sharon? Were you surprised they ended up together in the end?
10. In your opinion, did Archie really love Sharon, or was he just lonely and needed a wife? Did he have genuine feelings for Holly?
11. Holly reflects, "Ted made me see Archie in a new light: Archie is a taker. He would take and take and take and then go off and marry somebody like Sharon. Ted, the guy I went out with, is a giver." Who are the other "takers" in the novel? Who are the "givers"? Which character started out as one and then became the other?
12. Were you surprised that Suzanne (aka Buster) and Momma got together? Which character in QUEEN BEE do you think changed the most?

13. After Charlie's admission and meeting Suzanne, Holly states, "If I haven't learned anything else this whole year, I learned that love comes in every color, shape, and size." Do you think the Lowcountry is ready for colorful characters like Char and Suzanne?
14. Have you ever been to Sullivan's Island or the Lowcountry in South Carolina? If not, has reading QUEEN BEE made you curious about this beautiful part of the country?