

Dear Reader,

There's a saying: the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. But in America this is only part of the story. The tree of our liberty has also been watered liberally with the blood of the innocent. Lynching is as American as baseball and apple pie, and in the last decade, cell phone videos have brought this fact home time and time again. Black people have been murdered in the name of "law and order" for centuries, and too many of us have accepted racial violence as part of the price we pay for freedom.

But what happens to the people left behind by this violence? How does one survive day after day in the shadow of the same racism that stole a loved one? How do you live in the embrace of a system that is unfair, that refuses to see the truth of your soul?

My young adult novel *Dread Nation* was about how Black people survive in a system founded upon carnage and exploitation without being consumed by that violence. With *Ophie's Ghosts*, I sought to ask a different set of questions: How do we live, survive, *thrive* in a system that is unjust? How do we remain strong and unbent, willing to do the right thing, even when it puts our own comfort and lives at risk? What are we willing to put on the line in the name of the justice that is denied to us? And, more than this: How do we grieve when the ghosts of our loss appear in the everyday suffering of those around us?

*Ophie's Ghosts* begins in the shadow of violence and injustice but ultimately asks whether we can grow past the cruelties inflicted upon us and learn to flourish despite our pain. Because surviving is resistance. And living well is always the best revenge.

Happy reading,

Justina Ireland