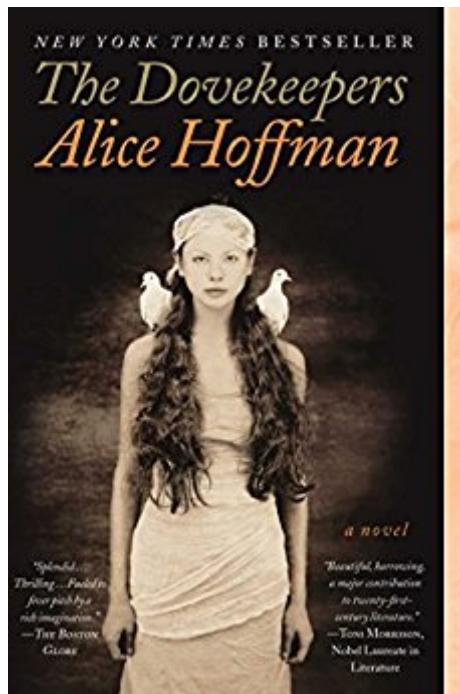


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The Dovekeepers: A Novel



Synopsis

The Dovekeepers is Alice Hoffman's most ambitious and mesmerizing novel: a compelling, expansive, intricately woven, and deepest new novel in biblical history, with a devotion and seriousness of purpose. (Entertainment Weekly). Nearly two thousand years ago, nine hundred Jews held out for months against armies of Romans on Masada, a mountain in the Judean desert. According to the ancient historian Josephus, two women and five children survived. Based on this tragic and iconic event, Hoffman's novel is a spellbinding tale of four extraordinarily bold, resourceful, and sensuous women, each of whom has come to Masada by a different path. Yael's mother died in childbirth, and her father, an expert assassin, never forgave her for that death. Revka, a village baker's wife, watched the murder of her daughter by Roman soldiers; she brings to Masada her young grandsons, rendered mute by what they have witnessed. Aziza is a warrior's daughter, raised as a boy, a fearless rider and expert marksman who finds passion with a fellow soldier. Shirah, born in Alexandria, is wise in the ways of ancient magic and medicine, a woman with uncanny insight and power. The lives of these four complex and fiercely independent women intersect in the desperate days of the siege. All are dovekeepers, and all are also keeping secrets about who they are, where they come from, who fathered them, and whom they love.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Dovekeepers" is the first book I've read of Alice Hoffmans'. In fact, one evening my wife looked at the book while I was reading in bed and said: "You're reading Alice Hoffman? I've read Alice Hoffman. But you don't read Alice Hoffman!" And so I DID read Alice Hoffman and I liked Alice Hoffman. This is a very good book. It's real deep and very weighty. "Dovekeepers" orbits around the real life events of the early 70s A.D. in ancient Judea. Rome was large and in charge and in the midst of shattering a Judean rebellion (seen commemorated in the famous Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum only a few hundred yards from the Colosseum in Italy). Several hundred Jews fled Jerusalem to the desert near the Dead Sea and moved into the former mountain fortress of King Herod at Masada. While the proud Jewish rebels held off a Roman legion for several years, Rome ultimately prevailed and all but two women and five children killed themselves rather than allow themselves to be overrun. Hoffman's novel follows the lives of four women who all find themselves on Masada. Each woman has a dedicated 100-150 pages that weave in and out of each other's stories with the collective whole building a comprehensive picture of their mutual plight. The stories connect the women together in ways that are obvious and follow the primary arc of the novel, but also in ways that are surprising and poignantly fulfilling. The connections build and develop on many levels: physically, emotionally, and symbolically. The book is full of characters who are broken and hurt; affected by some deep trauma catalyzed by the Roman attacks on Jerusalem; driving each, by their own will or otherwise, to the fortress in the desert. One of Hoffman's women is Yael, a deeply fractured and self actualizing individual who sums up the disparate journeys that brought the women to Masada: "We came like doves across the desert. In a time when there was nothing but death, we were grateful for anything, and most grateful of all when we awoke to another day." You'll feel the weight of each character's pain and sorrow increase as the novel progresses. There are few happy endings. Hoffman's themes cover the gamut from fate and destiny, to religion and love, and the depths of devotion. Faith is a thread that runs throughout Hoffman's carefully woven tapestry. It's not just a religious entity, but something that binds individuals, family units, as well as the entire rebel community. In Revka, Hoffman ponders the rebel Jews: "If we lost our faith, we would become like

the clouds that swell across the western sky when the wind pushes them into the desert promising rain but empty inside." It's through Revka also that Hoffman finally (about half-way through the book) provides a heart-wrenchingly warm and genuinely surprising treat at the end of her particular novella. For the first time the furrow on my brow melted into a smile on my face (note: it didn't last very long). Hoffman's Judean world is one of religion and tradition, of myth and magic: a world where everything in it has significance...symbolic or real. Some vignettes read almost as something out of a fantasy novel, but there's no melodrama to their weight. In looking for a good way to summarize the book's tone, I found a couple of strong quotes. This first comes from Shirah, 'The Witch of Moab': "Being human means losing everything we love best in the world. But would you ask to be anything else?" This second is from Revka: "...our waking life is formed by our sorrow. " In each character is anchored a heavy weight. In this misogynistic society, few men come across in a truly positive light. Though Hoffman writes very sparingly, in her few words, she's able to express a multiplicity of ideas and thoughts. Characters are never solely what they seem to be and there is very little that is purely black or white. Hoffman's world is filled with shades of gray. This book is going to resonate strongly for a lot of readers. It may be a bit polarizing because of its very serious nature. But as a first time reader of Hoffman, and a male, I feel fuller for having read this novel. I highly recommend it.

One of the best books I've read. Saw a documentary on Masada many years ago and found it intriguing how a settlement of people lived and died on top of that mountain. Willing to commit suicide rather than be taken into a life of slavery. This novel gave insight to how real lives may have been lived and the many trials they went through over the years. Though the book centers on several main characters it still gives you a sense of what some lived with or through. And how women carried the burden of being women, feeling one way but having to act in another. The book is long, but once I got into it, it was hard to put down. It also came out that many of these women had intertwining lives that they didn't realize. Though I knew the story of Masada, I still was interested in how the author would tell the story and bring it to an end. Was not disappointed....though towards the end I actually became very sad at so many having to come to such a fate.

Six women depict Hoffman's long and ambitious novel which retells the tragic event of the siege and defeat of Masada in 70 to 73 CE. The women: Yael, rejected by her ruthless father; Revka, the grandmother of two boys who witnessed the murder of their mother; Shirah, a medicine woman and her two daughters, Aziza, a warrior and Nahara, the rebellious, younger sister; and

Channa, the barren wife of Ben Eleazar, the leader of Masada. The novel, told in sections, reveals the story of each heroine and her journey to Masada. The women share their tragedies, disappointments, and secrets as they care for the dovecotes, always aware of the loss of Jerusalem, of Roman brutality and of the catastrophe that awaits them all. The characters become difficult to distinguish between, the novel drones with repetitive description, spells, magic, and prayers to Ashtoreth that Jews (Israelites), left behind centuries before. Whether or not two women and five children escaped death at Masada by surrender is unclear however, known is that when the Romans entered the palace on Masada, all were dead, as the 960 Jews preferred death to slavery under the Romans.

I did not wish to read this book because of the depressing subject matter. Our book club chose it, and I am so grateful. The lyric quality of the prose and the voices of the four main characters who served as protagonist/narrators wove a beautiful and inspirational message. I will not be soon forgetting the truths revealed in this historical novel.

I loved this book from beginning to end. My family and I just returned from Israel and I felt so close to the women dovekeepers and their incredible strength the entire time I was at the Masada. We have purchased the book to give to our guide, a man, because we know he will enjoy it as much as we did. Alice Hoffman's unique ability to draw us into each character as though we had always known them kept us so anxious to turn to the next page. I loved every word she wrote and am anxiously looking forward to her next book.

In the back of my mind I had a vague knowledge of Masada so when I began reading I thought the presentation was a "little off." Too magical, too mystical, too much of everything. The more I read the more I appreciated it is the only way to tell the tale. What a great presentation of the powerful historical event. Bravo! I would have given 5 stars except for the final chapter which I hasten to say I did not read because I was happier ending up on the mountainnot everything needs a gentle ending.

Too much recounting of each character's plight as the story progresses. Very redundant. We don't need to read over and over how Yeal's father detested her. The same can be said of the other characters as well.

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