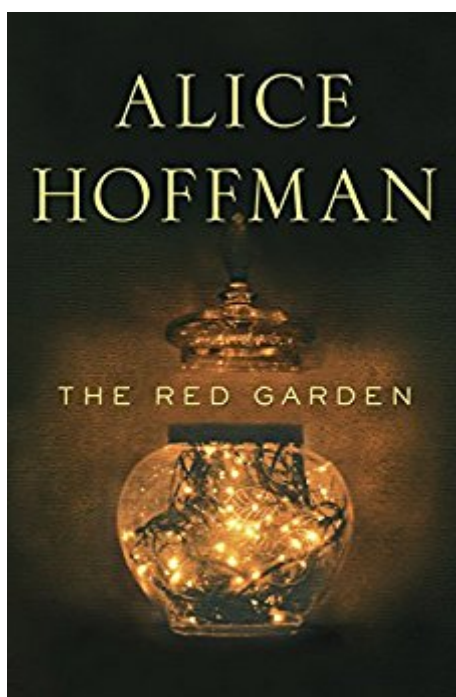


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The Red Garden



Synopsis

In exquisite prose, Hoffman offers a transforming glimpse of small-town America, presenting more than three hundred years of passion, dark secrets, loyalty, and redemption in a web of tales where characters' lives are intertwined by fate and by their own actions. The Red Garden introduces us to the luminous and haunting world of Blackwell, Massachusetts, capturing the unexpected turns in its history and in our own lives. From the town's founder, a brave young woman from England who has no fear of blizzards or bears, to the young man who runs away to New York City with only his dog for company, the characters in The Red Garden are extraordinary and vivid: a young wounded Civil War soldier who is saved by a passionate neighbor, a woman who meets a fiercely human historical character, a poet who falls in love with a blind man, a mysterious traveler who comes to town in the year when summer never arrives. At the center of everyone's life is a mysterious garden where only red plants can grow, and where the truth can be found by those who dare to look. Beautifully crafted and shimmering with magic, The Red Garden is as unforgettable as it is moving.

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Customer Reviews

I am not generally a big fan of short stories. However, Alice Hoffman is an exquisite storyteller and kept me completely engaged throughout. All of the stories are very different but they all take place in the very small town of Blackwell, Massachusetts from its founding in 1750 to the present. The stories span 300 years, and although the characters are usually descendants of the earlier settlers, there is really no way to connect them from story to story - this was a little disappointing for me. One of the earliest settlers, Hallie Brady, was the main reason the town was able to continue. She planted a garden behind her home and everything planted in the garden turns red. The settlers were able to survive thanks to the things Hallie grew in the garden. The garden makes an appearance in most if not all of the tales in the book. I admit that I got involved in these stories. Each chapter offers a story in a different moment in time and then moves forward.. Everyone is interconnected and affected by the haunting and magical Blackwell - and particularly the red garden - but it is difficult to follow these connections. My one complaint is that just when I found myself caught up in a tale, it would end. You do not get to find out what happens to each individual. You only get a brief moment in time. I would highly recommend this book. Hoffman is a great storyteller. I found myself frustrated, however, from wanting more. I never wanted any of the stories to end.

This book is constructed as a series of vaguely related vignettes strung out over a couple of hundred years to follow the evolution of a fictional small Northeastern town. Each vignette follows a character's life for a short time before they move on or where the author chooses to bring their story line to a stopping point. Each story is constructed around something reasonably interesting regarding its protagonist. In each case, you then move forward in time to a new character, with anecdotal detail of how the town and its people have changed. The red garden, which is associated with the town founder's original home, is sometimes a significant element of a story line, and sometimes not, which leaves the reader a bit confused as to what it has to do with anything. While I enjoyed the read, at many times it barely held my attention. It always seemed like just when you were beginning to gain interest in one of the characters, their particularly story was over, typically in a manner that failed to produce a smooth transition into the next story line. Chapter by chapter the book is by and large well written and I debated whether or not I thought it was a 3 star or a 4 star effort, but ultimately concluded that the author simply failed to make enough effort to develop each character. All in all the effect was akin to reading a collection of first chapters for books the author started on but never took any further.

Absolutely captivating! Alice Hoffman introduces us to the town of Blackwell, Massachusetts from its very conception by accident and down through the centuries. Each chapter is a new story of a person connected to this town in a different time period, but all the stories are entwined with the history of the town and its townspeople. Only Alice Hoffman can create such a magical blend of stories that leaves the reader spellbound. I recommend to anyone who loves flawless writing and magical stories.

This is an exquisite collection of short stories about the people who live in the isolated town of Blackwell, Massachusetts -- and I don't usually care for short stories. I haven't read a lot of Alice Hoffman's books, but the ones I have read show her to be a writer very much in tune with the secret magic in life, as well as -- if you'll forgive the hackneyed phrase -- the magic of the human heart. And Hoffman doesn't just tell the stories of the humans of Blackwell. Bears, eels, apple trees, residences, a river, and the eponymous red garden all have important stories of their own, although they are never point of view characters. In fact, I should confess that one of the reasons I liked this book so much was because of the repeated, vivid presence of bears weaving in and out of the human narratives. The stories are all stand-alone, but each new story weaves an increasingly detailed and rich tapestry of Blackwell and its environs, as people -- and homes and eels and bears and ghosts -- carry forward the heritage of almost-forgotten ancestors.

I rated the plot of the book as "Full of Surprises" because I couldn't follow the characters. Just as I got into one, they were gone and now their daughter or cousin was in the next chapter. Kept reading, hoping the book would mean something to me and understand why the author called it, "The Red Garden". It still escapes me...

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