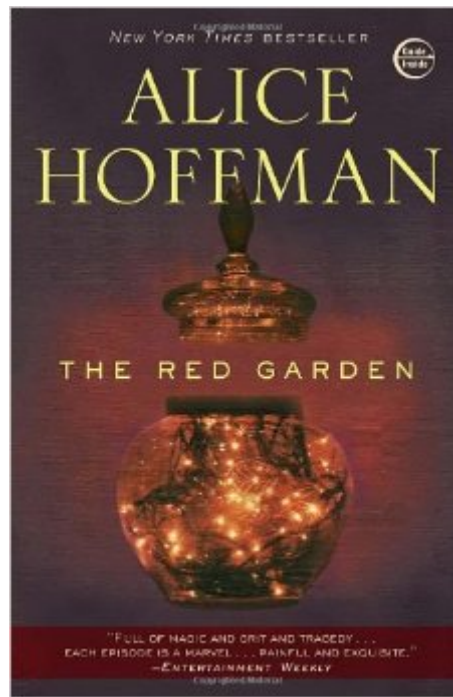


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The Red Garden



Synopsis

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. In exquisite prose, Hoffman offers a transforming glimpse of small-town America, presenting us with some 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. 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, shimmering with magic, The Red Garden is as unforgettable as it is moving. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Broadway Books; Reprint edition (August 2, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307405974

ISBN-13: 978-0307405975

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (395 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #67,219 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #92 in Books > Literature & Fiction > African American > Historical #208 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Alternate History #669 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Mythology & Folk Tales

Customer Reviews

This story is pure Alice Hoffman magic. She begins the story in 1750 with the settlers who founded the town of Bearsville, MA (name changed to Blackwell in 1786). Every chapter moves the story to another time period concluding sometime in the 2000's. The book reads like a seamless book of short stories, each chapter informing and building on the previous. Hoffman has a gift for sharply focusing on the main character of each time period as she moves the story of this small mountain

town along, revealing an inner truth. Characters come to town, live, leave, die, wander, return but always carry the thread of the town with them. The characters are so beautifully written, it's hard to choose a favorite chapter/story. The two chapters I enjoyed most were "The Principles of Devotion", the story of a loyal dog living at the grave of his owner and the "Monster of Blackwell", a young man who separates himself from society and lives in the mountains outside Blackwell. These chapters are achingly beautiful. The red garden refers to the founder's (Hallie Brady) garden where the soil is as red as blood and everything that grows in it is red. Perhaps a symbol of life and death; the connection we all have to nature and each other. Hoffman doesn't go on and on with flowery prose; her writing is edited, beautiful and powerful. She always manages to capture the beauty of a moment and the setting of the story, infusing it with her understanding of humanity.

THE RED GARDEN Alice Hoffman once again mixes the mystical and logical and bakes us a wonderful array of stories that are sure to please. THE RED GARDEN consists of a series of short stories all inter-woven and blending together to create one of the best books Hoffman has ever written. As the stories unfold, we first meet one Hallie Brady and a handful of other settlers who are stranded during inclement weather. They survive the hardships of their first winter together and create a new town called Bearsville. This first story or chapter, THE BEAR'S HOUSE, starts in the year 1750, with the final story, KING OF THE BEES, taking place currently. Hoffman introduces us to a number of engaging characters who are all somehow related to someone in this small Massachusetts town. Each character tells their story and we are constantly meeting interesting, wonderful, and magical people. The same characters pop up here and there throughout the entire book. Each story is different and enchanting, moving through time and history, taking the reader on an awesome journey. History and fiction blend well together in this book; we are walked through the late 1700's, the Civil War, the Depression, love, family life, new people in town, despair, marriages, affairs, ghosts, hardships, the struggles and victories of every day life, etc; even Johnny Appleseed makes an appearance. The reference to the red garden -- which seems to bind together this little town -- is a garden where everything grows red -- green beans, lilac bushes, cucumbers, and so on. Is this a magical piece of property? I literally flew through the pages of this book. Hoffman has always been a favorite author of mine although her past few books were a bit of a disappointment. For me, she totally redeems herself in this new book. This is the Hoffman I love. For those of you who haven't had the pleasure of reading any of Hoffman's works, THE RED GARDEN would be a fantastic place to start. Thank you. Pam

If you're all about realism and everything making sense, this is probably not the book for you; however, if you're able to surrender to magical storytelling and a more fairy tale approach, I highly recommend it. Hoffman begins her series of stories about town of Blackwell, Massachusetts, with the town's original settlers in 1750. Most prominent among them is a true frontier woman--Hallie Brady. Hallie, you see, saves the original settlers from starvation during their first winter, when the menfolk weren't quite up to the task! It is in this first story that the long-running theme of bears and the red garden begins. The book's title refers to the garden from which it is said only red things grow. There is a history to this garden, of course; a sad one which involves both Hallie and bears...or rather one particular bear whom she befriended that first hard winter. Through hundreds of years and generations descending from those first settlers, Hoffman tells the story of this area, these people and this garden. I think my favorite story is from 1956, called The Monster of Blackwell. A very Beauty and the Beast kind of story--sad but also tender and beautiful. The writing here is splendid for the most part, though I found the book's last two stories a terrible disappointment--an ending not befitting this lovely book in my opinion. Hoffman does a superb job in describing the environs. I could see it in my mind as I read--always my favorite kind of storytelling. Her way with words is just joyous to read. A few excerpts: "There were little frogs in the puddles and white butterflies with green specks on paper-thin wings circling the purple thistle. The sun was like honey, falling in splashes." "She felt as if she had stepped into a pool of treachery..." "The only way to fight evil is with joy, Azurine had written. Forget everything we've ever been taught." "I wondered if the electricity at Luna Park had seeped into his skin, and that was why his meanness grew, like a charge, burning brighter throughout the spring." Chances are you may not like all the stories (or all the people) equally, but the sum of the parts is most definitely worth reading. Sit down with a cup of coffee, throw a blanket over your legs and settle in for a trip to The Red Garden.

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