ReadingGroupGuides
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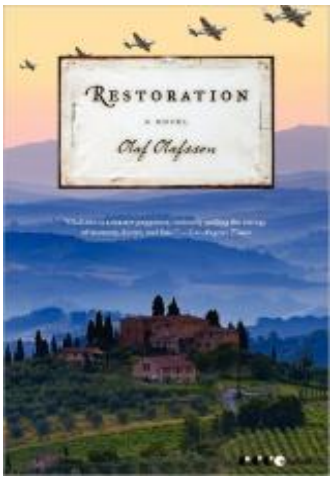
Restoration

by Olaf Olafsson



About the Book

Having grown up in an exclusive circle of wealthy British ex-pats in Florence in the 1920s, Alice Orsini shocks everyone when she marries the son of a minor Italian landowner and begins restoring San Martino, a crumbling villa in Tuscany, to its former glory. But after years of hard work --- filling the acres with orchards, livestock and farmhands --- Alice?s growing restlessness pulls her into the heady social swirl of wartime Rome and a reckless affair that will have devastating consequences.

Her indiscretion is noticed by careful eyes --- those of Robert Marshall, a renowned dealer of Renaissance art. In exchange for his silence, he demands Alice hide a priceless Caravaggio, a national treasure that he has sold to the Germans, at San Martino. As the front creeps toward Tuscany, sending a wave of orphans, refugees, and wounded Allies to San Martino, Alice trusts that the painting she?s hiding will keep the Germans at bay.

What she doesn?t know is the truth about a brilliant young artists he mentors named Kristín, a prodigy who can restore any painting, and whose secrets may ruin them all.

Trapped between loyalists and resistors, cruel German forces and Allied troops, Alice and Kristín must withstand the destruction of everything around them while painfully confronting the consequences of their past mistakes.

In this sweeping story of passion and betrayal, Olaf Olafsson works his profound magic once again, creating a novel that grapples with the moral abyss of war while rendering the psychological portraits of those living through it with masterful strokes.

Discussion Guide

1. What does the title **Restoration** refer to? What are the different kinds of restoration that occur in the novel?

2. The novel opens with text from an ?invitation to the National Gallery.? How does this set the tone for what follows?

3. When he and his new wife, Alice, first discover San Martino, Caludio calls it paradise. Was it a paradise for them? What were the factors that led to Claudio and Alice?s fall?

4. Alice writes in her journal that it was both her and her husband?s fault that their son died. Do they share blame? How did each contribute to the demise of their marriage and how did each neglect their son, Giovanni?

5. Why is Kristin?s school evaluation so important to her? How did it affect how she saw herself and her talent? Why does she eventually paint the Carravagio? What was she hoping to accomplish with the painting? How did that one act change the course of several lives?

6. Compare and contrast Kristin and Alice. What did you think of each woman? How did their lives parallel one another?

7. Talk about Alice?s choices. Why did she have an affair? Did her husband bear any responsibility? Was it better that she gave into blackmail, or should she have told her husband the truth?

8. In war, how is art used as a weapon as well? How was it used in **Restoration**? How were the Germans and the partisans portrayed?

9. Most of us cannot conceive of a war that physically invades our home. Discuss how Alice handled this horrific situation?her actions, her emotions, her choices. How would your life, your home, your family, your town, be different if war was on your doorstep? How did the war transform Alice, Kristin, and the rest of the characters in the story?

10. Did the truth about Claudio?s whereabouts surprise you?

11. What did you take away from reading **Restoration**?

Author Bio

Olaf Olafsson was born in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1962. He studied physics as a Wien scholar at Brandeis University. He is the author of THE JOURNEY HOME, ABSOLUTION, WALKING INTO THE NIGHT, RESTORATION, ONE STATION AWAY, THE SACRAMENT, TOUCH, and a story collection, VALENTINES. He is the former executive vice president of Time Warner and lives in New York City with his wife and three children.

Critical Praise

?With a backdrop of the ravages of WWII, particularly as they affect the civilian population, Olafsson casts a keen eye on Germany?s wartime acquisition of artistic masterpieces. A beautifully written literary novel of love, betrayal, reconciliation, and art.?

--- *Booklist*

?RESTORATION is an elegantly constructed work of fiction, seamlessly moving between the past and the present, but what makes Olafsson?s novel so compelling is his empathy and compassion for Alice Orsini, a woman trying to redeem her life in a country ravaged by war.?

--- Ron Rash, bestselling author of SERENA and THE COVE

?[Olaf?s] literary skills bring *Restoration* to life on a windy Tuscan hilltop north of Florence...[and] shows the reader the permutations of love betrayed, and the enormous losses that war will claim.?

--- Shelf Awareness

?[A] beautifully realized novel?Olafsson masterfully depicts the interior lives of these women, creating a richly complex portrait of love and passion at work even as his harrowing depictions of daily life in war-torn Italy add additional depth and power to the novel.?

--- *Library Journal*

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Publication Date: February 7, 2012
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Ecco
ISBN-10: 0062065653
ISBN-13: 9780062065650