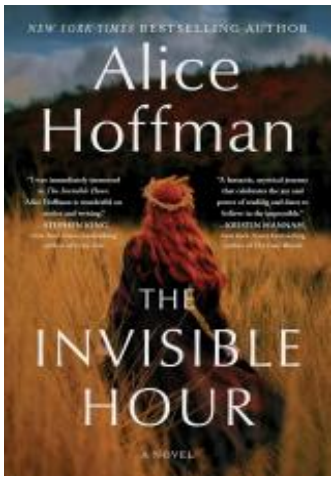
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Invisible Hour

by Alice Hoffman



About the Book

From the beloved *New York Times* bestselling author of THE MARRIAGE OF OPPOSITES and the *Practical Magic* series comes an enchanting novel about love, heartbreak, self-discovery and the enduring magic of books.

One brilliant June day when Mia Jacob can no longer see a way to survive, the power of words saves her. THE SCARLET LETTER was written almost 200 years earlier, but it seems to tell the story of Mia?s mother, Ivy, and their life inside the Community --- an oppressive cult in western Massachusetts where contact with the outside world is forbidden, and books are considered evil. But how could this be? How could Nathaniel Hawthorne have so perfectly captured the pain and loss that Mia carries inside her?

Through a journey of heartbreak, love and time, Mia must abandon the rules she was raised with at the Community. As she does, she realizes that reading can transport you to other worlds or bring them to you, and that readers and writers affect one another in mysterious ways. She learns that time is more fluid than she can imagine, and that love is stronger than any chains that bind you.

As a girl Mia fell in love with a book. Now as a young woman she falls in love with a brilliant writer as she makes her way back in time. But what if Nathaniel Hawthorne never wrote THE SCARLET LETTER? And what if Mia Jacob never found it on the day she planned to die?

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote: ?A single dream is more powerful than a thousand realities.?

This is the story of one woman?s dream. For a little while it came true.

Discussion Guide

1. We first meet Mia in the prologue as she tries to escape The Community. How does the prologue set the tone for the rest of the story?

2. Ivy tells people she grew up ?west of the moon.? Where does this phrase come from, and why do you think this is her response?

3. Joel proposes to Ivy very quickly upon her arrival at The Community. What drew him to her, and what were her motivations for accepting?

4. The relationship between Helen and Ivy feels similar to Mia?s with Sarah and Constance. How do they mirror each other? What, if any, are the major differences of these relationships?

5. Helen tells Mia that Ivy ?should have had the choice to decide what to do with her own body and her own fate? (p. 99). The theme of choice is brought up throughout the story. Discuss the choices presented to Ivy when she found out she was pregnant (sent away, adoption, runaway, marriage to the father). How has this scenario changed or not over time?

6. How do the settings --- Boston, Concord, New York --- act as characters within the story?

7. Each female character has her own version of strength --- Ivy choosing to leave her home and start over, Constance and Sarah building their family and later dealing with loss, Elizabeth?s familial loyalty, and Mia rescuing herself. As the reader, do you relate to any of these women? If so, please discuss who and why.

8. Discuss Nathaniel?s need to be a writer even throughout his depressive episodes. Do you think writing brought him a sense of comfort or dread? How were his sisters integral to his success?

9. Elizabeth brings Mia to the Hill of Death (p. 167). What was her motivation to do so? Why is Elizabeth so skeptical of Mia? Where does her mistrust stem from?

10. Discuss Joel?s ultimate demise. How is he bested by women for the final time?

11. Why do you think Mia returned to Nathaniel?s time? What was she hoping to achieve?

12. How is Mia?s choice to raise her daughter alone similar to Ivy?s choice? Do you believe Mia learned from her mother?s mistakes?

Author Bio

Alice Hoffman is the author of more than 30 works of fiction, including WHEN WE FLEW AWAY, THE WITCHES OF CAMBRIDGE, THE INVISIBLE HOUR, THE BOOK OF MAGIC, MAGIC LESSONS: The Prequel to *Practical Magic*, THE WORLD THAT WE KNEW, THE RULES OF MAGIC, FAITHFUL, THE MARRIAGE OF OPPOSITES, THE MUSEUM OF EXTRAORDINARY THINGS, THE DOVEKEEPERS, PRACTICAL MAGIC, THE RED

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Photo Credit: Alyssa Peek

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Publication Date: May 21, 2024
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Paperback: 272 pages
Publisher: Atria Books
ISBN-10: 1982175389
ISBN-13: 9781982175382