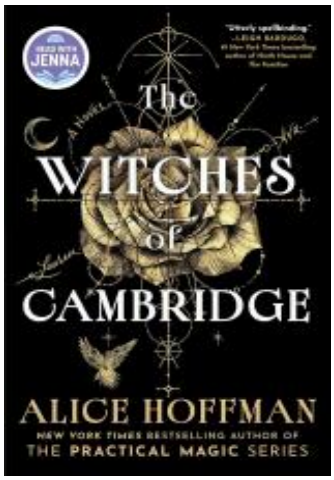
The Witches of Cambridge

by Alice Hoffman



About the Book

The brand-new series from the bestselling author of PRACTICAL MAGIC, following two brilliant young women in 1950s Cambridge, Massachusetts, as they become immersed in a mysterious secret group of witches at Radcliffe known as the Lilith Society.

Once upon a time, women were drowned in the river, and the only witnesses were the crows in the trees. The Puritans blamed Eve for the sins of the world. That was when we began to meet in the name of Lilith, Adam?s first wife --- banished for refusing to do as she was told.

We Fly Together?

By the 1950s, Cambridge, Massachusetts feels far removed from the legendary witch trials that marked its early days as a colony. Ava, a bright young woman from a small town in Maine, arrives for her first year at Radcliffe College. There, she meets Lauren, her opposite in every way --- the wild and brazen daughter of a wealthy and well-established Cambridge family. But the two have more in common than they think. Both are recruited by the Lilith Society, a secret organization of witches at Radcliffe dating back to colonial times. As they learn more about their legacy, Ava and Lauren form a close bond that is put to the test as they learn to navigate their new power, friendship and love.

While Radcliffe seems like a safe haven, the shadow of McCarthyism looms large, an ever-present threat to the flourishing creative and intellectual life in Cambridge. And as girls from the Lilith Society begin to go missing, Ava and Lauren realize the witch trials of the past may not be as deeply buried as they once believed.

Discussion Guide

1. Ava?s longing for another life is clear from the moment she appears on the page: ?She wanted to be surprised by life,

to walk along dark streets and kiss someone as if her life depended upon it? (p. 11). How does Ava?s relationship with freedom and agency evolve over the course of the novel?

2. Lauren tells Lionel, ?People like us shouldn?t ever fall in love? (p. 27). How does Lauren?s fear of emotional vulnerability change throughout the story? What allows her to be more vulnerable, and when do we see her the most afraid?

3. Lauren tells Ava that Ava had better learn ?the game of appearing normal? (p. 33). What role does conformity play for the characters, magical and non-magical alike, throughout the novel? Which characters succeed at blending in, and which refuse to?

4. Rose, the first witch of Cambridge, writes, ?What men don?t understand they will seek to destroy? (p. 164). Where do we see the consequences of this play out in the story?

5. Jamie repeatedly struggles with the darkness of his family history. How does his relationship with his legacy shape his journey?

6. The novel draws direct parallels between the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthy-era America. Where do you see these comparisons most clearly? Can similar parallels be drawn to the political climate of today?

7. Discuss the role of the body in this novel. Characters are judged, punished, desired or feared because of physical traits like sharp teeth, black blood, scars or extra fingers. How are these traits used to convey a sense of otherness and power?

8. Imagery from the natural world appears throughout the novel: crows, dogs, flowers, rivers, apples and many more. What role does nature play within the magical world of the story? Which recurring symbols stood out most to you, and why?

9. Discuss the relationship between power and knowledge in the novel. Who has access to education, history and magic --- and who is excluded from them?

10. By the end of the novel, which relationship dynamics felt the most meaningful to you: friendship, romance, family bonds, or the connections between generations of women? Why? How do these different relationships overlap or conflict with each other?

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 GARDEN, and the Oprah's Book Club selection HERE ON EARTH. She lives near Boston.

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