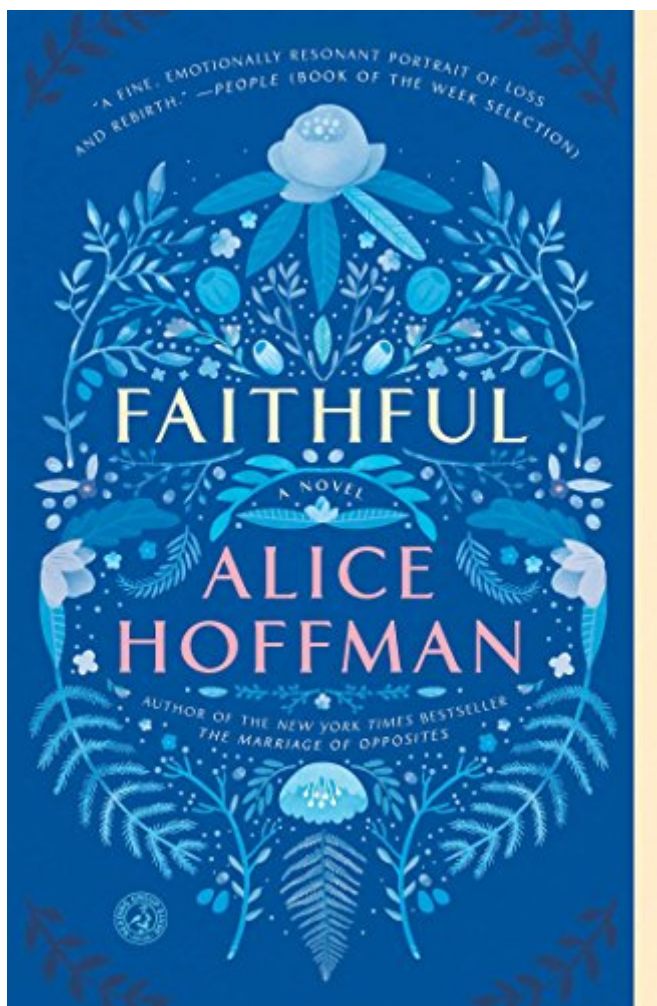


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Faithful: A Novel



Synopsis

From the New York Times bestselling author of *The Marriage of Opposites* and *The Dovekeepers* comes a soul-searching story about a young woman struggling to redefine herself and the power of love, family, and fate. Growing up on Long Island, Shelby Richmond is an ordinary girl until one night an extraordinary tragedy changes her fate. Her best friend's future is destroyed in an accident, while Shelby walks away with the burden of guilt. What happens when a life is turned inside out? When love is something so distant it may as well be a star in the sky? *Faithful* is the story of a survivor, filled with emotion from dark suffering to true happiness—a moving portrait of a young woman finding her way in the modern world. A fan of Chinese food, dogs, bookstores, and men she should stay away from, Shelby has to fight her way back to her own future. In New York City she finds a circle of lost and found souls—including an angel who's been watching over her ever since that fateful icy night. Here is a character you will fall in love with, so believable and real and endearing, that she captures both the ache of loneliness and the joy of finding yourself at last. For anyone who's ever been a hurt teenager, for every mother of a daughter who has lost her way, *Faithful* is a roadmap. Alice Hoffman's "trademark alchemy" (USA TODAY) and her ability to write about the "delicate balance between the everyday world and the extraordinary" (WBUR) make this an unforgettable story. With beautifully crafted prose, Alice Hoffman spins hope from heartbreak in this profoundly moving novel.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is not an easy feel good light hearted read. It's a testament to how one seemingly innocent decision can lead to a life filled with regret, guilt and self punishment. I have to confess that midway through I wanted to put it down and walk away because as much as I was rooting for Shelby to let herself feel some level of happiness I was getting tired of the doom and gloom on page after page. I actually did put the book away for a couple of weeks to give myself a break from it and then when I picked it back up I found I couldn't put it down because I just couldn't let go of wanting her to get some sort of a happy ending or at least a glimpse of what a happy life could feel like. I won't spoil the ending for you but I will say reading this book is a long slow uphill climb but in the end it's worth it.

How did this book find me? I was there, hiding out in the section with thrillers, suspense, serial killers, crazed stalkers... and then I chose this lovely book. And for a while it made cynical me a bit less cynical.[NOTE: Apparaently some would like SPOILER ALERT if I reveal the first 20 pages, so... SPOILER ALERT].Shelby and Helene are high school best friends. They wear matching bracelets. They do everything together. So when beautiful Helene is dumped by her boyfriend and wants to throw rocks through his window, Shelby reluctantly goes along and drives through the winter night. She hits a patch of ice and skids. Instead of turning into the skid (remember that from driver's ed?) she hits the brake. The car spins and collides. Shelby thinks she has died, but she suffers minor physical injuries. Helene is in a coma.Helene is eventually moved to her home, and is thought to be the bestower of miracles, a sleeping beauty in Long Island. People line up to spend a moment in her presence, to hold her hand and perhaps be cured.Shelby, meanwhile, is institutionalized. She stops speaking. She cuts herself. She shaves her head. She feels guilty for every bad thing that happens to others. She is convinced she causes bad things. She feels guilty and responsible for what happened to Helene.Then one day she receives a mysterious postcard. It has a drawing and a simple message. "Say something."Thus begins Shelby's slow climb back to life.What makes it a great book. Well, since you asked...10. Even in my deep cynicism, I believe that

miracles happen. Alice Hoffman apparently believes this, too.⁹ If I had to start on motherhood all over again, I would want to be exactly like Shelby's mother, who stands by her daughter through the deepest tragedies. She doesn't judge. She supports and finds beauty where others might see none. She is strong when she needs to be strong and gentle when she needs to be gentle.⁸ One of the best portrayals of teenage angst, shown through Shelby's friend's daughter and understood by Shelby, who has clearly completed the AP Teenage Angst course.⁷ Where does your soul go? Shelby wants to find out.⁶ The writing is tender and sensitive without being mushy and trite.⁵ The mystery of the postcards. Who is sending them? Why? How does the sender know what the next message needs to be?⁴ Hoffman has the ability to make us feel the depths of despair and the glimmers of hope.³ Can a stray dog (or cat) save your soul?² What is behind you is gone. What is in front of you awaits.¹ Through love and understanding and the goodness of humanity, we can be healed. Okay. Enough tenderness and hope. I'm heading back to my usual literary diet of serial killers.

If you are an Alice Hoffman fan, I'm sure you'll buy this book no matter what the reviews because you know her work. Her latest tale of redemption does not disappoint. Through a story of tragedy and sorrow, she weaves a journey that's so personal you'll come to love the main character. Shelby and Helene were best friends until one night that changed it all. What happens to the survivor is a life clouded in guilt. Shelby lives in her basement shrouded in memories and bitterness. When she finally emerges, the journey is long and mostly painful. Shelby learns about forgiveness of self and acceptance of others. Hoffman develops each character carefully and in detail. She also infuses that touch of magic for which she is famous. Dreamy and flowing, this book is a must read.

Faithful is a compelling story about guilt, redemption, and love. Shelby Richmond is a young girl when a single act changes her life forever; an accident on an icy road, leaving her best friend in a perpetual coma; and although Shelby survives physically intact, the emotional impact of that event has a devastating effect. Shelby's journey begins at the depth of her despair, living in her parent's basement, cut off emotionally from everyone who loves her, spending her days with Ben, who sells her drugs and becomes her only friend. Slowly, little by little, Shelby claws out of her hole, until she can finally forgive herself, allowing herself to be loved, and letting the past go. The beginning of the book is dark and brooding, mirroring Shelby as she allows survivor's guilt to dictate her life; as the book moves on we get glimpses of light as Shelby finally begins to heal....Shelby's journey is powerful, fraught with anxiety and self-loathing, until the depths of Shelby's love for her friends, for

her mother, for her future, becomes evident to Shelby, as well as to the reader. Shelby is one of the most complex characters I've ever read, and my feelings for her during the book evolved even as Shelby herself evolved. One of my favorite literary elements is a transformative character, and the character of Shelby Richmond undergoes a true metamorphosis in this heartfelt book.

The main protagonist of this novel is a young woman named Shelby who was driving a car in an ice storm that spins out of control and crashes. She is injured but her best friend, Helene, is gravely wounded and in a coma. She blames herself, of course, and shaves off all her hair and goes into a major funk. Her best male friend, Ben, is her drug dealer. She and Ben go off to New York, where she takes a job at a pet store. Luckily she makes a good friend at the store and becomes part of the friend's family. She also rescues three dogs and adopts them. It looks like she might marry Ben, but fate has other things in store for her. What I liked about this novel was its ability to tell a story about overcoming adversity in a realistic manner. The characters are interesting and some are endearingly human. Alice Hoffman seems to be growing as a writer -- all the emotional notes are on key.

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