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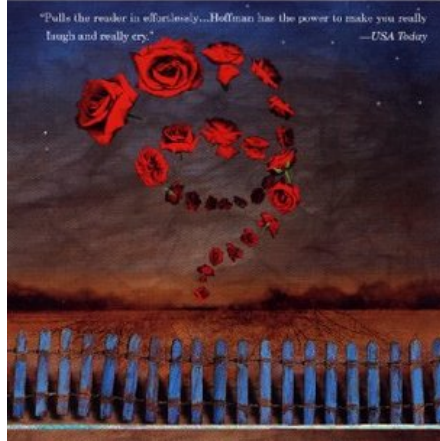
Alice  
Hoffman

LOCAL GIRLS

"Wonderful."

—Cleveland Plain Dealer

"Pulls the reader in effortlessly...Hoffman has the power to make you really  
laugh and really cry." —USA Today



## Local Girls

*Alice Hoffman*

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# Local Girls

*Alice Hoffman*

## Local Girls Alice Hoffman

From the *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Dovekeepers*, **Alice Hoffman** is at her haunting, thought-provoking best with these interconnected stories about a Long Island family, the Samuelsons, and the lessons in survival and transformation that life brings to every family...

"Pulls the reader in effortlessly...Hoffman has the power to make you really laugh and really cry." --**USA Today**

"Moving and deadpan funny...Epiphanies about passion, pain, and resiliency induce smiles and shivers in equal measure." --**Entertainment Weekly**

## Local Girls Details

Date : Published by Berkley (first published June 1st 1998)

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Author : Alice Hoffman

Format : Kindle Edition 208 pages

Genre : Fiction, Short Stories, Magical Realism, Young Adult, Coming Of Age

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## From Reader Review Local Girls for online ebook

### Donna says

This is the book that proved to one of my best friends that despite my addiction to romances, I do actually have good taste in books. I'd been telling her for years to read Alice Hoffman, but, due to the aforementioned, she kept taking a pass. After all someone who reads romances (insert disdainful tone) couldn't possibly know a good book when they read one. Then came this book, which felt autobiographical there were so many parallels to our lives & friendship. I forced the issue and gave her a copy for her birthday. Needless to say, I am redeemed. The friendship portrayed in this book with its ups and downs, distances, failures, shared pain & enduring comfort is beautiful and real.

Alice Hoffman became one of my favorite writers because her use of the written word is so poetical. There is beauty in the way she describes even the most dreary of circumstances. She finds a way to make you feel her characters emotions, to see through their eyes the beauty and pain of their world. Because I have people in my life who deal with addictions, depression and mental illness, I am unusually sensitive to false notes when characters have or must deal with others who suffer. Alice Hoffman has never put a step wrong in this area.

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### Mitzi says

This was the second book I read from Alice Hoffman--the first was Practical Magic. This wasn't as well developed as PM, but it was still an entertaining read. She started out telling the story from Gretel's point of view and then switched to 3rd person narratives of different characters halfway through. She is actually a stronger writer in 3rd person, but switching the voice halfway made the novel seem less cohesive. Still, the ending scene reminded me of when my friend Amy came to visit me at my house after our 10 year high school reunion--she was a magazine writer in NY and I was a SAHM pregnant with my 3rd, so my liking for the story might be colored with nostalgia. Still, despite 2 deaths, and no love interest for the main character, it is a hopeful story--and I like those right now.

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### Mary says

As always, Hoffman is brilliant. I just love her books. Much of this book was read through tears. A beautiful and poignant story.

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### Erica says

Portions of this novel were absolutely beautiful! Perhaps a deceptively simple story... if that makes sense.

My favorite quotes, which keep lingering in my mind...

“There was a bird perched above us in a leafless tree, a little grey thing, a sparrow or a wren. We all looked up, hoping it would sing, but it was silent as stone. We had to laugh then, all three of us.

“ ‘Just our luck,’ Margot said, ‘a mute.’

“ ‘Maybe it’s resting,’ my mother insisted. ‘Maybe it sang the most beautiful song in the world right before we got here.’ The bird stared down at us from a wavering branch. ‘You never know.’

“By then, the rain was falling harder, but none of us paid the least bit of attention. We didn’t even blink.

“ ‘Exactly,’ I had to agree. ‘You never can tell.’ ” p. 128-9

“The real reason Jill and Gretel haven’t seen each other much in the past two years has nothing to do with Eddie. At least not in that way. It’s jealousy, that’s the problem; it’s coveting something you’d never actually want in real life but still desire in your dreams. The silliest dreams, the ones you simply can’t shake, even now when you’re not a kid anymore and should know better than to traffic in envy. Each wants a bit of the other’s life. Not the whole thing of course, not the lonlieness or the exhaustion, just the best parts, the prizes.”

p. 188-9

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## **Cherie says**

Note: Just re-read this again. This book is so phenomenal, so amazing. The emotions are so real it will make you forget your own problems. It's one of my all-time favourite books. Read it. (13 July 2009)

I have read this book so many times, and most recently, a few weeks ago. A novel in short stories, this is the fantastic story of the life of a suburban girl (and I believe the town is to be the one I grew up in!) and how things can go so horribly wrong so quickly...but luckily our narrator can hold it together. Beautiful prose; I love Alice Hoffman. This is her best, and a book to study for any writer.

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## **Mack says**

I read this last night while trying to keep warm and like all Alice Hoffman's I enjoyed getting to know her characters, their fates, tragedy and emotions in an unfair world of sickness, disappointment, bad judgements and love. It tells the story of Gretel, her best friend Jill, her cousin Margot and her Mother Franny, each on their own spiritual journey with the power and loyalty of friendship together.

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## **Margie says**

Four minus.

Sweet and short, in that order. I finished it in one evening.

Hoffman has a wonderful writing style. She wrote "Practical Magic," which was made into a movie. If you've seen it, you know that she's strong on female characters and the bonds between them.

Reading this book, I fell in love not so much with the characters themselves, but with their relationships, and the way Hoffman writes about them. Some of the characters are self-destructive or otherwise less than fully loveable, but Hoffman helps us find their loveliness because of the way their families and loved ones feel about them.

Okay: a paragraph without any form of the "L" word in it. Hoffman has a clear, true voice (I almost wrote "lovely", but then stopped myself). I look forward to reading more of her books.

Love,  
-Margie

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### **Suzanne says**

A quite interesting shortish story told from the point of view of Gretel, and her growing up in the not so best of circumstances. We see the highs and (mostly) lows of her growing up, then the coming of age full circle. It was nice to see Gretel and her best friend share the last scene. This book is different to what I usually enjoy and was nice for a change of pace.

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### **Dardenitaaa says**

I think part of what makes me such a heavy reader is the fact that I love books like I love people. Because quite frankly, books are very much like people in so many ways. They speak of lives and hold secrets. They keep you company, they become a refuge. You can love or hate them. They can have odd first impressions and feelings that you could shake off a few days later or probably they could linger a little bit longer than you think they would, and if you're lucky, sometimes they can also change your life.

And strangely enough, reading Alice Hoffman's lovely novel *Local Girls* (1999), made me think that aside from a lifetime love affair, books could also offer friendship—tender, heartfelt, warm. It's a quick, light read which is poetically narrated in vignettes of short stories by its central character, Gretel Samuelson, about the lives of women and others around her. If this book is a walking person, it's definitely close to a picture of someone who could seamlessly be a candidate for being best-friend material, mostly because it explores the theme of friendship between women so magically beautiful. In Hoffman's heroine's very own words in the book: "It was the sort of beauty you feel so deeply it becomes contagious and somehow makes you feel beautiful too."

Ultimately, the book is about Gretel and Jill, two best friends who grew up living in houses that are basically next to each other. It's this kind of nostalgic childhood that I rarely read in American Fiction, and this one's the best of its kind. Also, I find it so playful of author Alice Hoffman to derive her protagonists names from two of fairy tales and nursery rhymes' popular duos: Gretel (from Hansel and Gretel) and Jill (from Jack and

Jill). Just an observation which tickled me pink. Anyway the story unfolds like this:

"Jill and I have known each other our whole lives. One house separates our houses but we act as if it doesn't exist. We met before we were born and we'll probably still know each other after we die. At least, that's the way we're planning it."

It's so disarmingly sweet from the get-go that I didn't have trouble loving the book even from just the first few pages alone. It's filled with a simplicity so endearing, sprinkled with poetic goodness that makes each sentence so sublime and surreal. And when I say each sentence, I mean it. This reminds me a lot of Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*, where I mentioned how much I want to underline the entire book because it's beautiful from the first page down to the last. *Local Girls* is no different. Every line is so memorable and moving that I wanted to quote everything from hilarious paragraphs from their early teenage years about crushes and infatuation:

"Jill told me that when you're really in love, you know right away. I'm not exactly sure how this happens. Is it like a flash of lightning? Like an angel tapping you on the shoulder? Or is it similar to choosing a puppy? You think you're picking the cutest one, but really you wind up going home with the one who keeps insisting on climbing into your lap."

to shiver-inducing lines about the world and life in general:

"It was late but we could hear traffic on the Southern State Parkway, even though it was Christmas, and snowing so hard. You had to wonder who all these people in their cars were leaving behind and who they were driving toward, and if they knew that in the distance, the echo of their tires on the asphalt sounded like a river, and that to someone like me, it could seem like the miracle I'd been looking for.

Even her one-liners shines with a sadness:

"...he had a way of taking your hand which made it clear he'd have to be the one to let go."

Moreover, I liked the characters' growth in the span of their individual stories. Admittedly, growth is the defining factor of Young Adults Literature which really captivates and endears me as a reader. There's just something so heart-tugging at reading people turn over a new leaf or find a different reflection staring back at them from the mirror. I love how one day changes everything for eternity. I'm a sucker for that kind of stuff. Truth be told, Alice Hoffman is amazing at doing exactly just that.

Look how she presents Gretel's cocoon so harmlessly sympathetic right at the very beginning:

"I could hardly get a boy to look at me. All right, they'd look, they'd even take me out, but no one asked for a second date. I was too nasty, a real wise guy, and all the boys could tell what my rotten disposition was. Deep down, I wanted a commitment with a capital C. To get anywhere with me, a boy would have to sign his undying loyalty with his own blood."

And then look at how Gretel beautifully grew into a butterfly just a few years later:

"In the darkest hour of winter, when the starlings had all flown away, Gretel Samuelson fell in love. It happened the way things are never supposed to happen in real life, like a sledgehammer, like a bolt from out

of the blue. One minute she was a seventeen year-old senior in high school waiting for a Sicilian pizza to go; the next one she was someone whose whole world had exploded, leaving her adrift in the Milky Way, so far from earth she was walking on stars."

It's the kind of book that tells you that you are understood, and it's okay. Oh I loved it a lot, and I'd be re-reading and re-reading it over and over again in the future, I suppose. I know for a fact that Alice Hoffman's books are widely loved and praised by many, and *Local Girls* is a great introduction to her work. I will definitely be in the hunt for the rest of her books, for sure.

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### **Sally Whitehead says**

I've read almost all of Hoffman's books since "Blue Diary" and a fair few of her earlier ones. In fact it would be fair to say she is easily one of my favourite authors. I am always a little wary though of dipping into a favourite author's "back catalogue" - but "Local Girls" did not disappoint. It lacks the magical realism of many of Hoffman's other works (although there are occasional subtle hints that it might be something she will go on to explore in the future...) but it's firmly in the "Blue Diary" territory of realism and I'd forgotten how well she does this too!

In a mere 200 pages we get to see surly, introspective Gretel grow through her late teens and into her mid twenties. More a series of vignettes (sometimes in first person, sometimes third) about her life during this period. It's testament to Hoffman's writing that she manages to do this so beautifully and such a short book, without the text ever feeling sparse.

It's a novel of family and friendship, love and loss, grief and growing up. The cleverest thing about it, which you will probably only notice as you reach the closing pages, is how the style becomes more sophisticated as Gretel matures.

Lovely.

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### **Mary says**

I had Mr. Gober as my English teacher in the ninth grade. He was a very strange man, too strange really to document in this tiny little space, but this isn't about how strange he was. This is about how he assigned us the worst books to read, and very few of them at that. Everyone else was reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, while we were reading *Bang the Drum Slowly*--blech. I began to hate reading (and baseball), because all the books I had to read were not my taste at all.

For one assignment he told us we could choose any book we wanted to read and then write a report on it and present it to the class. Finally, I was reinvigorated. I went to the school's library and browsed forever. The librarian helped me out and recommended a few books, and I picked *Lord of the Flies*.

We had to clear our choices with Mr. Gober before we began to read, and when I told him what I had picked, he told me I couldn't read it. "You'll read that in another class, definitely," he said. "So you can't read it now,

in mine."

After I realized he wasn't joking, I was furious. What a stupid thing to say to a girl who was clearly excited about something! He said I could pick anything else, just not that, and that I didn't have to clear it with him. My passive aggressive reaction was a personal, silent refusal to read anything.

The night before the report and presentation were due, I casually asked my mom for a book to read, and she handed me *Turtle Moon* by Alice Hoffman. "The author's from Long Island, so she's good," she insisted. That night, I wrote a report based on the summary on the book jacket, and the next day made my presentation, filled with the same fiction from the report. I got an A, and I didn't start reading books for real again until college.

Also, *Lord of the Flies* was never assigned to me in any other class.

*Local Girls* is a book by Alice Hoffman that I swear I just actually read, and it was pretty good--maybe even as good as I once swore her other book was.

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## **Will Byrnes says**

In this coming of age tale, Gretel and Jill are Long Island teens in a contemporary setting, Franconia, a place so bereft of imagination that all the local enterprises use the town's name for theirs.

There are moments in which magic enlivens the story and provides a context. In one, Gretel and Jason torment their hated stepmother by tossing her belongings, one by one, out the window of a moving car, breadcrumbs back to safety. In another, drawn by an enticing aroma, Gretel meets the old woman who lives in the creepy house at the edge of town. No witches there. Hoffman gives us one of the central images of the novel. The old woman had planted roses a lifetime ago, and the breadth and large aroma of that lifetime permeates the air. The rose imagery reappears when Gretel visits Pinelawn with her terminally ill mother, Franny, and later in Florida when Margot gets Gretel a rose-colored bikini. Finally, Gretel smells the roses she planted at her home, years after she has moved out, and is just sitting in front of it.

In a driving accident, Jason (Hansel?) begins to experience fire, a creature trying to squash and burn him in the overturned vehicle. (maybe like the feel of being in an oven?) Later, drug-addled, he is walking barefoot three miles through snow when his T-shirt bursts into flames. Living in a flop house, he sees sparks and fire where no others can see them and knows the creature is waiting for him. Eventually he succumbs, to find the creature is himself. Mysterious ball lightning damages Margot's home, then she wakes to find her back lawn carpeted with spider webs. Finally four-ounce hailstones pummel and penetrate her house. Strangely these horrors lead to true love. Margot and Gretel visit a strange gypsy-like healer in Florida.

There is a shift in mid-book from first person to third. I was uncertain why this was necessary. Then back and forth again. I found this a bit jarring.

I enjoyed the chapter titles. For example, *Gretel* in the chapter in which Gretel tosses her stepmother's things out the car window, *The Rest of your Life* when Gretel, Margot and Gretel's mother go to Pinelawn.

Deciding to live or die – Jason – Margot – Jill - Gretel – all are faced with situations in which they must decide to move forward, remain where they are or sink. Although different characters choose different paths,

there is hope at the end of several of them. It was an enjoyable read, with enough spice to make the interest more than a mere curiosity about what might happen to this or that character. The extra elements, fairy tale touches, were very satisfying. And not bit of gingerbread in sight.

If you like the sort of magical element that Hoffman brings, you might enjoy her later novel-in-stories books *The Red Garden* and *Blackbird House*.

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## **BlackOxford says**

### **The Effects of Ennui**

Back in the days when Archie Bunker was a television buffoon and not the President of the United States, the Long Island suburbs were a region of anonymous mediocrity. Nothing happened there because there was no developed society. The components were in place - schools, shops, public libraries, cinemas, restaurants - but they never formed a coherent whole, just an endless desert of unrewarding routine practised within hundreds of indistinguishable neighbourhoods by hundreds of thousands of indistinguishable families..

Alice Hoffman captures the atmosphere of the Long Island suburbs on the turn, as it were, from sterile but unremarkable commuter land of the 50's and 60's in which everyone could feel superior to the remaining denizens of Brooklyn and Queens, to what it has become: a culturally sick region of boredom, drugs, post-religious superstition, and psychic healers. The only way to survive is escape. Emigration and suicide are the principle options. *Local Girls* is a shorthand version of all the reasons why getting out as young as possible is the only sensible choice.

I could be wrong of course. Hoffman's fiction may be just a light, autobiographical, romantic melodrama; in which case it is largely a waste of reading time and energy. All the referential tropes are there - the identical houses, absent fathers, the parkways, the turnpike, the North Shore, Jones Beach - but their meaning is trivial without some context. Only as a cautionary tale to the young trapped in the morass of the un-civilisation of Nassau County does the book have any merit. It then also helps to explain why Archie Bunker has become President.

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## **Kerry says**

A coming of age tale focused around Gretel. She faces many difficult situations throughout her life. A story about family, friendship, tragedy, grief, life's challenges, love and growing up amidst it all. A nicely written page turner with fascinating characters.

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## **Lynn says**

I enjoyed this short novel about friendship, family, love, loss and dreams that may or may not come true. The characters are fascinating and the story moves along quickly. The writing, as usual, is just beautiful.

There is a weird shift from first person to third about midway through the book which is off putting, and after that it keeps switching between chapters.

Other than that, this is a typical Alice Hoffman, with her signature magical elements, some of which are quite funny (watch for the butter episode!)

Maybe not my favorite book by her but still quite enjoyable. Is there such a thing as a bad Alice Hoffman book? I don't think I've read one yet.

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