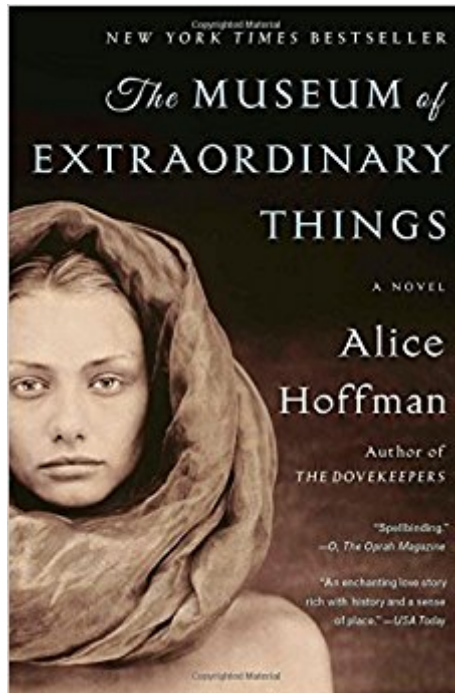




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The Museum Of Extraordinary Things: A Novel



Synopsis

The “spellbinding” (People, 4 stars), > bestseller from the author of >: an extraordinary novel about an electric and impassioned love affair “an enchanting love story rich with history and a sense of place” (>). Coralie Sardie is the daughter of the sinister impresario behind The Museum of Extraordinary Things, a Coney Island freak show that thrills the masses. An exceptional swimmer, Coralie appears as the Mermaid in her father’s “museum,” alongside performers like the Wolfman and the Butterfly Girl. One night Coralie stumbles upon a striking young man taking pictures of moonlit trees in the woods off the Hudson River. The dashing photographer is Eddie Cohen, a Russian immigrant who has run away from his community and his job as a tailor’s apprentice. When Eddie photographs the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, he becomes embroiled in the mystery behind a young woman’s disappearance. And he ignites the heart of Coralie. Alice Hoffman weaves her trademark magic, romance, and masterful storytelling to unite Coralie and Eddie in a tender and moving story of young love in tumultuous times. The Museum of Extraordinary Things is, “a lavish tale about strange yet sympathetic people” (The New York Times Book Review).

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review After her imaginative foray into ancient Judaic history in *The Dovekeepers* (2011), Hoffman breathes fiery life into an enrapturing fairy tale and historical fiction mash-up. Professor

Sardie, a fanatic with a secret past and a Dr. Frankenstein aura, runs the Museum of Extraordinary Things on Coney Island in 1911, showcasing “living wonders,” including his motherless daughter, web-fingered Coralie, who performs in a tank as the Mermaid. Ezekiel Cohen, a motherless Orthodox Jewish immigrant from Russia, abandons his tailor father and his faith, calls himself Eddie, and devotes himself to photography. As Coralie’s father puts her at grave risk to perpetuate what he hopes will be a profitable hoax, Eddie documents the shocking and tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and tries to solve the mystery of a young woman’s disappearance. Both Coralie and Eddie end up experiencing unnerving epiphanies in the glorious and imperiled wilderness on the northern coast of Manhattan. With a Jewish mystic and a distinguished Wolfman, ravishing evocations of the rapidly transforming city and the tawdry yet profoundly human magnetism of Coney Island, dramatic perspectives on criminal greed and the coalescence of the labor movement, and keen appreciation for the new clarity photography fostered, Hoffman unveils both horror and magic in this transfixing tale of liberation and love in a metropolis of lies, yearning, and metamorphosis. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Extensive promotion and an author tour will amplify the appeal of one of best-selling Hoffman’s most incandescent novels. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

“Hoffman’s book earns its legitimacy through an eye-opening plethora of period detailing, coupled with the author’s overarching outrage at urban workplace abuses. You can’t help but admire the author’s fervor for telling stories and the democratic manner in which she disseminates the love of reading.” (Jan Stuart The Boston Globe) “A lavish tale about strange yet sympathetic people, haunted by the past and living in bizarre circumstances. Imaginative. Once Coralie and Eddie discover each other, their profound, mystical attraction and mutual obsession become forces of their own, driving the story forward.” (The New York Times Book Review) “Spellbinding. Hoffman’s penchant for the magical is on full display in this world filled with rogues, strivers, corrupt politicians, Gilded Age riches and debilitating poverty. The chaos and grandeur of New York City at the time make it a character in its own right, as monstrous and intoxicating as the circus sideshow that traps Coralie and makes her a star.” (Andrea Walker People) “Alice Hoffman employs her trademark alchemy of finding the magical amid the ordinary in her mesmerizing new novel. If you’re looking for an enchanting love story rich with history and a sense of place, step right up to The Museum of Extraordinary Things.” (USA Today) “The year 1911 had an apocalyptic feel in New

York City as fire devastated the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in Greenwich Village and destroyed the amusement park Dreamland that rose above Coney Island. Manhattan wasn't yet entirely tamed by concrete and people still believed in the fantastical. Alice Hoffman, whose brand of magic realism really should have a patent pending, makes lovely work of the era in her new city-centric novel, *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*. (Sherryl Connelly New York Daily News) "Hoffman masterfully creates two characters of depth and emotion in Eddie and Coralie. [She] does not disappoint." (Amanda St. Amant The St. Louis Post-Dispatch) "The Museum of Extraordinary Things, like *Ragtime*, is packed with history and mystery, an introspective and full-bodied fairy tale for adult readers." (Julie Bookman Atlanta Journal Constitution) "Alice Hoffman's storytelling magic is on abundant display in her new novel. Hoffman expertly weaves the future lovers' monologues with a third-person account moving through the spring of 1911 to create a wonderfully rich narrative tapestry. Her prose is as lyrically beautiful as ever, evoking the teeming complexity of New York. The action-packed story line sweeps through labor strife, a missing Triangle worker eventually fished from the Hudson, the exposure of her murderer and a bravura plot twist that reveals the truth about Coralie's mother." (Newsday) "Fans of Hoffman will not be disappointed. Lush imagery, extensive use of period details, well-drawn, and vivid prose make this a sumptuous read, a rich reading experience." (The Seattle Times) "Part Ray Bradbury and part Steven Millhauser...the delicate balance between the everyday world and the extraordinary is balanced more in favor of the world we know, though not many writers describe that world as elegantly as Hoffman does....First-rate...Vividly drawn...Hoffman gives us extraordinary things and extraordinary times. And more." (Ed Siegel The Artery, WBUR) "[Hoffman is] a master of craft and a lover of language. Each sentence shows precision and deliberation. The Museum of Extraordinary Things lives up to the extraordinary of its title, a work of passion that celebrates a place and an era even while it explores a particularly dark moment in New York's history." (Zach Powers The Savannah Morning News) "Classic Hoffman: a bewitching world of time and place (in this case, Coney Island and its boardwalk freak show in the early 1900s) suffused with magical moments, a mysterious disappearance and romance." (Darcy Jacobs Family Circle) "A mesmerizing new novel about the electric and impassioned love between two vastly different souls during the volatile first decades of the 20th century." (Publisher's Weekly) "Hoffman breathes fiery life into an enrapturing fairy tale and historical fiction mash-up. Ravishing. Dramatic. Hoffman unveils both horror and magic in this transfixing tale of liberation and love in a metropolis of lies, yearning, and

metamorphosis. (Booklist (starred review)) "The Museum of Extraordinary Things is the mesmerizing new novel about the electric and impassioned love between two vastly different souls in New York during the volatile first decades of the twentieth century. (Ann McDonald Red Carpet Crash) "In The Museum of Extraordinary Things, Alice Hoffman mounts an arresting display: a New York City tale rich with literary inspiration, history, and urban legend. Readers often talk about being immersed in novels; this is a satisfying swim in tidal waters. Take the plunge. (Gregory Maquire, author of Wicked and Out of Oz) "Alice Hoffman understands and delivers the ordinary and the extraordinary in this contemporary novel of the past. As always, her powerful, elegant prose embraces tremendous passion with constant, clear-eyed compassion. (Amy Bloom, author of Away)" As always, Alice Hoffman amazes me with her ability to use words the way other master artists use watercolors, painting the dreamlike world of a girl who grows up in a hall of wonders only to learn that something as ordinary as love is the greatest marvel of all. Many novels these days are called 'stunning' but this one truly IS: part love story, part mystery, part history, and all beauty." (Jodi Picoult, author of The Storyteller and Lone Wolf)

I have really liked the other novels of Alice Hoffman's that I have read, but unfortunately didn't enjoy this one. It progressed too slowly, and the level of descriptive detail in the story began to feel indulgent or self-conscious in some way, rather than poetic or lyrical. To be sure, Ms. Hoffman brings 1911 New York alive, and I liked that she grounded the story in two real historical events - a shirtwaist factory fire that fueled the workers' rights movement, and a huge Coney Island fire. Her characters are also very well-wrought, from the Coney Island show 'freaks' that we get to know as real men and women, to a Jewish mystic from the lower East side Orthodox community, to the hermits in upper Manhattan, still living in the forest, before the city has fully taken over. But the compelling historical setting and characters didn't make up for the slow pace for me. The story moves back and forth between the lives of 2 characters - a young woman with webbed hands who is featured as a fish-girl in the Coney Island museum her father runs, and a young man who has abandoned his Jewish Orthodox upbringing, now working as a crime photographer on the fringes of society. Each of their stories is told in part in first person as if they are reminiscing about their past, and in part through a third person narrator. We know early on that these two are destined to be together, but they do not actually meet until the 60% into the book (I checked.) That was much too long of a lead-in for me, and I had almost abandoned the book before this. To be sure, it picked up in the last 40%, and the last few chapters made it almost worth it. But even in those, the writing and

level of detail began to feel like an obstacle. So unfortunately for me this was just so-so overall, with both good points and bad points.

This was a very interesting story. The descriptions of NY at the turn of the century were so vivid. It really was a story about a whole other world that most people don't think of when they think of NY. I'm from NY and it still made me want to go research more of what NY was about and what it looked like during the turn of the century. I learned so much about my hometown that I never knew before. I read this novel a little bit slower than I normally do though because I didn't fall in love with the characters. I wasn't very interested in them. I feel there was too much going on and the characters weren't developed enough. I've read other Alice Hoffman books and felt the same way about too many characters that aren't developed enough but I was still interested in the characters that were developed. With this one I didn't feel this way. At times I was just reading it to get it over with.

A novel needs to be many things. It must, above all else, tell a darn good story. The story must be believable enough, no matter what genre it is written in. It must make me want to return to it often enough to get me through the pages in a reasonable amount of time. The characters need not be likeable, but I must care what happens to them. And, for me, the author needs to steer clear of platitudes and worn out cliches. If the author covers familiar territory, she has an obligation to bring fresh insights. She needs to tell a story whose ending does not make me wince and write in the notes, "trite," or "truism." The action should not all take place in the last third of the book. Was this a historical romance? Was it a murder mystery? Was it a history of Coney Island and the "freak" shows this author euphemistically calls "wonders"? Was it about the Workmen's Circle, the Triangle Factory fire? She tried all of that, and more. There is a Dickensian cast of characters, some of whom seemed put there salaciously. And of course, all the loose ends are tied up, in surprising and not so surprising ways. Hoffman, afraid her readers would not get her point, goes on at the end, explicating her points about love, as well. She needed to trust her readers more. Ezekiel/Eddie and his father, Coralie and her father were love/hate stories that completed two different circles, then there was Maureen and the Wolfman, the hermit in the woods, the creature in the Hudson, the one-armed lion tamer, another great fire. Sounds like a great read, right? Yet, I had to force myself to read a certain amount each day to be certain I would finish in time to discuss at book club. In the end, most of it seemed contrived. Hoffman got lazy and explained where she should have hinted.

Hoffman digs below the surface to present the full humanity and courage of side show performers,

whom the world judges to be freaks based on the superficiality of appearances. In contrast, key outwardly normal characters are the novel's moral and spiritual freaks, the sources of a pervasive and deadly evil. The author explores this theme of appearances versus reality, and of how reality can be perceived, in a rich and thoughtful way. Photography, the profession of the protagonist, is a vehicle for development of this theme. Hoffman effectively explores her philosophical, thematic concerns through an exciting, engaging plot in a novel that is both a mystery and a love story. As the protagonist/photographer solves one mystery by peeling away the deceptive layers of appearance to reveal the core truth, his love interest engages in the same process. Their quest for the truth, for reality, is also means of self-discovery. This novel rewards the reader on multiple levels.

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