



## The Probable Future

*Alice Hoffman*

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## **The Probable Future** Alice Hoffman

Alice Hoffman's most magical novel to date—three generations of extraordinary women are driven to unite in crisis and discover the rewards of reconciliation and love.

Women of the Sparrow family have unusual gifts. Elinor can detect falsehood. Her daughter, Jenny, can see people's dreams when they sleep. Granddaughter Stella has a mental window on the future—a future that she might not want to see.

In *The Probable Future* this vivid and intriguing cast of characters confronts a haunting past—and a very current murder—against the evocative backdrop of small-town New England. By turns chilling and enchanting, *The Probable Future* chronicles the Sparrows's legacy as young Stella struggles to cope with her disturbing clairvoyance. Her potential to ruin or redeem becomes unbearable when one of her premonitions puts her father in jail, wrongly accused of homicide. Yet this ordeal also leads Stella to the grandmother she was forbidden to meet and to a historic family home full of talismans from her ancestors.

Poignant, arresting, unsettling, *The Probable Future* showcases the lavish literary gifts that have made Alice Hoffman one of America's most treasured writers.

## **The Probable Future Details**

Date : Published June 1st 2004 by Ballantine Books (first published February 24th 2003)

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Author : Alice Hoffman

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## From Reader Review The Probable Future for online ebook

### Nikoleta says

Υπ?ροχο δε?γμα του αμερικ?νικου μαγικο? ρεαλισμο?. Μου ?ρεσε ιδια?τερα η τ?σο ρομαντικ? αφ?γηση και η μαγικ? ατμ?σφαιρα. Εξαιρετικ? βιβλ?ο. (Ατυχ?στατη η επιλογ? του ελληνικο? εξωφ?λλου, δεν μου ταίρι?ζει καθ?λου με το ?φος και την ατμ?σφαιρα του κειμ?νου.)

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### Thomas says

"The Probable Future" is about the Sparrow family, a lineage of woman who through each generation have their own unique powers and abilities. Elinor, the grandmother, can detect falsehood. Jenny, the middle-aged mother, can see other people's dreams. And Stella, the granddaughter, can see how people are going to die. These powers come with tribulations though. Elinor is slowly dying. Jenny has a cheating ex-husband and has been living her entire life with the wrong person. And Stella is your simple angst-filled teenager. When Stella tells her father Will Avery to warn the police about a murder that was going to take place, the police get suspicious of him and accuse him of being the murderer himself. This accusation brings the entire family back together, where they will have to deal with each other and hopefully reconcile.

This was a good book, although it took me forever to read thanks to all advanced courses at school. The writing was full of figurative language, the metaphors and similes were seemingly boundless. I appreciated her prose, but sometimes I felt as if she could've cut back on some paragraphs and made them shorter.

As for the plot, I think there was just a little bit too much going on. Everything in the end was handled, but I felt that not a single aspect of the plot was finished as smoothly as it could've been. For example, the Sparrow family's powers were never explained. Also, Will's legal case was never fully described in detail either. So maybe this book would've appealed to a different audience better, but I still liked it for what it was.

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### Nardia says

This is a lovely story. I was hooked from the start, reading it all in two sittings, and when the book finally let me go it was with a sigh of relief and satisfaction. Alice Hoffman's grasp on her words is just magical; tightly controlled, so that each sentence seems to hold layers of meaning, but also flowing easily from the tongue. There's definitely a certain poetry in the way she weaves the environments where the story takes place, and she doesn't write as though her readers are stupid. Many little details that add to the depth of the story are slipped in quietly, fitting in naturally, beneath the noise of the surface events; it's refreshing to see a writer who doesn't feel the need to brandish about plot points like a flashing neon sign. She doesn't turn her head away from the less enchanting sides of a person, but shows how people can overcome their own weaknesses and the demons of their past, whether it takes them months or years or decades... In many, many ways, this is a beautiful book and I recommend it to anyone who knows how to appreciate a great writer.

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## **Mj says**

this book reminded me how much I love to read. I don't know enough about composition to say if it was well written, but I do know when someone is a good storyteller. hoffman is definitely that.

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## **Marie Sexton says**

OMG, I can't remember the last time I cried so much reading a book. One of those perfect stories that makes me feel like a fraud for daring to call myself an author. My eyes are swollen and I'll have the sniffles all night, but it was worth it.

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## **Kelly says**

Some things, Ms. Hoffman, some things need not be explained until the words don't even sound like words anymore. In fact, Ms. Hoffman explains the setting (ie. Cake House, flora, fauna, seasons in MA, etc) so much and in so many different ways, she makes Stephen King look terse. And that, people, is talent.

The characters are one-dimensional, unrealistic, and completely unlikeable. The women in the novel are either two of the following: cold and constantly angry for no valid reason or daft and riddled with low self-esteem. As for the men, with the exception of two, they're lying, cheating dogs that Ms. Hoffman decides at the last hour to redeem in a manner so devoid of reality it's almost laughable. Almost. Oh, and those two men...idiotic, love-sick puppies with the patience of a saint.

But the worse part, the worse part may actually be a plot line that weaved in and out of existence. Then again, maybe it was the jumps in time, a tying of loose ends here and there throughout the book (inappropriately placed) that look like they were added as an after thought when the book was finished. My guess though is that it was probably closing the book feeling like a chump. But hey, at least I'm a chump that could now get her horticulture degree. Thanks, Ms. Hoffman!

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## **Kim says**

3.5 stars. I just love her magical stories.

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## **Dele Haynes says**

The Probable Future by Alice Hoffman, (Fiction) I've been enjoying a great discovery of Alice Hoffman's books recently. Her books have a very strong female center where the women take the lead. In a world where they solve what is happening in their own lives. Her books also includes the otherworldness that women seem to move through so effortlessly.

The Sparrow women are the center of The Probable Future, each Sparrow woman is given a spiritual gift on her thirteenth birthday. Elinor Sparrow sees the truth in people, her daughter, Jenny, dreams other peoples

dreams and her granddaughter, Stella, sees some peoples point of death. Each of these gifts will help each woman to come to understand each other better and bring them a future they had not imagined for themselves.

A mother-daughter conflict is at the center of the story. Elinor and Jenny had been estranged for years, Jenny and Stella are going down the same path. They each had to come to recognize their own faults in the matter and to begin to return to a loving relationship.

I've come to really enjoy Alice's stories. Her female characters are strong center characters in their own lives. They make mistakes, but they lean on each other to solve them. I also enjoy that she creates worlds that are not all black and white, that there are other forces in the world. I believe women are connected to these forces. Yes, I would recommend that book to anyone who would like to discover a slightly different world.

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### **Karen says**

My rating is 4-1/2 stars. This was the type of story that started off slowly and hooked you with little, interesting tidbits of information and before you know it, you have Kleenex nearby and actually come to care about every single person, living or dead, in the town of Unity as if you were living there right along with them. Alice Hoffman's writing was poetic and profound. Her theme of love was shown in all it's ugliness, from grief to heartbreak, and it all it's wonder from new love to restored relationships. I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I loved the town, the history, the supernatural elements and the way all that affected me as I was reading it.

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### **Susan says**

Once again a wonderful magical read from Alice Hoffman!

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### **Badly Drawn Girl says**

I have some mixed feelings about this book which usually happens when I read a book that allows me to suspend belief but which doesn't have enough substance to sustain my enjoyment beyond the act of reading. To put it simply, while reading it I was sucked into the fairy tale like quality. But after I was finished (and had come back down to earth) the flaws showed up quite clearly. I felt that people changed too much, too quickly... and that in hindsight the story had some huge holes in the plot.

Now I don't want to get down to specifics so I won't. I would say that sometimes people read for information, and sometimes they read to escape, and sometimes they read to evoke feelings, or visit faraway places or just to kill time. We read for a million different reasons. This is a book that shines as a beach read, a vacation read, a bedtime story. It's uplifting, optimistic, fun and enjoyable. It's not great literature, and that's okay too. Only in hindsight, did my feelings wan... but while I was reading it I enjoyed it a bunch.

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## **Meagan says**

Honestly, this book was one of the best depictions of mother-daughter relationships I've ever read. I felt for both mother and child in it, I could see both sides and where both were coming from - yet unlike other novels, I saw no clear way to fix it, because there was no clear way to fix things. It was kind of heartbreaking to read, because I saw my own relationship with my mom in Hoffman's words.

The only downside to the plot was Stella's relationship with the football player. It seemed awkward and out of place - I applaud Hoffman for taking a risk, putting the heroine with the character who wouldn't necessarily be called the "hero" of the younger cast, but her execution could've used some smoothing over.

Other than that, it was a very good novel. A very typical Hoffman novel - she uses supernatural elements to define the relationships between her female characters. It takes after Practical Magic in the way that the women's abilities are passed down through the family line, but the circumstances and characters are different enough so that you can firmly separate the two novels in your head.

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## **Barbara says**

Each of the Sparrow women of Unity, Massachusetts has an unusual ability which manifests itself on her 13th birthday. In this book - due to a confluence of circumstances - three generations of Sparrow women find themselves living together in the family's vintage "cake house" - which has the shape of a giant wedding cake. Brought together are grandmother Elinor - who can detect liars, her daughter Jenny - who can see people's dreams, and granddaughter Stella - who can see how people will die.

At the beginning of the story Jenny, her husband Will, and her daughter Stella are living in Cambridge, Massachusetts when 13-year-old Stella 'sees' that a woman is going to be murdered. Stella insists her father tell the police and when the woman is killed Will, having 'suspicious knowledge of the crime,' is arrested for the murder. Stella's parents ship her off to Unity to protect her from the real killer and Jenny soon joins her there.

There is conflict in the family because Jenny, who had been neglected by her grieving mother Elinor, ran off to marry her ne'er do well, lying, cheating boyfriend Will when she was seventeen; and Stella feels smothered and controlled by Jenny. In the course of the story we learn a lot about the history of the Sparrow women (one of whom was drowned as a witch), which is interesting. There are also a variety of additional characters who help round out the tale but don't really 'pop' off the page. As Jenny and Stella settle into Unity several couples fall in love or admit their love, which - in fairy tale fashion - is beneficial to their lives. In this book at least love cures a lot of ills.

I thought the initial premise of the book was intriguing but before long the story bogged down for me and I found that I didn't particularly like most of the characters. In fact some of the characters are so self-absorbed and oblivious and others are so self-effacing that I didn't much care what happened to them. Though skillfully written this book is more of a miss than a hit for me.

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## Schmacko says

(This is a little long, cuz I get bitchy.)

There's an audience for this type of Hoffman novel. I probably ain't it.

I would guess that Hoffman's core readers as transcendental herbalists from Martha's Vineyard, and I'm sure I'm not that! So, maybe I was destined to dislike this book

The Probable Future is about the three most recent generations of the Sparrow women. All Sparrow women have witch-like gifts, like being about to sniff out liars or the talent to predict the mode of others' deaths. It's this last gift that gets the teenaged Stella Sparrow in trouble. She foresees a brutal Boston murder and tries to get her loser dad to stop it before it happens. Instead, he gets arrested for the crime. So Stella and her mom flee to small-town Massachusetts to hide out with the cantankerous grandma. Here they come to understand more about 13 generations of Sparrow women and their gifts.

Although I love Hoffman's idea of domestic witchcraft and magic, I find her execution fluffy and unsurprising – the story arc is basically the stuff of Lifetime films, with a small bit of New England witchery thrown in. The sum product is a mystical version of a Laura Ashley gift basket, replete with a pale pastel bow to wrap the whole damn thing up too neatly at the end.

It also pisses me off that the females are seen as flawed but human, and many of the males are simply slackers, demons, pricks or buffoons. There's not a lot of singularity here; I wouldn't want to spend an unexpected amount of time with ANY of Hoffman's two-dimensional characters. She defines too much of them by likes and dislikes and not enough by action intrinsic to the plot. Many of the conflicts could've simply been fixed with a good conversation. None of these people are witty, deep or complex.

I also distinctly dislike when authors write shallow "mustache twisting" villains; this book has one of the shallowest. And of course it's a man, because I think Hoffman thinks this means she's being feminist. (I suppose a female moustache-twister would be too scary and weird, though...all that facial hair.)

Hoffman's book is missing a good question. The Probable Future possessed absolutely no thematic complications, comic or dramatic. (There are bumper sticker themes: "Family is good." "Change is good.") There was no point where I pondered, "God, what would I do?!? How would I handle this situation?!?" I never thought the author was taking any intellectual or emotional risks. The solutions to the characters' problems were always obvious. Often, I didn't care. Sometimes I even thought of a very quick, easy solution the characters were to vapid to consider.

Finally, all the description of horticulture, of bird wings, of flavored tea, gets old after a while. These aspects are buried in corny lines like, "Eleanor knew that you couldn't tell anything about a new flower before it bloomed, just like you cannot tell truth about young people until they blossom into adulthood."

My major quibbles being duly noted, Hoffman's use of magic—casual, almost commonplace—is wonderful. I just wish she could've made a more unexpected plot with richer characterization. And she can end the book with us pondering a few questions, and I wouldn't complain. I could actually live through the detailed descriptions of flora, fauna and food. But for all of its magic, the worst part of The Probable Future is how banal its characters are; it's like Martha Stewart for the Wiccan set.

But then again, I suspect I am not the target audience here.

(By the way, I've also read Practical Magic, Second Nature and Seventh Heaven. Last night I tried to give Hoffman one more chance with Here on Earth. But after 40 pages, I had to put it down. It has the same characters—same struggling mom, same Goth daughter. It possessed the same cursed land. It took place in a small Massachusetts town, like The Probable Future. It was scary how repetitive this seemed. I had to quit.)

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### **Tania says**

We know what we need when we get it.

2.5 stars. I should have enjoyed this more, it had all the right elements - magical realism, mother-daughter issues, special magical abilities, but I didn't. I could not connect with the characters at all, and I think the book was too long. I absolutely adored The Dovekeepers by same author, which was a very different type of book, I'm holding thumbs she'll do something similar in future, because I don't think I'll be reading her older books if they are like the probable future.

The Story: The Story of three generations of the extraordinary Sparrow women with unusual gifts who are driven to unite in crisis, and discover the rewards of reconciliation and love.

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