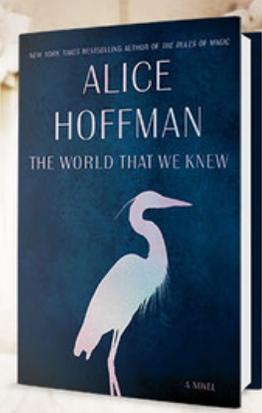


THE WORLD THAT WE KNEW

A Novel



To My Readers

For me, a novel can begin with a character, as it did with Rachel Pizzarro in *The Marriage of Opposites*, or with a place, Masada in *The Dovekeepers*, or a situation - What is it liked to be cursed in matters of love? - in *The Rules of Magic*. *The World That We Knew* came into being completely by accident, although I now believe it was meant to be. I've given a reading at a library in Florida, and afterward I discovered an attractive, older woman waiting for me in the parking lot. She introduced herself and immediately told me I needed to write her life story.

I was apologetic as I told her I couldn't possibly do as she asked. I believed there were two types of fiction writers: those who wanted to explore and explain their own histories and those who wished to escape their lives. I had always been an escapist reader, and I had become an escapist writer. My interests were fairytales, myths, and folktales. I wanted to create new fictional worlds.

"But you must," the woman in the parking lot said. "Otherwise people will forget."

She revealed that she had been a hidden child in France during World War II, and although she was a Jew, she had been sent to a convent by her parents to be raised as a Catholic. Her parents' great sacrifice was the reason she had not been arrested by the French Police or the Gestapo. It was the reason she had survived. But would the story also survive, or would people forget the cruelty of the time? That was her worry. Would people remember?

I had to leave, and so I thanked her and we soon said our good-byes. I didn't get her name, or the details of her life. I didn't yet realize that her life story, the tale of child separated from her parents, is the central motif of many fairy tales, reaching the most vulnerable parts of our hearts and souls and engaging our deepest fears. When you lose your child the future vanishes. When you lose your parent the world ends.

I've come to understand that fairy tales are perhaps the most autobiographical of all stories, containing the deepest psychological truths. They are the original stories, handed down from grandmothers to grandchildren, told by firelight or starlight. Each one is a cautionary tale. These are the stories that explain the sorrow of real life, but also assures us that once upon a time there was a woman or a girl who managed to rescue herself.

Once you tell a story, you are not forgotten. This is what our grandmothers wanted us to know, that that is what I realized while writing about the journey of three characters who refused to be silent: Lea, a young girl who is sent away from Berlin to ensure that she will survive. Ettie, the daughter of a rabbi, who is as brave in the real world as she is in the world of magic. And Ava, a mythic being whose only purpose is to protect the stranger who affects her life in ways she could not have imagined.

Fairy tales tell us that we may be lost, we may be forsaken, but there is a path.

To the woman who set me on the path that led me to this book, thank you for finding me. After all this time, I remembered.