

The Well Women: Crossing the Boundaries

Ladine Housholder

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Nine women find relationships that heal at the site of a biblical well in this powerful novel.

Ladine Housholder's novel *The Well Women* is a journey of healing and forgiveness. In it, Housholder intertwines the historical account of Jesus's interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well with modern-day stories to help people, especially women, feel the impact of—and experience change because of—biblical truths.

The novel brings together nine women from around the world who meet as part of an international Bible study. They meet in the West Bank's Nablus as they tour the site of Jacob's Well—where Jesus had his famous encounter with the Samaritan woman. Each of the nine women harbors a past pain and finds healing through the tale of the woman at the well. The story also impacts their tour guide, Najila.

The plot jets right into action: "Kay sat straight up in bed. There it was—that same dream again. It was something about a Samaritan woman." This immediacy compels readers to want to know more about Kay's dream and the Samaritan woman, and they will become even more intrigued as Kay organizes a trip to the West Bank for her friends. But the true power of the book is the healing relationships the women form in the next several-hundred pages.

Housholder uses third person to adeptly weave the stories together. She sparingly gives direct glimpses of the women's thoughts, which is effective, but the closeness occasionally makes the characters seem a little neurotic. Housholder wisely confines most character revelations to dialogue and descriptions of action.

The back matter contains interesting historical notes about the Book of John, where the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman originates. It also contains discussion questions, which will help those reading the novel together to relate to one another in deep, transformative ways—much like the women in the narrative.

The cover and interior typesettings unfortunately give the book an amateur feel. The bold lettering of the cover title does not blend well with the soft image of the woman at the well. The font size inside the book is large, making it appear as if younger readers are the target audience.

Throughout the narrative, it is clear that Housholder knows her subject—she has studied the Bible extensively amid travels to Israel and the West Bank. As a result, she earns credibility with her readers. While *The Well Woman* is far from chick-lit, the characters and their brokenness will appeal most to female readers, especially those who have ever coped with feelings of aimlessness, rejection, or uncertainty.

MELISSA WUSKE (April 24, 2013)

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