



A Remarkable Kindness

Diana Bletter

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Through a largely hidden ceremony...four friends discover the true meaning of life.

It's 2006 in a seaside village in Israel, where a war is brewing. Lauren, Emily, Aviva and Rachel, four memorable women from different backgrounds, are drawn to the village. Lauren, a maternity nurse, loves her Israeli doctor husband but struggles to make a home for herself in a foreign land miles away from her beloved Boston. Seeking a fresh start after divorce, her vivacious friend Emily follows. Strong, sensuous Aviva, brought to Israel years earlier by intelligence work, has raised a family and now lost a son. And Rachel, a beautiful, idealistic college graduate from Wyoming, arrives with her hopeful dreams.

The women forge a friendship that sustains them as they come to terms with love and loss, and the outbreak of war. Their intimate bond is strengthened by their participation in a traditional ritual that closes the circle of life. As their lives are slowly transformed, each finds unexpected strength and resilience.

Brimming with wisdom, rich in meaningful insights, *A Remarkable Kindness* is a moving testament to women's friendship, illuminating a mostly unknown ritual that underscores what it means to truly be alive.

A Remarkable Kindness Details

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Darlene says

I love the friendships formed by these women. If not for the burial circle, their paths probably wouldn't have ever crossed. I found it easy to relate to the stresses of being a parent, but also loved how different I am from them. I learned a great deal more about a culture and have gained a better understanding.

Ann says

What a truly wonderful story. I'm going to have to get my thesaurus to find enough words to describe remarkable. Set in Northern Israel from 2000-2006 this book taught me so much about life love and friendship. With rocket attacks a daily possibility, 4 women live their lives to the fullest. 3 have emigrated from the US and all miss their old friends and families. They help with the death house, preparing women for burial. I love Rachel, Lauren, Aviva and Emily. The story blends so naturally from each of their point of view. I learned so much about Jewish customs and Arab life. A fantastic read that will have you watching the news with a little different view. This has moved right into my top ten books.

Barbara Bakal says

The story of 4 American women who make aliyah to the same small community in northern Israel. It made me cry. It made me think about life in Israel for both Americans who aren't used to the hardships of life under constant stress of the worry of war, and the life of Israeli's who live life under the constant stress of the worry of war and hate from their Arab neighbors. It made me think about my visits there, my family there, my children, being Jewish..... not so much by what the book said, but by what it brought to the forefront of my thoughts. It also made me think about the rituals surrounding death of a Jew. Not powerfully written, but brought out powerful thoughts for me.

Arlene says

The best book I have read this year. Set in Israel, this book follows the lives of the women of the Burial Circle in Peleg. Each woman is very different and living in a war torn country is hard. But in spite of the harshness of their surroundings these women find a bond that goes beyond sisterhood. Their tending of the dead women in their village teaches them so much about life and living every day to its fullest. I really hated to come to the end of this book as I felt I really knew Aviva, Lauren, Emily and Rachel. I will miss them.

Morninglight Mama says

I had mixed reactions to this novel. I enjoyed the storylines of the four women at the center of the book, but the storytelling format itself made it challenging to follow along. The inconsistencies in time passage

between chapters made it disorienting to know when the next chapter was taking place, as well as the habit of some characters to drift off into interior flashbacks that weren't differentiated in the text also made it difficult to know what was going on. The content of the novel, especially the details about the traditional burial circle experience, was compelling and emotionally evocative.

Asheley says

Read my full review [HERE](#) at Into the Hall of Books.

This is the story of four women living in Israel that come together to perform a traditional burial ceremony when a women dies in their community. These women are American Jewish women that have all moved to Israel for different reasons and consequently are all a part of the burial circle for different reasons. **A Remarkable Kindness** takes a look into the lives of Lauren, Emily, Aviva, and Rachel - at how they came to Israel, how they adjust to and enjoy their live in Israel, and how they feel about their part in the burial circle.

I went into this book fairly blindly, to be honest, which is how I love to begin novels. I was mainly interested in the interaction of these women from different backgrounds, how they interact and form friendships when they come together. The author sets this story over about six years, from 2000-2006, so we are really able to get to know each woman over time and see how she connects to the other characters. One follows her physician husband to Israel because he wants to make a difference where he is needed rather than in America, where he is sure to live a more comfortable life. One is in Israel alone, to volunteer and change things and make a difference in the world. One moved there years ago, is a widow, and has lost too many family members to the unstable political and religious military violence. One moves to Israel after a divorce breaks her heart, looking for a fresh start. I grew to adore each of these women, and I was so interested in the things that they loved, the things that broke their hearts, their successes and mistakes, and how they felt about one another. I loved them all. I felt like I could feel them and see them in my head so very well.

The burial circle ceremony is not something that I knew about before this book. Bodies are prepared and cleansed for burial and then watched or protected until they are actually buried, and this is uniquely special because the dead cannot thank them for their service. I loved watching these woman learn this process and in return, grow in their respect for living and for death, and I also loved how this process changed their own lives in unique ways.

It is in between the burial circle scenes that we really learn these characters' stories. I personally learned more about what was going on in this region at the time, and I always enjoy that, plus I learned more about the culture of the different groups of people living there. This book is so wonderfully character-driven and I was caught up in decisions and emotions and friendships and casual interactions with secondary characters. Long before the book ended, I was fully invested and wanted the very best for each woman/family.

I recommend **A Remarkable Kindness** by Diana Bletter for readers that enjoy women's fiction and readers that enjoy learning about cultures other than their own. This would make a great beach or pool read.

Rachel says

Told from the alternating perspectives of four American women who made Aliyah and all become volunteers in the burial society in their small town in northern Israel. I put it down about half way through because I felt like every chapter was about who was hooking up with who and the romantic relationships all seemed to be developing too quickly to be believable. But I picked it up again last night and finished it this afternoon. It was a page turner at the end and had some important, interesting, and insightful (though sometimes shallow) messages about life, love, grief, and friendship.

Sharon says

Life is a puzzle and often times doesn't make sense. I really liked the book but found that it made me both happy and sad. Happy that these friends found each other in Israel and did something so powerful as The Burial Group.. Sad on the way it all turned out.. But that's life! I would highly recommend this book!

Nancy Barton says

Chick Lit in Israel. Who knew!

Betty says

Four women have found themselves immigrating to Israel, some from idealism, some for love. They come together in a bond that helps them adjust to a culture that is very often not easy. All four join the local hevra kadisha, a burial circle. Being Jewish, I am familiar with the tradition and the blessing one derives from helping someone that cannot return the favor. Upon death, the “burial circle” lovingly and reverently prepares the body for burial. The body must be cleansed and wrapped; and the body is not to be left alone before burial. One cannot perform this precious ritual without being changed themselves.

We slowly get to know these four women: Lauren who moved to Israel after falling in love with an Israeli man, Emily who follows her best friend Lauren there, Aviva whose work brought her there and she chose to remain, and young idealistic Rachel wants to change the world. Some find more than they expected, and some are very disappointed.

The story covers a period of six years. The gaps sometimes confused me, but not horribly so. I just had to look back to the previous chapter for the “date stamp”. Each chapter does begin with a date and year so that helps. I could see the evolution of the characters and how well they did, or did not, adjust to their new homes. I found the varying reactions of the characters to their new home to be very realistic. Israel is a difficult country to adapt to. Life there is difficult. But life there also has its incredible moments that you would not exchange for anything. The women there must be strong and must adapt to loss. Our four women experience many losses – loss of loved ones, loss of innocence, loss of hope, loss of home. I have known women like all four of them.

There is a wonderful variety of “supporting characters” to the story. These characters bring in the elements of multi-cultures, of Holocaust survival, of fatigue from life itself. Some are able to handle the stresses, some cannot. It is a realistic look at people striving to survive under often soul-destroying conditions.

Joan says

This book follows the complicated lives of women in a costal village in northern Israel. Through the experiences of these women we are introduced to deep themes of love, life, death, grief, war and peace. The author does not spare us any details of their messy lives and relationships and mistakes, but also illustrates the beauty of passion and complication. A must-read for 2015.

Ellen says

There are books that are hard to get through, not because they are poorly written, but because the subject matter is so difficult. The story of three good friends, Emily, Aviva and Lauren, part of a burial circle in Israel, will speak to your heart. There is much sadness and loss experienced, but the love and friendship are redeeming. I recommend if you want to read a truly moving novel.

Raven Haired Girl says

Imperious snapshot of the intricate complexity of living in a slight village in Israel. You are exposed to the truly eclectic mix of people as well as cultures claiming Israel as their home. The challenges of living in this rocky county through war and times of peace, dichotomies and never-ending conflicts are richly described. People living in constant unrest, any given moment can be devastating, Bletter captures the atmosphere present day and its people in a compelling manner.

Exploring Israel through the lives of four American Jewish women via various circumstances electing to relocate to Israel is eye-opening. Their friendship and beliefs serve as a bond as they collectively participate in serving their village as members of the chevra kadisha or burial circle preparing the body for burial in the ritual manner and sit with the body until the funeral. The ritual is halting, and the way it is portrayed leaves you in admiration for those performing the last task to the deceased with incredibly dignity. Bletter did an outstanding job incorporating this aspect into the narrative, extremely respectful and quite affecting.

"Helping a woman give birth was so noisy, filled with moans and screams and commotion. But death was quiet. So calm and unruffled. It was almost as if the mystery of life could be found within that silence."

The four women range in age, circumstances all dealing with personal issues, they really give a glimpse into the many facets of life in Israel. Their day-to-day life, a game of roulette, all dealing with heavier personal issues, an ideologist, another dealing with grief, one looking to escape, and one deeply homesick .

A wonderful story of friendship in a challenging environment. Fantastic insight into culture, traditions, people. Lovely.

Visit [Raven Haired Girl](#) for more reviews and giveaways

Linda says

I enjoyed this book and it is a very touching story about four friends who discover the real meaning of life as they try to survive in a war torn country, perhaps find love and the sadness of death. The story is rich on traditions handed down from generation to another and it will linger in the back of your mind for the longest time!

Sharon says

A Remarkable Kindness tells the story of four women in a small community on Israel's northern Mediterranean coast not far from the Lebanese border. They are drawn together through their common background as American Jewish women living in Israel and their friendship, love, care and commitment to partake in the community's chevra kadisha or burial circle. As they and the other members of the circle prepare the body for burial in the ritual manner and sit with the body until the funeral, we learn their impressions and the complications in their lives.

This book vividly and realistically portrays the women and the other characters in the coastal village and gives us a taste of the different people and cultures that call that area of Israel home. Through the women's stories we discover their changing shapes and colors, their power and energy, their joys and sorrows. The landscape described also reflects contrasts and complications — it is tough as well as mild, its sounds can be soft and sometimes harsh. A Remarkable Kindness brings to life the atmosphere, scenery, smells and struggles of living in Israel through peace and war. The book will resonate with those who live in Israel or have been to Israel and can recall their own impressions and the uninitiated who will learn about the land, the people and customs. It is a 'must read' book for anyone who values friendship and is interested in the Promised Land.

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