

Midnight Cactus

By Bella Pollen

The best-selling author of *Hunting Unicorns* returns with a stirring and suspenseful tale of love and the quest for freedom, vividly set in the wild lands between Arizona and the Mexican border. On the run from her claustrophobic marriage in London, Alice Coleman moves her two small children to the American desert hoping to find the solitude she craves but hadn't thought possible. But the vast and unruly southwest has room for the dreams of more than one fugitive—from Benjamin, an abandoned mining town's Mexican caretaker, to the immigrants who risk their lives to cross the border, to the laconic cowboy Duval, who Alice finds herself falling for. What seemed idyllic turns deadly as Alice must decide how much she is willing to sacrifice in order to preserve not only her freedom, but Benjamin and Duvall's as well. Building to a blistering climax, *Midnight Cactus* is both a perilous love story and a compelling exploration of the tension between unrealized dreams and the pull of family.

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Midnight Cactus Summary Details

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editorial:

From Publishers Weekly

Restless and unfulfilled, Alice Coleman jumps at the chance to spend a year away from London and her officious, workaholic developer husband, Robert. Accompanied only by her young children, Jack and Emmy, Alice arrives in Temerosa, Ariz., a ghost town her husband bought, to oversee the renovation of the decrepit property into a resort. Unprepared for life in the remote desert community, Alice finds herself immersed in a harsh climate filled with deadly wildlife, illegal immigrants, immigrant traffickers and vigilante border guards. The construction crew working on her expansive property, she suspects, are illegals, as is the maid she hires in a fit of "wretched middle class guilt." Meanwhile, Alice is drawn into a flirtation with handsome local crew leader Henry Duval, whose rugged charm covers his own dark secrets. Robert joins the family in Temerosa and gets sucked into a murder investigation involving Henry, and things get dire. Pollen (*Hunting Unicorns*) creates a scorching landscape and a large, finely drawn cast, and her portrayal of the pressure-cooker atmosphere along the border is notable for its lack of preachiness. The ongoing immigration debate can't hurt sales potential. (Jan.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Alice Coleman, looking to escape her unhappy marriage to a brash British businessman, uproots her kids and flees to Temerosa, Arizona, the site of one of her husband's failed business schemes. She decides to reactivate his project to turn the bleak mining town into a resort with the help of kindly Mexican caretaker Benjamin, who recommends hiring reticent cowboy Duval as the contractor. The arid Southwest is so different from her urban existence in London that Alice and her children must adjust not only to the deceptively dangerous desert climate but also to the cowboy culture and the border politics. Soon Alice finds herself drawn to Duval and the tragic secret that has led him to his clandestine work helping impoverished immigrants desperate to cross the border and often preyed upon by both corrupt guides and American land barons. Best known for the romantic comedy *Hunting Unicorns* (2004), Pollen tells a darker story here but also deftly mixes in comical dialogue from the Coleman kids, a beautifully evoked desert setting, and an intriguing romance. Joanne Wilkinson

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Review

"A delightful and rewarding novel, with moments of startling beauty ... Pollen is entirely in control of her material, perfectly pacing the book to tantalizingly unravel secrets. The setting is as enigmatic as the eccentric characters.... Successfully marries literary and commercial fiction ... compelling ... intelligent and provocative." -- Kim Aikman

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