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The Falconer's Knot: A Story of Friars, Flirtation and Foul Play

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Hoffman, Mary. *The Falconer's Knot: A Story of Friars, Flirtation and Foul Play*. Bloomsbury, 2007. ISBN 9781599900568. \$16.95. 288 p.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Detective and mystery stories; Historical fiction

Subject: Religious life--Juvenile fiction; Italy--History--1268-1492--Juvenile fiction; Murder--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews

A Franciscan friary in medieval Italy seems an unlikely place for a series of violent deaths, the budding of a young love, and renewal of an old one, yet so it is in Mary Hoffman's *The Falconer's Knot*. How the title relates to the action is somewhat obscure; *Murder in the Monastery* might have been more descriptive of the novel's focus. Sixteen-year-old Silvano, a "counterfeit" friar, is secretly given sanctuary at the Giardinetto friary while his father, the Baron Montacuto, searches for the fugitive who used Silvano's dagger to kill a man. Unfortunately, the sanctuary becomes almost more dangerous than remaining in his home city.

Adjacent to the friary is a small convent, where an unwilling young girl is sent by her brother/guardian upon their father's death. Chiara must lose her name, her beautiful hair, and all worldly possessions as she dons the robes of a novice nun. She notices, however, the arrival of the handsome, young friar with interest; the grisly events that unfold draw them increasingly together. Many lives are lost or endangered before the mysteries are finally solved and the true killers identified. The way is open at last for blossoming love to move toward a satisfying "happy ever after," with all of the side plots neatly tied together.

Fans of mystery and romance will find Hoffman's story intriguingly different, mainly due to the time period and unusual setting. Unfortunately, the pace is slowed by several sub-plots which introduce a multiplicity of characters (some of them actual historical Italian artists), though Hoffman does provide a character list which helps to keep them straight. The novel also detours into Italian art history, the chemistry and technique of color preparation for fresco painting, and descriptions of various walls and ceilings being decorated. Some readers may become a little impatient waiting for the story to move forward; others with an interest in art may welcome the painting asides. Once again, the author assists with a historical note which provides background information on medieval Italian art and lifestyle. Additionally, an outline of the Divine Office helps clarify numerous references to the daily routine at the friary and nunnery. The colorful dust jacket, simulating vellum, with gold foil "illuminations" added to its illustrations, reflects the medieval setting and invites readers into its pages. Though not a gripping novel, *The Falconer's Knot* is entertaining and does give the persistent reader an interesting glimpse into medieval Italian culture.

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