



The Hour Before Dawn

Penelope Wilcock

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Once again, author Penelope Wilcock reaches back through the centuries to the ancient monastery of St. Alcuin. Abbot John is undergoing deep, emotional shock after learning of the rape of his sister and murder of his mother; Father William is discovering his own vulnerability; and there, immersed in the daily routine of simple tasks, the brothers undertake the greatest task of nurturing the grace of God in their souls.

Book 5 in the recently continued The Hawk and the Dove series, The Hour before Dawn explores the psychological impact of grief and trauma as well as how one can be healed. Wilcock deftly weaves themes of the resurrection and ascension throughout the story, exploring the process of having survived suffering, but not yet having moved on. Characters eagerly await the coming dawn of restoration. Based on solid historical research, Wilcock's representation of monastic life is authentic, rich with poetic prose and a sense of time and place.

The Hour before Dawn affirms our need for one another's understanding and love as well as our need for a personal relationship with Jesus. Wilcock's newest story helps readers understand the grieving process, make connections between the Bible and everyday life experiences, and nurture an attitude of understanding and kindness.

The Hour Before Dawn Details

Date : Published September 27th 2015 by Lion Fiction (first published January 1st 2012)

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Author : Penelope Wilcock

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Christian Fiction, Medieval, Christian

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From Reader Review The Hour Before Dawn for online ebook

Beth says

I received this book from Goodreads giveaway.

The Hour Before Dawn was well written. I didn't like some of the details about the rape in the book. I did like the theme of the promise we all have of heaven. It has great accuracy of the 14th century monastery. If you love medieval mysteries, this is the book for you.

Gwen says

The Hour Before Dawn was a good read with enough action to keep the reader interested. There were a few times the reading lagged and for that I only gave it four stars. If you are interested in abbeys and priories and religious orders in your reading you will find this an enjoyable read. It is a member of "The Hawk and the Dove" series by Penelope Wilcock.

I received this book free from Goodreads First Reads.

English says

This is another one of those books that I am in two minds about. I knew from before I read it that it was very controversial because of the subject matter and some of the content. Basically, it begins with an account of an attack by a group of drunken village men on the mother and sister of Brother John, Abbot of the fictional St Alcuin's monastery in Yorkshire. The attack culminates in the women's house being burned down, Madelaine's John's mother is accidentally killed and his sister very deliberately raped.

I do understand where the author was coming from with including these scenes, I really do. It resulted from a desire to explore the impact of emotional trauma as well as the struggle of Christians to reconcile their faith with the bad things that happen in the world, and to other Christians. I am not one of those people who thinks we should shy away from exploring difficult or painful subjects in Christian Fiction. In fact, I find such content less objectionable when it has a serious purpose than when it simply used to create drama.

However, I do object to the context in which the scenes in question was presented. It was made out that the villagers attacked Madelaine and her daughter because they were suspected of being 'witches' for being able to read, and knowing about herbalism. Later in the story, when a distraught John was considering pursuing legal action, it was claimed that this would only cause more trouble because a Sheriff would probably also suspect such a woman of being a witch.

Sorry, but I consider such claims to be patent nonsense, which only serves to perpetrate myths about history. There is plenty of evidence that Medieval women could read, and plenty of evidence that they owned books, including religious books and missals. Some women even wrote or translated religious books and were never suspected of 'witchcraft' for doing so.. It was entirely acceptable for women to be literate, and herbalism was a commonly known and widely accepted practice for both sexes.

I almost think that in some places, a false or misguided basis was being created from which to condemn supposedly sexist and misogynist attitudes which may not have even existed in the first place, or at least not have been so pervasive as was claimed. Finally, I was a little concerned about one scene in the monastery in which a monk referred to the spiritual resurrection of Christ. Church doctrine for much of the last 2000 years has held to a physical resurrection: only Gnostics believed it was spiritual.

Once I got past certain passages, I did find this book more enjoyable and I will certainly try to finish the series, but this instalment is not for the fainthearted or easily offended. Sadly, also, on a historical level the points detailed above prevent me from giving it a higher rating.

I was sent a paperback copy of this title from the publisher Lion Fiction upon my request. I was not required to write a positive review and all opinions expressed are my own.

Leila says

Had to go back and re-read as I stopped to re-read her previous trilogy. A beautiful book though not for everybody. The themes she touches on in turn, touch me deeply.

Nicole says

If one has ever faced extreme grief, one can relate to the pain of the abbot John. At times things in life happen that seem impossible to overcome. This book proves that senseless acts of violence can bring destitute victims closer to each other and Christ. I really enjoyed looking into the life of monasteries and the bonding of the brothers involved. I enjoyed the themes of resurrection and ascension. Just because you are down, it does not mean you are out. It's not over until God says it is, even if you think you cannot carry on.

Jenna says

The best part of this book is the discussions it fuels. The Hour Before Dawn takes an in depth look at how people deal with tragedy and faith. Although I didn't agree with some parts (Times have changed since the 14th century :)) there were some parts that were really inspiring. And most importantly, the book leaves you filled with hope. Thank you Penelope Wilcock for tackling some difficult issues and the encouragement. God Bless!

I won this book through a goodreads giveaway.
This book is available at ChristainBook.com

Lisa Johnson says

Title: The Hour Before Dawn (The Hawk and the Dove #5)
Author: Penelope Wilcock

Pages: 208

Year: 2015

Publisher: Lion Hudson

My rating is 5 stars.

Readers are once again returned to the 14th century monastery of St. Alcuin's in Yorkshire, England in this fifth entry of The Hawk and the Dove series. Most of the characters from the prior four books make return appearances, but the story centers around Abbot John and Father William.

Abbot John has just been in his position as head of St. Alcuin's for about a month when he receives devastating news that his mother has been murdered and his sister gang-raped. These women lived together and were thought by some to be witches, but they were really healers and midwives. The abbot is devastated by this news and is numb with shock. He travels to see his sister with Father William as a companion. His sister blames what happened on Abbot John for not being home to protect her and their mother. The abbot struggles with an all-consuming guilt, Father William consoles, cajoles and finally sternly counsels the abbot.

As readers we follow the developing relationship between Father William and Abbot John as well as the abbot's sister toward both of these men. Also, along the way one of Father William's monks from his former priory is found horribly disfigured. Again, Abbot John takes on more guilt at not helping this monk the first time they met (in book four of the series). Father William again must pull him from the black hole of despair. Readers will also see Abbot John begin to gain assurance in his role as leader of the monastery. He returns the favor of counseling when William is struggling with an issue.

Just as an FYI, I think this series should be read in order as the story continues from one book to the next. The spiritual insight and truths shared are wonderful. The author writes with great insight into human emotions and how Christ would have us live our lives. The relationship between the monks shows mercy, compassion, jealousy, sadness, love and many other emotions we all experience. Above all, readers see the monks trying their best to live life as Christ like examples. I can't wait to read book six titled, Remember Me.

Disclosure of Material Connection: The above is my opinion. I only recommend products or services I use personally and believe will be good for my readers. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255. "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Megan says

Wilcock again does an amazing job of exploring the complexity of the heart and human relationships. This book's subject matter was much more intense than her previous work. I loved the way character's stories providentially wove together as well as the beautiful picture of the healing grace found in ordinary rhythm, work, and even food. Her narrating of the inner thoughts of characters, is lovely. These books have a gentle instructive nature as I think they lead our hearts and minds in patterns of thinking about how the Gospel can and should manifest in our relationships. The one difficulty I had was the speed at which a very tramitzed character seemed to recover. I don't think I would have noticed if the dates had not so clearly been pointed out repeatedly. I understand though that the author was also trying to metaphorically tie the spiritual meaning of certain periods and days in the church calendar to elements of character development by having them coincide. In this respect the story was more poetic than realistic in its lapse of time.

Deon says

The Hour before Dawn (The Hawk and the Dove #5)
by Penelope Wilcock

The Hour before Dawn is the fifth book in the series, The Hawk and the Dove. Penelope Wilcock paints the image and reality, that this world can be an awful, unkind place. This book follows the main characters in the preceding book, The Hardest Thing to Do. In this book, Abbot John finds out his sister has been raped and his mother is dead. The abbot then travels the emotional road of healing with his friend, Father William. (To learn more of their strong bond one should read the previous book) Father William has his own struggles as he finds a lost acquaintance, whom has been been physically and emotional battered, due to some of William's choices.

I enjoyed reading this book for the realistic events and feelings that the characters showed. But as the title implies, the dawn will come. Days will be dreary, but healing can be accomplished.

I recommend this book to those who are dealing with a loss or a great hurt and are looking for encouragement .

I received a free copy from the publisher. No review, positive or otherwise, was required—all opinions are my own.

Beth Withers says

This is the fifth in The Hawk and the Dove series. Abbott John is still new at his job when he gets tragic news regarding his family. William proves his worth, and another brother joins the monastery. The message in this one is strong about handling adversities and relying on God to do so. I was a little uncomfortable with the ending, but I suppose that is the reality of monastic life.

Jane says

Beautiful story with much wisdom and spirituality, exploring that "*bardo*" between a tragedy and eventual healing from grief. Father John, now Abbot of St. Alcuin's Monastery after Father Peregrine's passing, has suffered a personal tragedy. Accused as witches by the villagers, his mother has been killed, his sister violated and their home razed. Now fragile, he sinks to the depths of hurt, self-blame, and despair. With the help of Father William, another monastic, he gropes his way towards the light and back to equilibrium and calm acceptance through the two of them forgetting themselves and helping someone in dire need. Abbot John utilizes his skills as former Infirmarian. Father William experiences an epiphany of his own.

I was immersed in that medieval monastic world but did miss Father Peregrine. This was another of Penelope Wilcock's wonderful The Hawk and the Dove series, with her same strong characters, and lessons for us. I appreciated we were spared the modern family; the novel plunged us right into monastery life.

Noel Adams says

My motto, when it comes to fiction, is typically, "I read dead people." But I have to say that Wilcock is one of my favorites--and she's still alive. This is the fifth book in the Hawk and Dove series and just as wonderful as the four previous ones. Wilcock's characters are dynamic and three dimensional. She tackles very difficult subject matter in a beautiful way. And she always brings it back to biblical virtue without being syrupy or preachy. I'm a huge fan!

Fleur Finch says

A rewarding read

Beautifully written and inspirational as it focusses on the depths of relationships which are finely tuned within the confines of a holy calling. Honest interchanges, personal insights, perceptive reflections on the agonies born within the soul as a result of cruelty at the hands of ignorant men. A truly rewarding read which needs to be read as part of the six part series to be best understood and appreciated. I can only commend the author for her skilful writing

Abigail says

Not going to lie - I was pretty disappointed with this fifth book in the Hawk and the Dove series. I've read all four of the other books in this series and enjoyed them; sadly the trend went spiraling downward by the time I had finished *The Hour Before Dawn*.

While the characters remained relatable, it was the plot I found to be lacking in my tastes. The majority of the plot centers around newly installed Abbot John's sister, Madeleine, who at the very beginning of the book is accused of being a witch and is brutally raped. John and Madeleine's mother is killed during the incident, and the home Madeleine and her mother share is torched. What killed me was the graphic telling of this incident. There was just way to many details, and I really didn't need that mental image stuck in my photographic mind. There were a few other graphic incidents, but I won't mention them for the sake not spoiling it for potential readers.

The last fourth of the book was better, as the characters began to reconcile and move past their own personal trials to get on with life. Still, I thought the apparent speed at which Madeleine began to act like her old self a tad unbelievable. After everything that had happened, you would think it would take longer to recover. All in all, I wasn't impressed with *The Hour Before Dawn*. I'll still keep an eye out for the sixth book, due to be published sometime in 2012, I hope it'll have a better plot line than the 5th did.

I received a free galley of this book from Crossway and Netgalley for this review. These opinions are my own; I was not required to write a positive review.

Beks says

"The world is always darkest the hour before the dawn." Many of us have either heard or read this particular saying and it is from this that the title is taken from and it is a very fitting title for the story. It is a story which the author explores the varying paths of grief and the only way to truly come out of it.

This is the fifth book of the series but can be read with minimal confusion on its own. It follows Abbot John and William, first as they travel to visit John's sister after her attack and then later as they go in search of Brother Oswald, one of Father Williams brothers from his old order. It is upon finding Brother Oswald that the path to happiness could finally be taken (you have to read the book if you want to find out why.)

As someone whose only knowledge of monasteries came from watching Sound of Music it was very nice to have it all spelled out so nicely both in the book and with extra explanations afterwards. Wilcock seems to have done real research into this topic and tells her story with ease. It is a deep book and one which shows how God can lead individuals to a place of healing. as explained in one of my favorite quotes of the novel:

"God is the Creator who goes about making us and remaking us even when our hearts are broken and our lives are shattered. He searches for every shard of who we once were and makes something new of all those pieces and His love."

In all honesty I probably won't go back and read the rest of the books in the series, but I don't regret spending my time in reading this. Thank you to Crossway Books for giving me a book for review.
