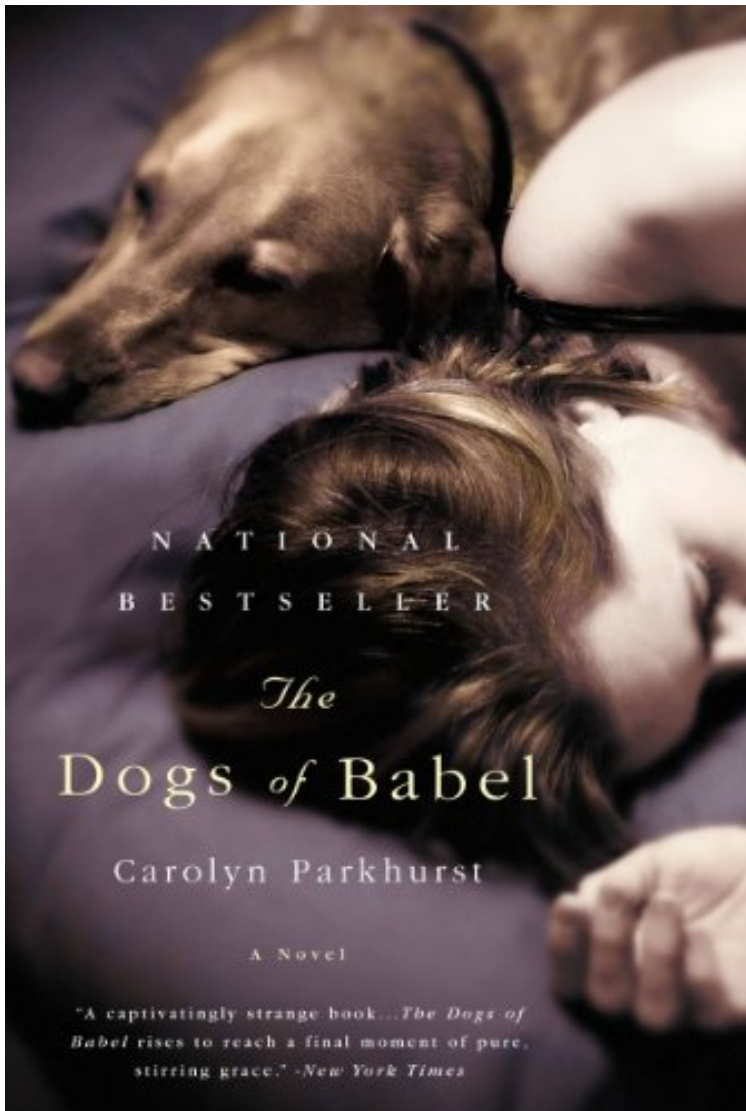


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The Dogs of Babel: A Novel (English Edition)



Par Carolyn Parkhurst
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA poignant and beautiful debut novel explores a man's quest to unravel the mystery of his wife's death with the help of the only witness--their Rhodesian ridgeback, Lorelei..comThe quirky premise of Carolyn Parkhurst's debut novel, *The Dogs of Babel*, is original enough: after his wife Lexy dies after falling from a tree, linguistics professor Paul Iverson becomes obsessed with teaching their dog, a Rhodesian Ridgeback named Lorelei (the sole witness to the tragedy), to speak so he can find out the truth about Lexy's death--was it accidental or did Lexy commit suicide? In short, accelerating chapters Parkhurst alternates between Paul's strange and passionate efforts to get Lorelei to communicate and his heartfelt memories of his whirlwind relationship with Lexy. The first 100 pages or so bring to mind another noteworthy debut, Alice Sebold's brilliant exploration of grief, *The Lovely Bones*. Unfortunately, the second

half of *The Dogs of Babel* takes too many odd twists and turns--everything from a Ms. Cleo-like TV psychic to an underground sect of abusive canine linguists--to ever allow the reader to feel any real sympathy for the main characters. Parkhurst's Paul Iverson can certainly be appealing at times, and his heartbreak is often quite palpable ("...for every dark moment we shared between us, there was a moment of such brightness I almost could not bear to look at it head-on."). But his mask-maker wife Lexy--Paul's driving inspiration--is a character whose spur-of-the-moment outbursts, spontaneous fits of anger, and supposedly charming sense of whimsy (on their first date, they drive from Virginia to Disney World, eating only appetizers and side dishes along the way), become so annoying and grating that it's hard to believe anyone could ever put up with her, let alone teach their dog to speak for her. Despite its cloying tone, *The Dogs of Babel* marks a notable debut. Parkhurst possesses a wealth of inspired ideas, and no doubt many readers will respond to the book, but one hopes that the author's future efforts will be packed with richer character development and less schmaltz. --

Gisele Toueg
From Publishers Weekly
It's a terrific high concept: a woman falls from a backyard tree and dies; the only witness is the family dog, a Rhodesian Ridgeback. To find out what happened--accident? suicide?--her grieving husband tries to teach the dog to talk. Parkhurst's debut novel has been getting a lot of pre-pub attention, probably mostly for this concept, because the execution of this first novel is flawed. The tantalizing prospect of linguistics professor Paul Iverson attempting to teach Lorelei to talk is given short, and erratically plotted, shrift. Paul's narration oscillates between his present-day experiences and the backstory of his romance with Lexy Ransome, a mask maker. The two meet when Paul drops by Lexy's yard sale, buys a device for shaping hard-boiled eggs into squares, then returns with a bunch of square eggs ("And we stood there smiling, with the plate between us, the egg-cubes glowing palely in the growing dark"). This incident, a maxi-combo of cute and sentimental, defines much of the couple's love story (on their first date, Lexy whisks them off to DisneyWorld), marking much of this novel as a sentimental, manipulative romance not unlike James Patterson's *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*; some readers will adore it, while others will gag even as the pages darken toward tragedy. Few will relish the sketchy account of Paul's work with the dog, which goes nowhere until it veers, bizarrely and unbelievably, toward an underground group performing illegal surgical experiments on dogs. Parkhurst is a fluid stylist, and there are memorable moments here, as well as some terrific characters (particularly the enigmatic Lexy), but one gets the sense of an author trying to stuff every notion she's ever had into her first book, with less than splendid results. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.