



# The Outside of August

*Joanna Hershon*

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Critics and readers alike hailed *Swimming*, Joanna Hershon's fiction debut. "Compelling," said the *Washington Post*, while *Vanity Fair* called *Swimming* a "page-turning premiere." Now Hershon brings us her anticipated second novel, in which she vividly explores the secrets of an American family. *The Outside of August* is a mesmerizing, beautifully written story that combs the emotional landscape of its characters with power and precision.

For as long as Alice Green can remember, her elusive mother, Charlotte, has moved in and out of family life—disappearing relentlessly and often without explanation. Despite the exotic clutter of souvenirs that detail Charlotte's international travels, the Green's home becomes progressively hollow, as nothing but Charlotte can fill the empty spaces.

With their mother's tenuous presence, and their tender but distant father working long hours, Alice and her brother, August, react in different ways. While seeking constant affection from other women, August relies on an unspoken bond with Charlotte that allows him a certain freedom. But Alice feels no such security and grows increasingly unmoored, always in search of ways to keep her mother at home.

When, years later, her unfettered brother becomes strangely remote, Alice journeys to find him in an isolated beach town. It is there that a deeply buried secret will have to unravel in order for Alice to come to terms with her fractured family and her place within it—and learn to let go of a mother she perhaps never really knew.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## The Outside of August Details

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Author : Joanna Hershon

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## From Reader Review The Outside of August for online ebook

### Cathy says

I find this story intriguing because it's told from the point of view of a daughter whose mother, Charlotte, is always escaping to foreign lands. The family can't really figure out what Charlotte does when she goes away, nor why she feels compelled to always leave. They feel the mother's absence intensely when she's absent, and they seem to always be waiting for her return. Of course, I can identify with this story as I can see a lot of myself in that mother. It's interesting that it's told from the children's point of view, and focuses on how her absence really affects the children. Of course, in my all-too-real life, I can see the effect my absence has had on my children, although they insist that they are proud of me for following my dreams and for my bravery and adventurous nature. They say one thing, but their actions often speak differently.

Don't we read to discover something of ourselves? I know I do. I found this book to be illuminating in a very personal way.

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### Lanette says

I got to page 72 and couldn't bring myself to continue... reading about a dysfunctional family and a whore of a girl (her way of 'getting back' at her mother for being gone much of the time) is not how I want to spend my quiet evenings. I didn't sympathize with any of the characters... didn't want to get to know them... didn't care about what happened to them. So, I'm abandoning this book with no regrets. Yet another Ballantine Book that's been a disappointment. What's up with that?!?!

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### Vivian says

This story of a dysfunctional family spans the decades from the early 70's to 2001. It starts out slowly and the first half of the novel, set on the North Shore of Long Island, is hard to put down. We are introduced to Alice, the daughter, who seems to be always waiting for her mother to return from one of her endless trips. Alice's father is a workoholic and she is very emotionally attached to her elusive brother, August. And then there's Charlotte - the selfish, irresponsible mother who is away from home for months at a time in order to avoid her children and her suffocating marriage.

The second half of the book takes place after Charlotte's death in a house fire. Alice and August grow further apart, and after her father's death, Alice travels to Mexico to find him and finally learns about the family's deep, dark secret and why her family behaved like they did as she was growing up. Although the author's descriptions of the town, the food, the people are vivid and beautifully descriptive, the second half of the book was somewhat boring and a less satisfying read for me. However, I look forward to reading her other books.

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### Lauren Albert says

In Outside of August, absence--both physical and emotional--drives obsessive need. Alice's often absent, and never-quite-present mother, leaves her with a hollowness she can't fill. She gives herself physically without

compunction, but can never give herself emotionally to anyone outside of her family.

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### **Reagan says**

I stopped reading the book. The writing is terrible and the characters hard to relate to. While I'm mildly curious what the 'secret' behind the mother's behaviour is, it still isn't enough to compel me to finish the book.

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### **Annika says**

Kan inte påstå att den var trögläst. Men något fattades boken igen, det där som får en att vilja sträckläsa en bok.

Bra att Gus och Alice till slut fick veta sanningen om sin mor.

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### **Lauren says**

eh

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### **Crystal says**

I was sort of bored with this book. I guess I'm not much for the heavy psychological machinations of family dynamics. I couldn't identify with any of the characters: the absent and totally self-centered mother; the absent and totally self-centered brother; the weak and long suffering father; the daughter who spends 30 years trying to get her mother's love instead of the name of a good therapist. This book seems to have been reviewed very highly, so it must just be me. Also, I had trouble getting past the anachronisms, such as their having a photograph of the original owners of their home--from 1825!! I didn't think one would have had a family photograph hanging around from 1825, but just to verify it, I found this in Wikipedia: The first permanent photograph was an image produced in 1825 by the French inventor Nicéphore Niépce. So, unless the Long Island family were real pals with this guy Nicéphore, not really possible.

There were some recently popularized expressions in the 1977 dialog, but can't find examples of those right now. And I was distracted for a few minutes when I stopped to ponder how Alice could've hit an adult, lactating, cow with her small car, have the cow flip and land on the top of the car then roll off somehow, and Alice walks away from the accident. She then imagines how if her brother had been with her they would've carried the cow off the highway. What does such a cow weigh anyway? At least a ton. But that's just me.

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### **Sheryl says**

I have to say I was disappointed in this one. It had much of the same style as my favorite "Swimming", however it was lacking something and I found it a bit boring.

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### **Marissa says**

Not overly inspiring

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### **Lori says**

I disliked this novel and basically stopped reading at about page 40 and began skimming through to uncover the secret to the mother's eccentricity. The characters were caricatures of ideas and not human beings. If the point of the novel was to feel outside of it, she succeeded beautifully. All the characters possess an elitist ennui and an attitude that their woes are the direct result of them being too intellectual and too philosophical for the mundane world they are unfortunate to have to exist within. I disliked the writing as well. I thought she was inconsistent with style and tone and overreached the stream of consciousness technique. Instead of adding flair to the confusion and chaos of these character's minds it made them even more unrelatable and dull. Plus, the big secret the mother was hiding was too small for the emotional architecture she built throughout the novel. It should have been messier, more depraved, more animalistic.

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### **Tommy says**

advanced reading copy

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### **Colleen says**

Only read 50 pp. It did not draw me in, so I'm moving on.

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### **Daniel says**

they said this is a good one

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### **Charlie says**

Yeah, I couldn't get into this one at all. It dragged on for me, and it just lacked...something. I don't really know what made me so turned off to this book, but I just struggled through it.

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