



The Ocean Inside

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Life changes in an instant. One day, Emmett and Lauren Sullivan's biggest worries revolve around the escalating taxes on their gorgeous Victorian beach house on Pawley's Island, South Carolina. The next, they're facing a devastating crisis.

The Ocean Inside Details

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J R says

To me, a lot of books I got from the dollar store are dry, one-dimensional, or just plain weird. I was actually gonna give up on buying any more from any dollar store. Even so, I still decided to give this one to try. Just one last chance. I was actually surprised by how much I liked this book. The situations and hardships the Sullivan family face are all too real, and the way they fight to protect Ainslie was very moving to the reader. It's hard to not be touched by the honesty and courage this novel has. Although I felt like the ending could have been a little bit better, it was still pretty great overall.

Beth says

Too much speculative fiction has probably ruined me for this sort of real life story because I can't help but think that nothing happened in this book. And yeah, I feel like a real douche canoe for admitting that a story where a kid gets cancer and a family falls part equates to "nothing happened" in my mind.

Except, the story wasn't exactly *about* a kid with cancer and a family falling apart. Those things happened but only in order to set up the real action, which was the older teenage sister getting involved with a poor little rich kid whose daddy won't give him money to go to Europe with his college buddies so he gets involved in a plot to make some fast, easy money. That aspect of the story was gripping and the reason I've given the story three stars. The author is a talented storyteller.

However, before getting to the point where big sister got involved with this troublesome boy, grounds had to be laid that would support her acting out (I guess?). Early in the book it seemed like this was going to be a story about a kid getting cancer and how the evil insurance company was going to screw this family over.

The first and second chapter should have tipped me off to the fact that this would not be the case but I'll be the first to admit that I am dense sometimes.

Chapter 1 – an angst-ridden account of big sister's thoughts while swimming in the ocean.

Chapter 2 – an introduction of the family dynamic of a black family in the area who then mostly disappears until later in the story.

Chapter 3 – cancer strikes.

And then the rest of the first half of the book was about the cancer and the parents fighting and the dad fighting with the insurance company and so on and so forth. Stupid me for thinking that was what the book was supposed to be about and stupid me for being annoyed that it felt like something was missing and that certain parts of handling the insurance company were glossed over. In other words, I like stories that go sort of like this:

Complication --> Action --> Reaction

But during the "cancer strikes" part of the story, it went like this:

Complication --> Reaction

At first it felt like a copout until I realized that sprinkled amongst the cancer plot parts, big sister was hooking up with her rich, older college boy, going to Mexico with him and his college friends and becoming

more and more involved with his shenanigans. Seemingly out of nowhere, the *actual* story took off when members of the black family from chapter 2 reappeared in the story and there was less talk about cancer and more nefarious discussion about ways to make easy money.

Does anybody know if fiction can have a thesis? I didn't study literature during my years of higher education and I earn my living as a finance geek so sometimes I feel ill-equipped to analyze books and it makes me feel like a poser. This could be one of those poser moments because I feel the need to admit that I spent a significant portion of the book trying to figure out what the actual point was supposed to be and by the time I think I figured it out, I didn't really care. And I couldn't help but think that the characters felt more like stereotypes of how people in this type of situation were supposed to act rather than like real people. This was disappointing for someone who doesn't read a lot of real life fiction.

Because the cancer and the problems with the insurance company and the marital struggles between mom and dad were second to big sister's legal troubles with her boyfriend, it seemed like the resolution of those other matters was lacking. The ratio felt off and it made the ending feel especially abrupt.

Even though it feels like I've spent most of this review complaining about the parts that didn't work, I can't rate the book below three stars. I hope this author continues to write and continues to be published because I think she's on to something.

Kate Eftax says

It leaned more towards 4 stars by the end. Some things and decisions people made didn't feel believable. But overall a good storyline.

Kristen says

This was a beautifully written novel. I thought the characters and the way the way they dealt with the situations in their lives was really realistic. I also thought that alternating perspectives helped this novel. Unfortunately, I thought that the ending of this novel was very abrupt and felt like a cop-out. The reader is left with too many unanswered questions. I don't mind open endings but I feel like the author put her characters in such difficult situations that she didn't know how to solve them. I also felt that Sloane's dilemma was glossed over and not explored with the same finesse that the other characters and their side situations were dealt with. Overall, this was a surprisingly intense yet engrossing read.

Rachel says

I chose not to finish reading after about 60 pages. The author was passing a lot of time without much plot or character development. It didn't grab me and it didn't leave me wondering what was going to happen, no thinking about the book at all in between times I read a few chapters.

LadyCalico says

I might have been able to enjoy this story more if it hadn't been set in my own little town of Pawleys Island, so I had to grind my teeth to the nubbins over the amount of things the author got so very wrong about both Pawleys and nearby Georgetown's history, geography, and culture. Yes, I know it's fiction, but keep the fiction, fiction and the real, real or else use a fictional place name. Petty, I know, but blatant errors are like chalk squeaking on the blackboard and detract from anything else the writer has to say. It is impossible to fully enjoy a book in which a couple in 1989 looks sadly at the Hurricane Hugo damaged remains of the Pawleys Pavilion when the Pavilion burned down in 1970 and was never rebuilt--so Hurricane Hugo was also a time-traveler. I did get a giggle out of the developer picking up Waccamaw Riverfront property, some of the costliest real estate in South Carolina, "for a song." Yeah, if the song were Billion Dollar Baby sung by fairies waving magic wands. The author had this annoying thing about adding little generalities about Southerners, such as they boil and fry their foods--yeah, just like every other culture in the known universe. If the author knew anything about this segment of the South there wouldn't have been a character like promiscuous, drug-snorting Georgetown City Manager (actually, we call it Administrator) Caroline Crawford. Pawley's may be Yankeeified, but Georgetown is still Bible Belt with double capital B's. Any woman in such a position better be as irreproachable as Caesar's wife or the genteel Steel Magnolias of Georgetown would have her rear tarred, feathered and ridden out on a rail the first time she waggled it at someone's husband. Somehow, the author as an expert of all things Southern must never have heard of Southern Baptists. Beside, we are not Shabby Chic; we are Arrogantly Shabby. There's nothing chic about us, but we are arrogant. I guess it is unwise to read a book set in your home area by an outsider who knows not of what she speaks--it is a miserably painful experience. By the way, there isn't a lion in the Brookgreen Gardens statue of Fighting Stallions--those are stallions, thus the name.

Julie says

I enjoyed the ambiance of South Carolina, but I didn't really love any of the characters. I was extremely upset and disappointed at Sloan's remarks at the end about LaShonda. I think Sloan used LaShonda when she didn't have any other friends. LaShonda didn't do anything wrong. Sloan was an entitled brat who deserved punishment for what she did, but got away with it. There were also loose ends. What was Ainslie's prognosis? Where was Lauren in her faith? Her religion was an important part of the story for a while and then nothing mentioned about it again. I didn't like that we didn't get to experience conversations at the end between Lauren and Emmett, but just heard about them through Lauren telling Sloan. I felt like Emmett was portrayed as the bad guy too much. Overall I felt disconnected from these characters.

Lindsay Murphy says

I thought the book was fairly interesting but I thought that the author should not have added the story about LaShonda it distracted me from the story about Sloan and Ainslie. I was disappointed in the ending and thought that the whole thing with Sloan being rescued by dolphins was corny. I guess I wish the author had just stuck with the story about the sisters and the cancer.

Fatatat says

This book had an absolutely stunning opening scene and soon began to unfold a story that was captivating. The writing style was very easy and similar to a lighter version of a Picoult along with a similar type story line. Though I do tend to find with Picoult's that things are a little too drawn out this book had the perfect

pace and interwove different aspects of the story in a pleasing way. I very much enjoyed reading this and hearing all the voices of the place in which it was set. It's obvious that this author has done her research

Shannon says

This novel was amazing. Once I picked it up I could not put it down. The story was captivating and I loved how the chapters rotated by telling the story from various perspectives.

Lisa says

I was really surprised by how much I liked this. I thought from the book description that it would be a book about demonizing parents for forgetting to be parents but I was surprised by how it was not like that at all. It was more about how stress can manifest differently in everyone and how sometimes the person with the most pain, fear and stress can be the one most sensitive to others. I particularly liked the relationship between the sisters and thought it was realistic and hopeful. The way the book concludes makes me wonder if that relationship is what the book wants to emphasize most.

Julie says

I'm not entirely sure this book earned a full three stars, but it was definitely better than two stars. I can't pinpoint what was wrong with the book - it was relatively well-written, I found sympathy with the characters (although admittedly I sympathized more with the daughters than the parents), the book ended well. But as difficult as it is to say what was wrong with the book, I also can't say anything was glaringly right either. It just "was." I did find Sloan's storyline to be a hefty distraction (trying here to comment without giving anything away) and I think I would have liked this book better had she simply stuck with writing about Ainslee's cancer and how the family dealt with it, and left it at that. But, it was an easy read that I plugged through rather quickly, and I can't say I disliked it. But it wasn't a book that will resonate with me for any length of time.

Marti says

Sometimes a book hits you for reasons you can't quite explain. **The Ocean Inside** was that book for me. Perhaps because the author's story took a family and tore it apart emotionally and allowed the tide to ebb and flow with the emotions and fear. Perhaps because the ocean brought all things to a conclusion. According to the author, the ocean inside us is universal and is the part of us that lies hidden from the world. It is the part of us that has a secret, a fear, a longing or an emotional burden. We all have strengths deep down inside us that we need to pull up at times and we cover the others with our outside persona. The main character Sloan did this, but so did every member of the family at some point.

For the record, this book also highlights to me the power insurance companies take upon themselves when they don't want to pay. I believe next to the the tea party and the oil industries, insurance companies are the next big scam artist. They screw us out of money and nickel and dime us to death. They determine our treatment, our medications and how our health is looked at. They hold the bag and the string that ties the bag.

Rhonda Rae Baker says

WOW...just started and lyrical prose has sucked me in...I love this book already!

Finished this very quickly...couldn't stop taking breaks to get back to the story. Very real characters and what happened to them is something that could happen to anyone. Their reactions to the situations presented were totally realistic as I've experienced some of what they went through. Without telling you all the details and how it worked out, I will say that life happens to all of us and sometimes we get distracted by the fires all around. While we're dealing with the fires, we are forgetting to take care of other business. Eventually everything can be a mess and family can be hurt. Some feel neglected and other's feel used and/or abused.

There's no winning when tragedy or crisis hits anyone...I related to Janna's novel and it struck a deep resonance within my own experience. I will be finding a copy of her first novel post haste and watch for her next novel. She is definately an author to be reading...wonderful talent here!

Julie says

I ended up liking this book the more I read. What was best was the perspective change from person to person, where you learned the motivations and thoughts of the characters. Also, that it did not focus on the details of the illness, just the effects on the family. Did not sink to weepy melodrama.
