



## The Almost Sisters

*Joshilyn Jackson*

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# The Almost Sisters

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**The Almost Sisters** Joshilyn Jackson

**With empathy, grace, humor, and piercing insight, the author of *gods in Alabama* pens a powerful, emotionally resonant novel of the South that confronts the truth about privilege, family, and the distinctions between perception and reality---the stories we tell ourselves about our origins and who we really are.**

Superheroes have always been Leia Birch Briggs' weakness. One tequila-soaked night at a comics convention, the usually level-headed graphic novelist is swept off her barstool by a handsome and anonymous Batman.

It turns out the caped crusader has left her with more than just a nice, fuzzy memory. She's having a baby boy—an unexpected but not unhappy development in the thirty-eight year-old's life. But before Leia can break the news of her impending single-motherhood (including the fact that her baby is biracial) to her conventional, Southern family, her step-sister Rachel's marriage implodes. Worse, she learns her beloved ninety-year-old grandmother, Birchie, is losing her mind, and she's been hiding her dementia with the help of Wattie, her best friend since girlhood.

Leia returns to Alabama to put her grandmother's affairs in order, clean out the big Victorian that has been in the Birch family for generations, and tell her family that she's pregnant. Yet just when Leia thinks she's got it all under control, she learns that illness is not the only thing Birchie's been hiding. Tucked in the attic is a dangerous secret with roots that reach all the way back to the Civil War. Its exposure threatens the family's freedom and future, and it will change everything about how Leia sees herself and her sister, her son and his missing father, and the world she thinks she knows.

## The Almost Sisters Details

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# From Reader Review The Almost Sisters for online ebook

## Joshilyn Jackson says

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## Elyse says

Update: WOW... GREAT DAILY DEAL...  
\$1.99 Kindle download today!  
VERY ENJOYABLE!!!!

Jackson's creative juices are flying high with her STORY WITHIN THIS STORY. It's sooooo good, that I want to BUY A COPY of the created \*graphic novel\*, "Violence in Violet"...(with drawings of rabbits - fat mice - puffy birds - etc. ). I would pay for this paper graphic novel!!!

Leia's ( Lay), messages through her graphic art & words are powerful - linking this entire novel together....about RELATIONSHIPS of all kinds!!!

"Violet's story happened to everyone. All of us, every innocent babe born on this planet gets broken eventually".

and.....in doing so...once we break -we just might re-open...create more authentic intimacy with our own sisters!!

Dedicating my reading to Violet Wells!!

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## **Diane S ? says**

I adore this author, will read anything she writes. How many author can combine the grace and elegance of the south while deftly showing many of the issues that are still apparent underneath the charming veneer. Can combine the devastating effects of lewey bodies, Batman, sex crazed rabbits, a graphic artist, old bones and a church supper where the wrong food is served with humorous results and make it all work. I laughed so hard and will never look at salmon quite the same way again.

She uses a light, gentle tone, a great deal of humor while dealing with some very real issues. Sisterhood, bigotry, family and fatherhood, in all its permutations, are the underlying themes. Weighty subjects, all handled with humor and a great deal of tenderness and love. The characters are wonderful, worm their way into your heart, unforgettable. Entertainment and realism side by side, so well done. The ending, maybe a little schmaltzy, but for me it was apropos and while there was an ending, there was also a beginning.

ARC from publisher.

Releases July 11th from William Morris.

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## **JanB says**

Funny, quirky, and endearing are words that come to mind when I think of this novel. There are two sets of “almost sisters”: Leia and her stepsister Rachel, and Leia’s 90-year-old grandmother and her long-time best friend, Wattie.

Graphic novelist Leia is 38, single, and pregnant. She is trying to find a way to tell her family, but before she has a chance to do so, she discovers her stepsister Rachel’s marriage is in trouble and unbeknownst to her, her grandmother has been showing signs of dementia. Along with her 13-year-old niece, Lavender, Leia travels to Alabama to sort out her grandmother's affairs. While there, she discovers her grandmother’s dementia wasn’t the only thing that has been hidden away.

There are multiple issues dealt with in the novel: marital difficulties, unplanned pregnancy, dementia, racism, sibling relationships, along with the mystery in the attic. I loved the way Joshilyn Jackson can spin a humorous story while also incorporating deeper subjects into her stories. She did a great job weaving all the threads into a cohesive whole, and she did it with a ton of heart and humor, with many laugh-out-loud moments.

There were a few times toward the end when the narrative tended to get a little preachy, and the superhero comic book feature wasn't a favorite plot device, but neither ruined the book for me. What the author does exceptionally well is narrate her own audio book, bringing the characters to life. (if you listen, use ear buds – just trust me on this - I had my own laugh out loud moments when my husband walked in the room during some juicy bits. Twice, lol)

Recommended for fans of southern fiction who enjoy quirky characters and their humor with a touch of mystery and social commentary.

Thanks to my fellow Traveling Sisters for another great read! For reviews of this book and others visit their

blog at:  
<https://twogirlslostinacouleereading....>

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## Chelsea Humphrey says

I swear, every time I pick up a book written by Joshilyn Jackson I say it's the best she's ever written and she cannot possibly top it, but every time I'm wrong. I had a feeling before ever cracking the spine (*just kidding, I'm not a monster to my books*) that this one was special. Sure, the cover is gorgeous and swoon worthy and the blurb on the back was just the right amount of intrigue and feels, but my intuition was telling me that there was something deeper here, something more complex to the plot than portrayed in the description. I think all readers can relate to that feeling on occasion; it seems to be the holy grail of the reading experience and we try to capture that experience as often as possible to contain that wholly satisfied feeling.

As a caucasian female born and raised in the deep south, it's safe to say I'm a part of the target market for Jackson's books. This book in particular really spoke to my roots, as I was born in Alabama, raised in Atlanta, Georgia, and have recently moved to Northern Virginia; with two of these states being featured in *The Almost Sisters* I was completely at ease. While I won't be getting into detailed plot specifics, I could feel early on that the author chose to focus on a timely issue that I have struggled with for years-the dual nature of the southern states and how that nature affects minorities. In this book, the focus is on the black community and how, even though the years of legal slavery have passed, racism is still alive and well. Perhaps this is why the book resonated with me in such a complete fashion, but my entire life I have witnessed the two very distinct natures of the south. On one hand, it can be welcoming, hospitable, and comforting; I've experienced firsthand the warm love and support that a southern neighbor, friend, or family member can provide. On the other hand, underhand racism, as well as blatant racism, is still causing hurt and hatred to thrive in a time where we feel we've progressed profoundly. I can't do it justice in my review, but the narrative created by Joshilyn Jackson is indeed profound, moving, and convicting.

Prejudices are dissected in many forms along the journey; while there are many various appearances of racial discord, past and present tense, there are also situations involving the competitive nature of the step sisters, along with Leia being an unwed mother of a bi-racial baby while coming from a traditional, southern family. I found myself particularly moved by the plot line involving Birchie, Wattie, and "the secret". I would say the pacing was very steady, one that you would want to take your time through and soak up every detail (it's the southern way, after all). If you enjoy southern fiction that is well done and so much more than shallow cliches, I would **HIGHLY** recommend picking up *The Almost Sisters*. I think fans of the author will agree that this is her best work to date, although I'm equally sure I'll be eating crow by the time her next novel is published.

**\*Many thanks to the publisher for providing my copy; it was a pleasure to provide my honest thoughts here and participate with the SHE READS BOOK CLUB summer session.**

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## Cheri says

4.5 Stars

The first Joshilyn Jackson book I read was "Someone Else's Love Story," which has a special place in my

heart since it was my introduction to Jackson in the first place. How can you not love a book that begins the way that one does?

I haven't yet read one of her novels that I didn't enjoy, but I've loved some more than others, her style of writing has matured along the way, but with "The Almost Sisters" it seems to have more smoothly merged into that sweet spot she created with her earlier novels.

Leia Birch Briggs is 38 years old, living in Norfolk, Virginia, and makes her living as an artist, a graphic novel / comic book artist to be specific, an occupation which leads others, especially family members, to be dismissive of her talent and her success. She has a deadline looming; her contract obligates her to come up with the prequel story of her successful graphic novel, *Violence in Violet*.

*"...tequila never was the handmaiden of good decisions."*

After a whirlwind day presenting at FanCon, where she'd packed the room of 500 seats, she's recognized instantly by the throng of fans, something that only happens at these types of conventions, men and women both dressed up like her characters in all their varying stages. She heads to the hotel bar, where she meets Batman.

Well, a man dressed up as Batman, at least until he was no longer dressed. As Batman, or anyone else.

Around the time that Leia realizes that this one night will stay with her a lot longer than most, she is rushing to the home of her grandmother Birchie's home town, Birchville, Alabama, a town founded by Birchie's own grandfather. Charleston shipping family money. Birchie is elderly now; her health is failing, along with her memory, a victim of dementia, Lewy body disease.

Birchie and Wattie have known each other their whole lives, raised together by Wattie's mother, a servant in Birchie's home before they were even born. There is no one Birchie trusts more than Wattie, but this town has reinterpreted Wattie's presence as her personal maid. Not a friend. The lines of segregation were too clearly drawn for them to imagine that.

*"The South I'd been born into was all sweet tea and decency and Jesus, and it was a real, true place. I had grown up inside it, because my family lived there."*

*"The second South was always present, though, and in it decency was a thin, green cover over the rancid soil of our dark history. They were both always present, both truly present in every square inch."*

And once she's there, she sees things she's neglected to really take inside her, beyond her grandmother's failing health, beyond just the more thinly veiled racism where sides of towns are more likely to have a lighter skinned population and another side a darker skinned population.

*"For the first time, I understood that I was pregnant with a boy who would always know. Right now, secreted inside me, my son was protected by the lining of my own white hide. I could drift along, seeing only the South's best version of itself if I so chose. But once my son was out, brown-skinned and himself? He wouldn't have that choice."*

The South that Leia has grown up loving has its dark side, which she has been aware of, but having the future of her little temporarily inside-sidekick opens her eyes even more. As Birchie alienates more neighbors, and sides are taken, Leia still holds out hope for a better future for this place she sees as home.

Racism. What defines race in a biracial child? Motherhood. Birchie and Wattie's secret. The competitive relationship between Leia and her step-sister Rachel. Marital discord. A last minute decision to send a young teen to accompany Leia to Birchville. Dementia, courtesy of Lewy body disease. All these topics factor into "Almost Sisters," and more, but all with a dash Joshilyn Jackson's magical touch, her ability to weave a story of family secrets, lies and privilege, and what defines a family, in "Almost Sisters."

Recommended.

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## **Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says**

### **4 quirky, superhero stars to Joshilyn Jackson's The Almost Sisters! ?? ?? ?? ??**

Review of the audio read by the author! ? Joshilyn Jackson's narration was so entertaining I will be listening to all of her future books.

The Almost Sisters starts out silly but fun. The main character has a rendezvous with Batman (yes, Batman!) at a cartoon convention. References to Batman had me chuckling throughout. However, Joshilyn Jackson, in her trademark quirky, fun, there's more to it than meets the eye, style, delves into some deeper issues like race, aging, elder care, and...sisterhood.

Joshilyn Jackson is an author unto herself. I'm a huge fan and grateful I discovered her work because she never fails to provide an engaging, big-hearted, zany, but well-grounded and complex story.

This was a Traveling Sister group read, and it led to lots of laugh out loud moments. ?

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## **Will Byrnes says**

**My whole life I'd seen only one. I loved my South, though I could see how it was broken, plagued still with the legacies of slavery and war and segregation, history and a thousand unseen walls divided up the territory so that we had a black Baptist church and a white one, and the narrow aisle between the color-coded lunch tables at the high school was invisibly a chasm filled with dragons. Still, I always thought my homeland was a single place. I was wrong.**

**The South was like that optical illusion drawing of the duck that is at the same time a rabbit. I'd always see the duck first, his round eye cheery and his bill seeming to smile. But if I shifted my gaze, the duck's bill morphed into flattened, worried ears. The cheery eye, reversed, held fear, and I could see only a stolen rabbit. The Souths were like that drawing, both existed themselves, but they were so merged that I could shift from one and find myself inside the other without moving,**

Leia Birch Briggs, 38, single, living in Norfolk, VA, is a comic book artist with a Dark Horse contract to write an origin story for her successful graphic novel. She learns that her grandmother, the family matriarch lovingly known as Birchie, showed that she had lost a few marbles at a church event when she made a public comment about some private, and illicit goings on in the choir robe room. Just a teeny bit out of character for the very proper grande dame of the Alabama town that had been established by her grandfather. This



makes it a big week for Leia, who has just learned that that *Dark Knight* with whom she had somewhat drunkenly hooked up at an Atlanta Comic convention had given her another origin story to think about, a bi-racial one. And her step-sister has just thrown her husband out of *their* home. Leia heads to Birchville to see to granny, get the old house cleared out and Birchie placed where she can be looked after. But things get complicated when a long locked trunk is opened and an ancient secret comes to light. Have a nice day.

Joshilyn Jackson's *The Almost Sisters* uses a few biological/emotional pairings to highlight the underlying dichotomy of the South, a place that can offer the comforting warmth of caring community atop an undertow of ancient bigotry. Leia and her step-sister Rachel struggle with their competitiveness, forged very early when Leia's mother married Rachel's father. Leia's father had met an untimely end, a victim of a DUI. 90-year-old Birchie is bound at the hip to her lifelong bff, Wattie Price, the daughter of a family servant, but the best and closest friend Birchie has ever had. There are other bits of mirroring as well, fiscally dubious heads of household faring poorly in the managing of their family's finances, for example. And much more is to be seen through Leia's work.

#### **Joshilyn Jackson** - from Atlanta Magazine

Throughout the novel, Leia struggles to concoct an origin story for her *Violence in Violet* graphic novel. The insights Leia gains, to her relationship with her step-sister, to her relationship with her expected arrival, to the fetus's baby-daddy, and to her appreciation for the contradictions within her beloved South find an outlet in her drawing. Each relationship has an origin story, and in looking at the individual tales Jackson compiles a portrait of a place, a time, and how it got to be the way it is.

Both the hominess of this small Southern town and the darkness of some of the underlying attitudes offer a challenge for Leia as she uses her insight to the place to maneuver her way through the sundry challenges she faces.

In her recent novel about racism, *Small Great Things*, Jodi Picoult went with a full-on courtroom drama to cast a spotlight on what racism looks like. Joshilyn Jackson was born and raised there and lives there today. She knows it well. Her approach is to offer a very smart look at the layers that co-exist there, using very relatable people dealing with their family problems. And not only are the layers considered, but one's ability to perceive what is right there is called into question. There is drama, to be sure, but it is not of the ripped-from-the-headlines sort.

Readers of Jackson's earlier work know that she has a fondness for blended families and will not be disappointed here as she does mix-and-match, putting together pieces of families to make a functional whole. It works well, as it has in her earlier novels. She also has a affection for adolescent female characters and includes one here, as well as looking back at the past of some who are long past their teens. Faith usually provides one of the pillars of Jackson novels. There is certainly some of that here, but it seems that it is more in the communal aspect of faith, the public, rather than the contemplative element. The two old ladies belong to two town churches, one primarily black and one primarily white. Differing beliefs do not much enter into things, but social separations do.

Leia has it in mind that the old South will give way to a newer, more inclusive, more blended version. We can only hope she is right. Joshilyn Jackson has once again written a moving novel, one that engages with wonderfully-drawn characters and informs with astute and sensitive observation of a complex culture.

Whether you originated in the South or somewhere else, this trip to Birchville, where the old South is facing up to the New South, is one that is very much worth taking.

Review posted – 2/3/17

Publication date

---- 7/11/17 - hardcover

-----5/29/18 - Trade paperback

=====EXTRA STUFF

Links to the author's personal, Twitter, and FB pages

Reviews of other Jackson work

-----Someone Else's Love Story

-----The Opposite of Everyone

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## **Karen says**

Oh my, I really enjoyed this book. This is a book of Southern origins. It combines a story line of race relationships, super heroes, single motherhood, and long buried secrets.

I've only read one other book by this author and enjoyed both. I will be reading more of her work!

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## **Elizabeth of Silver's Reviews says**

A successful career, an ailing grandmother, a one-night stand, and a Southern family with untold secrets.

Leia had always been close to her grandmother, but did she really know her grandmother? After finding out her grandmother has been suffering with dementia for over 10 years, Leia puts the job she loves on hold and goes to Alabama to see what actually is going on.

What Leia finds at her grandmother's home isn't what she had expected, and coupled with her unexpected pregnancy was a bit ?overwhelmed.

Grandmother Birchie and her life-long friend, Wittie, are delightful characters and characters that can no longer live alone, but are putting up a fight.? When the secret in their attic is found, they get a reprieve from having to leave their home because the Sheriff ordered them to stay in the state.

THE ALMOST SISTERS had a lot of drama? and a lot of love?. I thoroughly enjoyed the storyline, the Southern charm, and especially the characters. They all were lovable, authentic, and sweet in their own way.

THE ALMOST SISTERS was a very enjoyable first book I have read by ?Ms. Jackson?. She has a marvelous writing style and a women's-fiction-theme-based story with some characters having unusual

problems and others with normal, everyday problems that the reader can relate to.

THE ALMOST SISTERS is a touching, endearing book about family.

I would recommend THE ALMOST SISTERS to readers who enjoy Southern living and adorable characters you wish you could spend some time with and will miss once you turn the last page.

THE ALMOST SISTERS is a book that will bring you closer to your own loved ones. 5/5

This book was given to me free of charge and without compensation by the publisher in return for a honest review.

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### **Jen says**

This is the 2nd novel I've read by this author and she continues to impress me. They tend to be written more on the lighter side and when I started this, I rolled my eyes and thought, really the protagonist is a cartoonist? A superhero one, too? With a one night stand?

Gag me. Is this a beach read?

Turns out there is more to the story than the surface stuff. Jackson is an engaging writer who takes a story and spins it with a weaving of lightness even with serious subjects - pregnancy, separation, murder, Alzheimer's and racism.

Throw in some southern charm, some humour and an aging, loveable grandma and it does not disappoint. The twist towards the end did surprise me and this is why I will continue to look for all Jackson writes. The only criticism I have was it was neatly packaged at the end and I'm not a fan of comic books, but it was still a very readable and enjoyable story. 3.75?? and rounding up to a 4.

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### **Angela M says**

This is the third book I have read by Joshilyn Jackson and with every one I read I want to read another. I have several of her earlier books to read yet, but I couldn't resist this recently published book given the chance to read it. This novel is so readable- I know people say that a lot and it may not make sense because all books can be read. For me it's the ease of reading about relatable characters, a realistic story infused with humor and comical moments amidst some crisis situations facing the characters. Leia at 38 is pregnant and doesn't even know the father's name but she does know that she is carrying a biracial baby. Rachel, her step sister who has led a seemingly perfect life is facing marital problems. Her grandmother, Birchie, the matriarch of her Alabama town founded by her stalwart family has big health issues - Lewy body dementia which causes her to act out and say things that no one in the town could possibly imagine would come out of her mouth. It's an incident at a church Fish Fry that causes a number of people to contact Leia. Of course, the situation is definitely a serious one, but it is a laugh out loud scene.

So Leia comes home to Alabama to help her grandmother only to find that things are not what she hoped they'd be and the place was still in so many ways a place she knew would not accept her son, a place where people thought of her Grandmother's best friend Wattie as the help. This is a family drama, but deeper in meaning focusing on the still existent racism reflected in this small southern town and awful secrets kept for

years. I'm not a fan of comic books and I've never read a graphic novel so I really wasn't taken by the fact that Leia is a graphic artist and creator of a comic book character. It did however have relevance to the story. The ending was maybe a little too neat but I really didn't mind. I plan to read the Jackson novels that I haven't read and look forward to her next.

I received an advanced copy of this book from William Morrow/HarperCollins through Edelweiss.

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## **Julie says**

The Almost Sisters by Joshilyn Jackson is a William Morrow publication.

An insane and highly addicting concoction of quirky southern drama-

Set in Alabama, this story centers around Leia Birch Briggs, a comic book illustrator, trying to give her most famous character new life with a prequel. But, her personal problems soon take precedent over her career difficulties, when, after tying one on at a comic convention, Leia discovers her one night stand with 'Batman' has resulted in an unexpected pregnancy.

But, before she can properly absorb her own situation, she must travel to a small Alabama town to look after her grandmother 'Birchie' who has been diagnosed with a form of dementia, but also finds herself embroiled in the marital woes of her sister Rachel and winds up taking care of her teenage niece, Lavender, temporarily.

If that wasn't enough to deal with, a trunk containing human remains, is discovered in Birchie's possession, making her a witness? Suspect? No one really knows, but the whole sordid truth is about to come spilling out.

Initially, Leia feels ill equipped to handle all this drama, consumed as she is with her own dilemmas. But, with Lavender's insights and meddling, Leia begins to slowly step up to the plate, gaining a new level of maturity, taking charge by doing what she must for her grandmother, niece, sister and her unborn child. Maybe not quite like her alter ego comic book superheroes, whose character run along side Leia's, but enough to keep her family from falling completely apart.

This book is filled with zany, quirky, and flawed characters all facing heavy, life altering situations, and they are nearly all related to or deeply connected to each other, making the situation even more volatile.

The story is complex, an odd mingling of old southern ways of thinking with modern phrasings and forward thinking, tinged with just a tiny bit of Southern Gothic. While heavier issues are explored, like race, and dementia, as well as the need for forgiveness, the story didn't become too overburdened or heavy until the last few chapters, where any lighter tones all but vanished and a very dark story emerged.

But, overall, the heavier atmosphere mixed surprisingly well with the lighter narrative, and of course any story that features a mysterious, old family secret, a little romance, and a little southern fried drama, is right up my alley.

This is the first book I've read by this author, but now that I have had a taste of her work, I believe I'll have to have a second helping!!

4 stars

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### **Diane Barnes says**

Every time I read a book by this author I come away feeling as though the characters are personal friends. Her first person narration, the humor, the contemporary issues, and her knowledge of human nature make the story come to life in a special way.

And boy, does she know the South! She knows our goodness, our badness, our stupidity and wisdom, our craziness and our tragedy.

In this book, she lets us see a little chink in the darkness of racial prejudice, and the hypocrisy of one group of people thinking they are superior to another.

I loved everything about this book, and the irreverent humor and self deprecating attitude of the heroine was just my cup of tea. Leia Birch Briggs made her living by writing and illustrating graphic novels, and that gave me pause at first, because I don't read them and have no interest in doing so. By the end of the book, I was such a fan of the one she was working on that I'm disappointed it's not a real book I can buy.

A special note to anyone in Goodreads Land who hasn't read this author because they think her books are chick-litty romances, let me assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. This lady writes about life and the human condition, in particular the way we manage those things here in the South. She makes me proud.

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### **Lori says**

I have wanted to read Joshilyn Jackson for awhile now and was thrilled to get my hands on her newest novel. There were aspects of this I enjoyed; the feisty southern ladies, the quaint southern town and the mystery of the bones. The comic book part, however, for me just didn't fit in the story. Overall, 3.5 stars.

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