



Heaven

By Angela Johnson

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Marley has lived in Heaven since she was two years old, when her mother found a postcard postmarked HEAVEN, OH on a park bench and decided that was where she wanted to raise her family.

And for twelve years, Marley's hometown has lived up to its name. She lives in a house by the river, has loving parents, a funny younger brother, good friends, and receives frequent letters from her mysterious Uncle Jack. Then one day a letter arrives from Alabama, and Marley's life is turned upside down. Marley doesn't even know who she is anymore -- but where can she go for answers, when she's been deceived by the very people she should be able to trust the most?

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Heaven By Angela Johnson Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

As in her *Gone from Home* (reviewed above), Johnson here explores the themes of what makes a place home and which people family. Fourteen-year-old Marley's tranquil life in Heaven, Ohio, turns hellish the day her family receives a letter from Alabama. The note (from the pastor of a church that was destroyed by arson) requests a replacement for Marley's baptismal record, and reveals that "Momma" and "Pops" are really Marley's aunt and uncle, and mysterious Jack (an alleged "uncle" with whom Marley has corresponded but doesn't remember) is her true father. In this montage of Marley's changing perceptions, Johnson presents fragments of the whole picture a little at a time: images of people, places (the Western Union building "1637" steps away from Marley's house) and artifacts (a box filled with love letters between her birth parents) gain significance as Marley begins to make sense of the past and integrate her perceptions into her new identity. The author's poetic metaphors describe a child grasping desperately for a hold on her reality ("It was one of those nights that started to go down before the sun did," she says of the evening the fateful letter arrives). The melding of flashbacks and present-day story line may be confusing initially, but readers who follow Marley's winding path toward revelation will be well rewarded. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 6-9-What makes a person who she is? Is it her name, the people she lives with, or is blood the only link to identity? Marley, 14, suddenly plunges head first into these complex questions when she discovers that the people she's been living with her entire life aren't her real parents. Butchy is not her real brother, and her mysterious Uncle Jack, who has been writing her short but beautiful letters for as long as she can remember, turns out to be her real, very absent father. In spare, often poetic prose reminiscent of Patricia MacLachlan's work, Johnson relates Marley's insightful quest into what makes a family. Her extreme anger with her supposed parents, who turn out to be her aunt and uncle, for not telling her the truth, for not being the perfect family that she'd always thought them to be, wars with her knowledge that not even her friend Shoogy Maple's model family is as perfect and beautiful as it seems. The various examples of "family" Marley encounters make her question what's real, what's true, what makes sense, and if any of that really matters as much as the love she continues to feel for her parents in spite of their seeming betrayal. Johnson exhibits admirable stylistic control over Marley's struggle to understand a concept that is often impossible to understand or even to define.

Linda Bindner, formerly at Athens Clarke County Library, GA

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 6⁺-10. In *Humming Whispers* (1995) and *Gone from Home*, Johnson writes powerfully about deep family sorrow and loss. Here she writes about happiness despite sorrow, about a teenager whose life has always been heaven. Marley, 14, lives in the small Ohio town of Heaven, rooted in her loving African American family, close to good friends, and part of a caring community. Then she discovers she is adopted-- Mom and Pops are really her aunt and uncle, and for a while, Heaven seems like hell. The paradise setup is too idyllic, and in the anguish of Marley's discovery and upheaval, everyone is absolutely perfectly supportive and understanding. And Marley's real dad comes home at last. What saves this from being generic Hallmark is Johnson's plain, lyrical writing about the people in Marley's life. Everyone has secrets. There are all kinds of loving families. Marley baby-sits for a devoted single-parent dad. The owner of the general store is like a mother to the neighborhood. In fact, the most troubled family is the "perfect" nuclear one of Marley's best friend, who needs as much support as Marley does. On the news, they hear about people

burning churches, but Johnson makes us see the power of loving kindness. *Hazel Rochman*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Edna Brooks:

What do you think about book? It is just for students since they're still students or the idea for all people in the world, the particular best subject for that? Simply you can be answered for that question above. Every person has several personality and hobby per other. Don't to be obligated someone or something that they don't desire do that. You must know how great as well as important the book Heaven. All type of book can you see on many resources. You can look for the internet options or other social media.

Courtney Cook:

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Elizabeth Schwartz:

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Corey Watts:

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