

<<别的家庭THE OTHER FAMILY>>

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内容概要

From the superb storyteller and quintessential women's fiction author, a new story about two families who must confront each other over an inheritance

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作者简介

Joanna Trollope has been writing fiction for more than 30 years. Some of her best known works include Daughters-in-Law, The Other Family, The Rector's Wife, A Village Affair, Other People's Children, and Marrying the Mistress. She was awarded the OBE in the 1996 Queen's Birthday Honors List for services to literature. She lives in England.

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章节摘录

CHAPTER ONE Looking back, it astonished her that none of them had broken down in the hospital. Even Dilly, who could be relied on to burst into tears over a shed eyelash, had been completely mute. Chrissie supposed it was shock, literally, the sudden suspension of all natural reactions caused by trauma. And the trauma had actually begun before the consultant had even opened his mouth. They just knew, all four of them, from the way he looked at them, before he said a word. They knew he was going to say, I'm so very sorry but, and then he did say it. He said it all the way through to the end, and they all stared at him, Chrissie and the three girls. And nobody uttered a cheep. Chrissie didn't know how she had got them home. Even though Tamsin and Dilly could drive, it hadn't crossed her mind to hand either of them the car keys. Instead, she had climbed wordlessly into the driver's seat, and Tamsin had got in unchallenged for once beside her, and the two younger ones had slipped into the back and even put their seat belts on without being reminded. Unheard of, usually. And Chrissie had started the car and driven, upright behind the wheel as if she was trying to demonstrate good posture, up Highgate Hill and down the other side towards home, towards the house they had lived in since Amy was born, eighteen years ago. Of course, there was no parking space directly outside the house. There seldom was in the evenings, after people got home from work. Chrissie said, Oh bother, in an overcontrolled, ladylike way, and Dilly said, from the backseat, There's a space over there, outside the Nelsons, and then nobody spoke while Chrissie maneuvered the car in, very badly, because they were all thinking how he would have been, had he been there, how he would have said, Ornamental objects shouldn't be asked to do parking. Gimme the keys, and Chrissie would well, might, anyway have laughed and thrown the keys at him ineptly, proving his point, and he'd have inserted the car neatly into an impossible space in no time so that they could all please him by saying, Show-off, in chorus. I make my living from showing off, he'd say. And don't you forget it. They got out of the car and locked it and trooped across the road to their own front door. There were no lights on. It had been daylight when they left, and anyway they were panicking because of the ambulance coming, and his frightening pallor and evident pain, so nobody thought of the return, how the return might be. Certainly, nobody had dared to think that the return might be like this. Chrissie opened the front door, while the girls huddled behind her on the porch as if it was bitterly cold and they were desperate to get into the warmth. It occurred to Chrissie, irrelevantly, that she should have swept the leaves off the porch, that it badly needed redecorating, that it had needed redecorating for years and Richie had always said that his granny, in North Shields on Tyneside, had scrubbed her front doorstep daily except for Sunday on her hands and knees. Daily. With a brush and a galvanized bucket. Chrissie took the keys out of the door, and dropped them. Tamsin leaned over her mother's bent back and switched on the hall lights. Then they all pushed past and surged down the hall to the kitchen, and Chrissie straightened up, with the keys in her hand, and tried to put them into the door's inside lock and found she was shaking so badly that she had to hold her right wrist with her left hand, in order to be steady enough. Then she walked down the hall, straight down, not looking in at the sitting room and certainly not in at his practice room, where the piano sat, and the dented piano bench, and the framed photographs and the music system and the racks and racks of CDs and the certificates and awards and battered stacks of old sheet music he would never throw away. She paused in the kitchen doorway. All the lights were on and so was the radio, at once, KISS FM or something, and the kettle was whining away and all three girls were scattered about, and they were all now crying and crying. Later that night, Chrissie climbed into bed clutching a hot-water bottle and a packet of Nurofen Extra. She hadn't used a hot-water bottle for years. She had an electric blanket on her side of their great bed. Richie, being a northerner, had despised electric blankets but she had felt a great need that night to have something to hold in bed, something warm and tactile and simple, so she had dug about in the airing cupboard and found a hot-water bottle that had once been given to Dilly, blue rubber inside a nylon-fur cover fashioned to look like a Dalmatian, its caricatured spotted face closing down over the stopper in a padded mask. One of the girls had put some tea by her bed. And a tumbler of what turned out to be whiskey. She never drank whiskey. Richie had liked whiskey, but she always preferred vodka. Or champagne. Richie would have made them drink champagne that evening; he always said champagne was grief medicine, temper medicine, disappointment medicine. But they

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couldnt do it. There was a bottle in the fridge there was almost always a bottle in the fridge and they took it out and looked at it and put it back again. Theyd drunk tea, and more tea, and Amy had had some cereal, and Tamsin had gone to telephone her boyfriend not very far away and they could hear her saying the same things over and over again, and Dilly had tried to pick some dried blueberries out of Amys cereal and Amy had slapped her, and then Chrissie had broken down at last herself, utterly and totally, and shocked them all into another silence. That shock, on top of the other unbearable shock, probably accounted for the whiskey. And her bed being turned down, and the bedside lamp on, and the bathroom all lit and ready, with a towel on the stool. But there was still a second towel on the heated rail, the supersize towel he liked, and there were still six pillows on the bed, and his reading glasses were on top of the pile of books he never finished, and there were his slippers, and a half-drunk glass of water. Chrissie looked at the glass with a kind of terror. His mouth had been on that glass, last night. Last night only. And she was going to have to lie down beside it because nothing on earth could persuade her either to touch that glass or to let anyone else touch it. Mum? Amy said from the doorway. Chrissie turned. Amy was still dressed, in a minidress and jeans and ballet slippers so shallow they were like a narrow black border to her naked feet. Chrissie said, gesturing at the bed, at the whiskey, Thank you. Sokay, Amy said. She had clamped some of her hair on top of her head with a red plastic clip and the rest hung unevenly round her face. Her face looked awful. Chrissie put her arms out. Come here. Amy came and stood awkwardly in Chrissies embrace. It wasnt the right embrace, Chrissie knew, it wasnt relaxed enough, comforting enough. Richie had been the one who was good at comfort, at subduing resistant adolescent limbs and frames into affectionate acquiescence. Sorry, Chrissie said into Amys hair. Amy sighed. What for? she asked. You didnt kill him. He just died. For being here, Chrissie wanted to say, for being here when he isnt. We just have to do it, she said instead, hour by hour. We just have to get through. Amy shifted, half pulling away. I know. Chrissie looked at the Nurofen. Want something to relax you? Help you sleep? Amy grimaced. She shook her head. Chrissie said, What are the others doing? Dillys got her door shut. Tams talking to Robbie. Still? Still, Amy said. She looked round the bedroom. Her glance plainly hurried over the slippers, the far pillows. I dont know what to do. Nor me, Chrissie said. Amy began to cry again. Chrissie tightened the arm round her shoulders, and pressed Amys head against her. I know, baby I cant stand it. Do you, Chrissie said, want to sleep with me? Amy stopped crying. She looked at the extra pillows. She shook her head, sniffing. Couldnt. Sorry. Dont have to be sorry. Just a suggestion. Well none of us sleep, wherever we are. When I wake up next, Amy said, therell be a second before I remember. Wont there? Chrissie nodded. Amy disengaged herself and trailed towards the door. In the doorway she paused and took the red clip out of her hair and snapped it once or twice. At least, she said, not turning, not looking at her mother, at least weve got his name still. At least were all still Rossiters. She gave a huge shuddering sigh. Im going to play my flute. Yes, Chrissie said. Yes. You do that. Amy flicked a glance at her mother. Dad liked my flute, she said. Then she went slowly away down the landing, shuffling in her little slippers, and Chrissie heard her starting tiredly on the stairs that led to the second-floor conversion that she and Richie had decided on and designed so that Dilly and Amy could have bedrooms of their own. She did sleep. She had thought she neither could, nor should, but she fell into a heavy, brief slumber and woke two hours later in order to fall instead into a pit of grief so deep that there seemed neither point nor possibility of climbing out of it. She had no idea how long she wrestled down there, but at some moment she exchanged her embrace of the Dalmatian hot-water bottle for one of Richies pillows, scented with the stuff he used on the gray streaks in his hair, and found herself crushing it, and groaning, and being suddenly and simultaneously aware that there were lines of incipient daylight above the curtain tracks, and that a bird or two were tuning up in the plane tree outside the window. She rolled over and turned on the light. It was six thirteen. She was six hours and thirteen minutes, only, into the first day of this chapter of life which she had always dreaded and, consequently, had never permitted herself to picture. Ill be a hopeless widow, she used to say to Richie,...

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媒体关注与评论

A heartwarming story of renewal and hope intelligent and moving. --Booklist

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