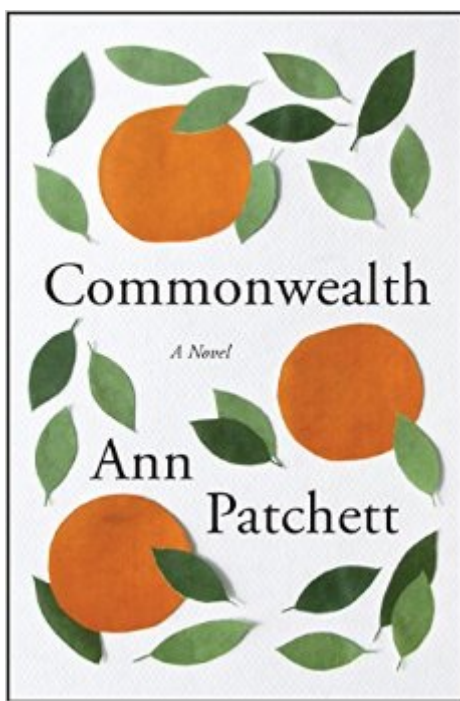


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# Commonwealth



## Synopsis

The acclaimed, bestselling author—winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Orange Prize—tells the enthralling story of how an unexpected romantic encounter irrevocably changes two families' lives. One Sunday afternoon in Southern California, Bert Cousins shows up at Franny Keating's christening party uninvited. Before evening falls, he has kissed Franny's mother, Beverly—thus setting in motion the dissolution of their marriages and the joining of two families. Spanning five decades, *Commonwealth* explores how this chance encounter reverberates through the lives of the four parents and six children involved. Spending summers together in Virginia, the Keating and Cousins children forge a lasting bond that is based on a shared disillusionment with their parents and the strange and genuine affection that grows up between them. When, in her twenties, Franny begins an affair with the legendary author Leon Posen and tells him about her family, the story of her siblings is no longer hers to control. Their childhood becomes the basis for his wildly successful book, ultimately forcing them to come to terms with their losses, their guilt, and the deeply loyal connection they feel for one another. Told with equal measures of humor and heartbreak, *Commonwealth* is a meditation on inspiration, interpretation, and the ownership of stories. It is a brilliant and tender tale of the far-reaching ties of love and responsibility that bind us together.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ann Patchett's new novel, "Commonwealth", surpassed my expectations and solidly earned a spot on my ["Best of 2016"](#) list. This character-driven domestic drama swept me up into the lives of the Cousins and Keating families as Patchett deftly revealed secrets and tragedies over the span of

five decades. Be assured that *Commonwealth* is not without Patchett's wry humor, after all, it IS about family. "Commonwealth" is a novel about two families whose fates are set into motion one LA afternoon in the 1960s at a Christening party to which a large bottle of gin is brought, and ripe oranges happen to be plentiful on the neighborhood trees. If any one detail of that day had been different, so would be the lives of the two families that were set into motion like a cascade of falling dominoes. "Commonwealth" is immediately engrossing; I can't imagine reading the first chapter and not being compelled to read on. The novel floats back and forth in time and among the members of the Cousins and Keating families, specifically the six children united by their hatred of their parents. Don't let the term "domestic drama" fool you into thinking this is light fare; Patchett can do in 300 pages what Franzen does in 600 - paint a fully realized picture of family life with all its many facets: humor, despair, evil thoughts, sibling rivalry, fraught relationships, tragedies, revenge and betrayal. Speaking of betrayal, Patchett employs a neat little conceit by having one of the characters reveal family secrets to a famous author who uses these as the basis of a prize-winning bestseller called, "Commonwealth". Several sections of the novel deal with how particular family members react to their lives being re-told and re-shaped for mass consumption.

Ann Patchett hits the trifecta with *Commonwealth* - "great writing, great story telling and great insight" - all told in a matter of fact style with a touch of humor. *Commonwealth* is about family - which means it's about love and hate, betrayal and forgiveness, expectations and disappointment, life and death. The story begins when deputy District Attorney Albert (Bert) Cousins crashes Franny Keating's christening party, meets and immediately falls in love with Franny's extraordinarily beautiful mother Beverly and two separate families suddenly become intertwined. Bert leaves his pregnant wife Teresa and their three children and Beverly leaves her police officer husband Fix. Beverly and Bert marry and along with Beverly's two daughters, Caroline and Franny, they move from Los Angeles to Virginia. Teresa is left with four children to raise on her own in Los Angeles, although Bert does suggest that she move with them to Virginia. That was all it took for Teresa Cousins to spend the rest of her life in Los Angeles. The Cousins children (Cal, Holly, Jennette and Albie) come to Virginia every year and the six children together wreak the kind of havoc that only six children very close in age with very little parental oversight can create. The six children held in common one overarching principle that cast their potential dislike for one another down to the bottom of the minor leagues: they disliked the parents. They hated them. When a tragedy strikes, the summers together come to an end, although a few years later, after setting fire to the art room at his school, Albie is sent to live in Virginia. The story is told in alternating

chronology.

Commonwealth by Ann Patchett is a very highly recommended domestic saga involving four parents and six children, and covering five decades. Commonwealth is one of the best books I have had the pleasure to read this year. By chance, just to escape the chaos at his home, Bert Cousins leaves his wife Teresa and their 3 children at home while he attends Beverly and Fix Keating's christening party for their second daughter, Franny. He barely knows her father, Fix, but before he leaves the party he has kissed and fallen for Beverly, thus setting up the dissolution of both marriages. Bert and Beverly marry, move from California to Virginia, and merge the two families. Every summer all six children are together in Virginia, and the two Cousins girls, Caroline and Franny, join forces with the Keatings, Cal, Holly, Jeannette, and Albie. The step-siblings form a bond and genuine affection for each other that based largely on their shared adventures and disappointment in and resentment toward their parents. During their time in Virginia the children are left largely unsupervised and engage in some risky activities. When one of the children has an accident, the others ban together to tell all the adults the same story. They keep secret what really happened. The accident means that the shared summers have ended, although the loyalty the step-siblings feel toward each other doesn't diminish. This begs the questions: How reliable are the memories and perceptions of children? How much does a broken family affect children? When Franny is in her mid-twenties she meets a famous writer she admires and begins an affair with him that has far reaching consequences.

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