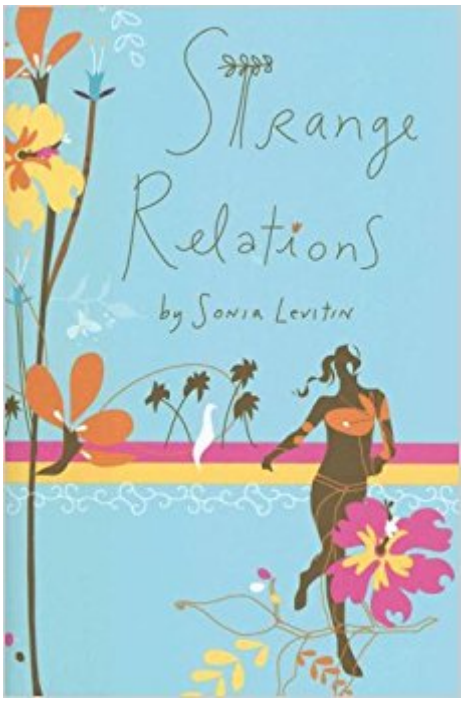
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# Strange Relations




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## Synopsis

A summer in paradise. That’s all Marne wants. That’s all she can think of when she asks her parents permission to spend the summer in Hawaii with Aunt Carole and her family.But Marne quickly realizes her visit isn’t going to be just about learning to surf and morning runs along the beach, despite the cute surfer boy she keeps bumping into. For one thing, Aunt Carole isn’t even Aunt Carole anymoreÃ¢â ¬â •she’s Aunt Chaya, married to a Chasidic rabbi and deeply rooted in her religious community. Nothing could be more foreign to Marne, and fitting into this new cultureÃ¢â ¬â •and house full of kidsÃ¢â ¬â •is a challenge. But as she settles into her newfound family’s daily routine, she begins to think about spirituality, identity, and finding a place in the world in a way she never has before.This rich novel is a window into a different life and gets to the very heart of faith, identity, and family ties.

## Book Information

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Hardcover: 304 pages
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Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces
Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews
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Age Range: 12 and up
Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 7-10Ã¢â ¬â œWhile her parents travel for business, Marne, 15, looks forward to spending the summer in Hawaii with her aunt and her family. She’s not quite sure what to expect, since her mom has been estranged for several years from Aunt Carole (now Chaya) due to Carole’s extreme beliefs. Marne views the trip as an opportunity to expand her horizons, get a tan, run on the beach,

and meet cute boys. What she encounters is another world, not just because Hawaii is an island community, but because Aunt Chaya, her rabbi husband, and their seven children are Hasids. Marne's secular Jewish upbringing hasn't prepared her for the strong level of religious devotion and the constant hard work that her aunt embraces with love every day. Marne slowly discovers the deep joy that this lifestyle brings as she helps with the children and becomes an integral part of the selfless community of women. When her best friend arrives for a vacation, Marne is stunned by Kim's shallowness; she realizes that she isn't the same person she used to be, and that her experiences have helped her to accept the terrible tragedy that devastated her family five years earlier. It's rare to find such well-developed characters, empathetic and sensitive religious treatment, and carefully crafted plotlines in one novel. Levitin's strong portrayal of a young woman who is trying to find her own beliefs and develop a sense of family makes this novel a real winner.Ã¢â ¬â œSusan Riley, Mount Kisco Public Library, NY Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

*Starred Review* After her mother receives a work assignment in Paris, 15-year-old Marne is eager to spend the summer in Hawaii with relatives. She yearns to escape the unspoken grief and tension that remains at home following her younger sister's disappearance years earlier. Imagining languid afternoons at the beach, Marne is confronted with a much different scene on arrival in Hawaii. Aunt Chaya and her husband, Yitz, a Hasidic rabbi, oversee a chaotic household filled with children and visiting members of their Jewish community. Marne, raised by secular Jewish parents, finds the cultural differences startling. "Are they from Mars?" she writes in an e-mail to her best friend, Kim, and she feels resentful when her conservatively dressed cousins question her shorts and tank tops. Gradually, though, she realizes that she loves the feeling of Shabbat—"the sudden quiet, the comfort"—and when Kim comes to visit and wants to hook up with some local guys, Marne feels on a "different wavelength." Too few novels give such a revealing, believable view of contemporary Jewish American kids wrestling with tradition and faith. The debates and cultural details sometimes feel like documentary, but Marne's authentic, first-person voice wraps purposefully inserted passages into an honest, sensitively told story that's filled with spot-on teen talk and inner monologues. Marne's active, earnest search for who she is and who she wants to become will touch readers of all backgrounds. Engberg, Gillian

If Sonia Levitin hadn't been born to write, she might well have considered becoming a tightrope walker. She has always taken risks, balancing stories of pleasurable appeal with deeper messages

reflecting commitment to truth and personal growth. In this book for teens, she successfully navigates a narrow path, taking on issues of tradition and conflicting values, introducing readers to a richly textured culture while giving them a heroine to whom they can truly relate. For five years, Marne, 15, watched her secular Jewish parents retreat into work and silence in the face of a terrible family loss. Given a chance to spend her summer with her mother's "odd" sister Carole in Hawaii, she envisions Paradise: long days on the beach, cute surfers, and even more fun when her friend Kim's hedonistic family flies in for a condo vacation nearby. However, immediately on arrival she discovers that Carole, now Aunt Chaya -- wife of a Hasidic rabbi, and mother of seven -- is an energetic, complex woman who takes great joy in her usefulness, her family and her community. Plunged into a chaotic but lively household, with little chance to laze around, Marne is confronted with challenges, annoyances, temptations, responsibilities and, ultimately, insights into her own nature. After Kim arrives, Marne sees her and her family through new eyes. Characters, plot and opposing lifestyles are well depicted against the exotic background of Oahu. Levitin has dexterously pulled together her recurrent themes of loss, courage, love, struggle against mindless conformity and the difficult search for personal integrity in a modern world, wrapping them in a novel that's contemporary, sensitive and believable. Ages 12 and up. Reviewed by Rita Frischer

It seems like such a good idea. Marne knows that her mom's sister, Carole, lives in Hawaii, so she has only to convince her parents that she should go for a long overdue visit to her relatives. She'll run along the beach, maybe even surf and swim in the ocean. Best of all, her friend will also be visiting Hawaii, so there will be no end of fun. When her parents agree to Marne's plan, she knows she's in for the perfect summer in the paradise of the Hawaiian islands!It doesn't take long for Marne to realize that her summer may not be as flawless as she'd hoped. Her aunt, who now calls herself "Chaya" and her uncle, a rabbi, have seven children. Marne is kept busy chasing after sticky toddlers and running errands for her busy, controlling aunt. She doesn't mind helping out, but the religious world of her cousins is far different from the life she's used to back home in L.A.Although spending Friday nights at Shabbos dinners is a far cry from the fun-filled, tropical nights she'd envisioned, Marne finds herself strangely drawn to some of the peaceful rituals practiced by her relatives. But, how will this fit in with her old life? Will her best friend, Kim, think Marne's becoming weird? What about Jeff, the hunky surfer she met while jogging on the beach? Little by little, she's figuring out who her family is and who she herself wants to become.STRANGE RELATIONS is an enticing read for anyone interested in exploring different cultures and lifestyles. Marne is a wonderful guide, who gives a thorough glimpse of the life of Chasidic Jews, as seen by a modern

teen.Reviewed by: Julie M. Prince

Sonia Levitin’s STRANGE RELATIONS tells of a summer in paradise in Hawaii with an aunt - but Marne realizes her Hawaii stay will be filled with challenges when she confronts a much-changed aunt and the foreign culture of a Chasidic rabbi. An outstanding story of romance and change evolves for older readers.

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