



# Outside Valentine

*Liza Ward*

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## **Outside Valentine** Liza Ward

Every so often a novel comes along that is capable of redeeming the losses it so devastatingly conveys. Disturbing, bittersweet, and lyrical, this is a story of people torn apart by tragedy and yet, finally, transformed by love.

A debut novelist interweaves a trio of voices--haunting, dangerous, full of longing--mysteriously linked by a shocking crime and the search to heal the past

Many long years have passed since the winter of blinding white when Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate drove across the hushed midwestern landscape and left a trail of blood and pain. So why does Lowell, a Manhattan collector of antiquities, still dream of what happened, despite his wife's best attempts to draw him back and offer comfort? And who is Susan, the teenager who appoints herself a detective, piecing together the story of the murders while wondering if she'll ever be loved like Starkweather loved his girl?

And then there's Caril Ann herself, who takes us back to relive the ride she swears she could not control. It began on the day Charlie first saw her, dangling her bare legs off the edge of a tree house. It ended outside Valentine, Nebraska, on that night when she still believed that life could somehow go back to being normal .

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Every so often a novel comes along that is capable of redeeming the losses it so devastatingly conveys. Disturbing, bittersweet, and lyrical, Liza Ward's *Outside Valentine* is a story of people torn apart by tragedy and yet, finally, transformed by love.

## **Outside Valentine Details**

Date : Published August 1st 2005 by Picador (first published 2004)

ISBN : 9780312424893

Author : Liza Ward

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# From Reader Review *Outside Valentine* for online ebook

## Ron says

Ward's storytelling is something like Alice Hoffman's, with darker moments out of Joyce Carol Oates. There are long internal passages as characters think, feel, and wonder restlessly, yearning for love, attention, someone - anyone - to care about them and lift the veil of loneliness surrounding them. When they talk to each other, they seldom say what they really mean. Their world is frozen like the deep Nebraska winter of 1958, in which the Starkweather murders take place.

The theme of loneliness, emotional abandonment, and the obsessive desire for love are played out in several story lines, all reflections of young Caril Ann Fugate's fatal attraction to the boy with a gun who romances her and draws her along in his bloody wake. Readers who find her parts of the novel compelling (and they are), will discover that Ward devotes far more of the book to less dramatic characters and situations, which are interesting only as they parallel or intersect with the account of Caril Ann and Charlie. Crime fiction fans will find these stretches of the novel slow going.

Curiously, Ward reimagines the Starkweather-Fugate story - as if the actual events lack a narrative integrity of their own. The two young people were eventually arrested not "outside Valentine" but in Douglas, Wyoming, after fleeing across the entire length of Nebraska. Readers interested in the story of that flight will find instead a more reflective and thoughtful study of the human heart.

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## Mandy says

The first book in quite a long time that I just cannot finish. This book seemed tailor-made for me. I love true crime, and this novel is based on the killing spree of Charlie Starkweather and Caril-Ann Fugate.

I really liked watching the film *Badlands* which is about the same subject.

But this book, I just can't do it. I couldn't care less about any of the characters, not one. It goes along in three different time-lines, and I hated every one of them.

This book has some high ratings, and lots of praise, but it just wasn't for me.

So after trying, and failing, a number of times to read this, I have decided that it's time for it to go.

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## Gracey says

2.5 stars This book tried a little too hard for me. It was also even more upsetting than I expected from the subject matter. Not bad, per se, just too much.

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## Robert Beveridge says

Liza Ward, *Outside Valentine* (Henry Holt, 2004)

*Outside Valentine* is pretty much tailor-made for me. I'm a sucker for the subject matter (three stories

paralleling the killing spree of Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate), the book was released by a major press but dropped off the radar after getting almost no publicity at all, and a whole lot of critics liked it a whole lot. And yet I've spent the last couple of years trying to get myself to like it and failing miserably. It's not that the book is badly-written, but there's not a single character in here, not even Caril Ann Fugate, who makes me care what's going to happen here, and the only plot point with any suspense surrounding it at all is the contents of the safe-deposit box in the 1991 story. And even that wasn't enough to keep me going past the halfway point. There are a slew of well-drawn characters here who are simply wandering aimlessly through their settings. (And even Terence Malick was capable of making Starkweather and Fugate wander aimlessly through *Badlands* in a compelling manner.) November is always them month where I go through and prune the reading list of stuff I simply can't bear to read any longer. I axed five books this year, which is a new high for me. Of all of them, *Outside Valentine* is the one I most regret, but there's way too much reading to do for me to try and force myself to finish this one. (zero)

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### **Darci says**

I didn't realize this was based on a real-life tragedy, but the idea that this story did actually happen sends chills down my spine. This is completely different than most books I read, and the story reminded me of *Monster*, because it seemed like these two killers simply got ahead of themselves and didn't have any way to get out of the muck they'd dug their wheels into. It was interesting, and certainly a good read, but I just can't fall in love with stories that depress me and have no good redeeming value. No one is completely sympathetic, and although the murderers have been severely wounded by the adults in their lives, they seemingly possess no mercy or kindness in their own hearts. I also have a hard time loving stories with several narrators and although the author does well, I had a hard time figuring out how the varied people all fit together at first. Worth reading, not worth going crazy about.

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### **Saleh MoonWalker says**

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### **Julia says**

When I started this book, I found it confusing, as the author wrote in the first person, but from three different characters point of view. It didn't take long for me to adjust to the differing voices, though, as they were very distinctive. As I reached the last half of the book, I found it hard to put down.

Much of the material was frightening to read, but was written with so much honesty and realism that it was riveting. I only wish that Susan had been more developed as an adult. I kept wondering what she was thinking in all the time that Lowe was gone.

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## **Katherine Farren says**

I had no idea this novel was based on real life events! Had I known the murder story was true I may have been more intrigued. Nonetheless, I enjoyed the story of Starkweather and Fugate far more than the love story between the two main characters. I was disappointed by the ending. I was hoping for something much more dramatic or tragic to happen to the couple, just as Starkweather's and Fugate's fates were.

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## **Joanne says**

This was an interesting book. I was 16 years old when the Charles Starkweather/Caril Fugate rampage took place, and it traumatized me. Growing up in a small town in Eastern Colorado I related to the story completely.

I didn't realize until later when I googled some research that Liza Ward is actually a granddaughter of the couple that was murdered in Lincoln, Nebraska. She changed the names of the victims in the book, so I didn't pick up on the relationship. I would be interested if anyone felt as I did, that two generations later, there are still scars left from such a tragic death of her grandparents. I would have liked a little more information, but Liza chose not to do a lot of research, so she imagined most of the story.

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## **Ellen says**

In 1957 in Lincoln, Nebraska, Charlie Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate went on a killing spree that ended the life of 11 people. Caril Ann is one of the narrators of this fiction novel based on the crime. She narrates the 1957 section while a young girl named "Puggy" tells the story of 1962. Puggy lives a few blocks away from the home of 3 of the murder victims and she has developed an obsession with the crime and the teenaged son who was away at boarding school when the murderers entered his home. In the 1991 section, we meet Lowell, a middle-aged husband and father who has never had a closeness with his wife or children. The three stories have a thread in common and the story jumps between the three narrators throughout the book.

This is probably one of the most depressing books I have ever read and it was a struggle to finish it. Of course the murders cast a large shadow over the story but no one, and I do mean not a single person, is ever happy for 5 minutes. This was certainly not what I had expected.

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## **Bamboozlepig says**

After a long string of DNF novels (most of which I didn't even note on here because I didn't get past the first couple of pages on them), this book proved to be interesting. Ward's novel about the Starkweather murder spree across Nebraska in 1957-1958 encompassed three narrative viewpoints: Caril Fugate, Charlie Starkweather's teenaged girlfriend; Lowell Bowman, son of the rich couple slain in their Lincoln home (although Ward sets their house in Valentine); and Susan, a young girl fascinated in 1962 by the Starkweather crimes, particularly the murder of Lowell's parents. All the narratives tie in together at the end.

Ward does a good job of balancing the three views in first person, making each voice unique enough that you can tell who is who without the identifiers at the head of each chapter. She also has some absolutely breathtaking descriptions in the story, so the prose part works well. I had a harder time connecting to Lowell's sections because he often came off rather self-centered, but Susan and Caril I had no problem with. All three characters are immensely lonely...Caril falls in with Charlie Starkweather after she feels like no one understands her at home. Susan's mother walks out on Susan and Susan's father because she feels stifled by the small-town atmosphere of Valentine. Susan is left trying to understand her mother's departure and in the course of her obsession with the Bowman murders (and Lowell), she befriends the girl who lives in the house next to the Bowmans' home, just so she can watch their house and wonder about Lowell. She realizes even in the friend's home, family doesn't always mean togetherness, it can also mean feeling alone among your blood relation. Lowell's sections are set in 1991 and he reflects back on his marriage, wondering if he ever really loved his wife at all. He's also left wondering about his parents' marriage as he looks over the contents of a shoebox he retrieved from a safe deposit box. I would've liked that angle to play out a little earlier in his sections because it felt like too much time was spent on him moping over his marriage, while ignoring until the end the truths of his own parents' marriage, which set the foundation for how he viewed relationships in the future.

And here's the other issues I had with the book. Ward stays mostly true to the Starkweather case as far as timeline goes and as far as the real life names of Starkweather's victims...EXCEPT the Bowmans. The Bowmans in real life were C. Lauer Ward and his wife, Clara Ward (along with their maid, Lillian Fencil). Liza Ward is the granddaughter of C. Lauer Ward and the Lowell character is based on her father, Michael, who was the Wards' only child (he was away at school during the murders and was thus spared from Starkweather's spree). Why in the world would Ward change the names of her grandparents and her father, but leave intact the real names of the other victims? She wrote the book with her father's permission, so it wasn't done to protect either him or her grandparents. That was the first thing that kind of jolted me in the book.

The other thing was the rewrite of how Starkweather and Fugate were captured. In the book, she has them being captured on a farm outside of Valentine. In real life, Starkweather was captured after leading the cops on a chase in Douglas, Wyoming. They shot out the windshield of his car and a piece of glass cut him, making him think he'd been shot and was going to die. He then pulled over and gave up. The real life capture was much more intense than the fictionalized capture that Ward wrote and the result was a rather blah finale to the Fugate/Starkweather arc. And I don't know why Ward went with such a disappointing ending...as a true crime buff, I found it annoying as hell because you'd have THOUGHT she would've maintained historical accuracy in a book based on the real life crimes. Of course, Truman Capote took creative liberties with the facts of the Clutter murder case in "In Cold Blood", so maybe Ward chose to take liberties as well in hopes of emulating Capote.

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## Nancy says

I'm not sure this book belongs in the non-fiction category. I was about half way through when I realized the author is the granddaughter of the Lincoln couple that was murdered. Ward has taken a tragic real life event and somewhat fictionalized it. Changed the names of the characters, not covered all the details. She writes from three perspectives = one of the perpetrators, Caril Ann Fugate, the Lincoln couple's son, and the son's wife. I was curious how much the figures in Liza Ward's story were based on any research, interviews, personal experience, or if they were imagined. Regardless, I thought the characterizations were well done, the piece was atmospheric. Starkweather and Fugate obviously came from dysfunctional families. You can't

identify with them, nor would their lack of normalcy ever excuse the crimes. However, the victims' survivors develop a dysfunctionality of their own. I can't begin to imagine how anyone would survive the violent murder of a family member. Dismal story, well told. I am have been transplanted into NE. Its surprising there are people who have clear memories of this case. So I went looking for some research after reading this.

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### **Rose says**

I found this book at the Goodwill...great place to find good books! The story is told from different perspectives. Caril Ann is a young impressionable teen when Charlie finds her in a tree house. Charlie is a murderous young man and takes her along on a rampage. Susan is a lonely teenager who is facinated by the story of Charlie Starkweather and Caril Ann, and years later she befriends the lonely girl that lives next door to the house where Starkweather killed a wife and husband. Lowell is the man whose parents were killed by Starkweather when he was just a young boy, and as an adult, his life is falling apart. This is a disturbing story but there are redeeming qualities in seeing how Lowell comes to terms with what happened to his family, the role Susan played in that, and Caril Ann's rehabilitation.

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### **Deereads says**

Really enjoyed the style of writing and I liked the movement from character to character. I couldn't put it down. I loved how things ended in the last chapter.

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### **Jane says**

This book is what I guess you'd call "fact-based fiction", based on the Charles Starkweather/Caril Ann Fugate killing spree in Nebraska in 1958.

It is told from the point of view of Caril, Lowell (son of two of the victims), and Susan (a young girl who is obsessed with the murders and later marries Lowell). It tells how the murders affected families, friends, and neighbors for generations after they took place.

I remember these events well since I lived only about 20 miles away from Lincoln. I was attending a small rural school at the time and I remember we kept the license plate number of the car they were purported to be in written on the black board. We had this plan for what we'd do if they came to our school. Seems like it involved hiding behing the door with a ball bat. Since Caril was only a few years older than I was, I could never believe she was a willing accomplice to the killing.

And apparently that is also the attitude of the author. That's surprising because she is actually the granddaughter of two of the victims, Lauer and Clara Ward (called the Bowmans in the book).

One thing that puzzled me most of the way through the book was why it was titled Outside Valentine since Starkweater and Fugate were never near Valentine, they were captured near Douglas, Wyoming. Maybe the author just thought that made a more interesting title.

