



Auslander

Mary Powell

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Auslander—the German word for “outsider.” In this novel, four women explore the many ways one can be an outsider geographically, culturally, and emotionally. They chronicle the life of the Jahn family in the close-knit German community of Schoenberg, Texas, during the '60s, '70s and '80s. Their counterpoint dialogues draw us into the family's marriages and separations, births and deaths, business failures, and moments of joy and into the German-Texan culture with its sometimes rigid traditions and prejudices. The voices we hear are from Queenie, matriarch of the family and wife of Beno; Carol Anne, the bride of Queenie's son, Fritz; Vera, the niece Queenie and Beno tried to raise as a daughter; and Sheila, Carol Anne's cabaret-singing mother from Houston.

Fritz Jahn, young, ambitious, and reserved, is the center around which the four women revolve. He truly loves Carol Anne but cannot understand her inability to settle down in Schoenberg. His closeness with Vera threatens to go beyond brotherly love and complicates Vera's relationship with Carol Anne and Queenie. Sheila is worldly, practical and puzzled by conventional family life. Perhaps the most compelling voice belongs to Queenie, the one who holds the family together. Speaking in the inverted sentence structure of those for whom German is the more natural language, she interprets and comments on what she sees with insight and wisdom.

Mary Powell, a resident of the Hill Country, captures that area's climate and geography in rich descriptions of fields and wildflowers and terrifyingly real scenes of a flash flood. She is equally insightful in portraying the lingering German culture of small towns like Schoenberg.

In *Auslander* Powell creates a powerful and realistic story of a family defined by their heritage yet sharing universal joys and sorrows.

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