



★ **Is Mother Dead**

Vigdis Hjorth

Charlotte Barslund, Translator

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In Vigdis Hjorth's novel *Is Mother Dead*, a woman takes drastic action to figure out where her relationship with her family went wrong.

After thirty years, Johanna is finally back in Oslo, the city where she grew up. In all that time, she never even considered reconnecting with her family, who viewed her decision to abandon her husband, become an artist, and move to America as the ultimate betrayal. But now, Johanna's physical proximity to her mother leads to an irresistible temptation—and to a relentless, remorseless search for the answers that may consume them both.

At first, Johanna seems like an ordinary woman with reasonable questions about the family who tried to mold her in their image, and who then rejected her for rejecting them. Over time, her preoccupation with her estranged family grows, driving her to extreme, invasive measures. Her obsession propels the story toward its tense conclusion.

The narrative moves between the present, as Johanna wonders what her family is like now, and the past, where the seeds of their estrangement were planted, one by one. Every old woman on the street becomes a potential window into her mother's daily routine; every moment alone is another chance to reflect on her own lonely childhood, and its rare glimpses into her mother's troubled psyche and broken dreams.

In the end, Johanna finds she cannot pry the answers she wants from the mother whom she still loves despite everything. All she has unearthed are her own complicated feelings about her family—and a way to move forward, unencumbered by the past.

Is Mother Dead is a Norwegian domestic thriller about the lengths to which people will go to dig up truths that others want to stay buried.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2022)

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