



## The Hottest State

*Ethan Hawke*

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## **The Hottest State** Ethan Hawke

When William meets Sarah at a bar appropriately called the Bitter End, he is a few months short of his twenty-first birthday and about to act in his first movie. He is so used to getting what he wants that he has never been able to care too deeply for anyone. But all of that is about to change. And it is Sarah--bold and shy, seductive and skittish--who will become William's undoing and his salvation.

William's affair with Sarah will take him from a tenement on the Lower East Side to a hotel room in Paris, from a flip proposal of marriage to the extremities of outraged need and the wisdom that comes only to true survivors. Anyone who reads *The Hottest State* will encounter a writer who can charm, dazzle, and break the heart in a single paragraph.

## **The Hottest State Details**

Date : Published October 27th 1998 by Vintage (first published 1996)

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Author : Ethan Hawke

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Genre : Fiction, Romance, Contemporary, Novels

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## From Reader Review The Hottest State for online ebook

### **Karen says**

I really enjoyed this book. Ethan Hawke's writing is fantastic. It flows so smoothly and effortlessly that you want to read it straight through; which is what I almost did. The story was realistic and captured my attention right away. I look forward to reading more books by Ethan Hawke.

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### **Karen says**

What a bizarre book. I did read it in around 1 day - couldn't put it down. But in the end I felt like it had been a waste of time. This book is basically about a guy who falls in love and then the girl dumps him and he takes it badly, but the whole time it seems like it's gonna be more - which is why I couldn't put it down. For awhile I thought William was in the midst of a psychotic break - hearing voices, erratic, violent behavior, strange physical manifestations like having to pee 20 times in an hour. But then he just recovers and gets over the girl with no explanation for all that. Then I thought maybe he was figuring out he was gay - nope. I wasn't sympathetic to his character or the girl who was supposedly so fabulous. And so many things didn't hang together - like Sarah grew up in CT, lived in Seattle, then moved to NY, but had never been on a plane? Yet she has a passport ready to go when he invites her to France? And she invites him to visit her preschool classroom and asks him to take a little girl to the bathroom then lie down with her while she falls asleep at naptime? Excuse me? That's a preschool whose days are numbered... Can't believe they turned this into a movie.

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### **Rajesh Kurup says**

Surprise, surprise, surprise. Ethan Hawke can write, well. His debut novel perfectly captures the essence of being young and in love and then the pain of breakup. I felt deeply those little moments of first falling in love, the uncertainty and self doubt as you wonder what is it about me that she sees. Am I good enough, are we good enough. The story changes dramatically as their relationship turns. When Samantha decides that she isn't really ready for a relationship, Will's reaction is unhealthy, to say the least. The tragedy of youth is that Will doesn't have the life experience to strip away the personal feelings about him from her feelings about where she is as an individual.

I cared about William and Sarah like I haven't cared about characters in a while. They've both loved and lost, their home lives were disastrous, but they both are alive, but in differing ways which is why I felt drawn in. As the story progresses and it becomes more of Will's story and less of theirs, we see more of how his past affects his ability to rationally approach relationships.

There are many perfect moments of dialogue. Between William and Sarah, in the short scene with them and Sarah's elderly mother, with William and his friends. Hawke has a great ear and puts it to good use here.

This is not a criticism of Hawke, but there is an easy connection between The hottest state and Reality Bites. Not the stories, but the character would fit well at a party together. Both works have a heavy Gen-X feel to them.

I picked this up on a whim almost entirely because I like Hawke, particularly the 90s indie and theatre actor

version. I'm glad I did look forward to reading more.

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## CC says

I read this such a long time ago, when it first came out. It's a novella, not a novel, per se. The characters felt familiar and the angst of William loving someone who didn't even know if she "liked" him half the time much less "loved" him gave the piece an honest vibe.

However, the lack of details throughout left me frustrated. Sarah is a nanny yet never seems to work, though she still manages to afford a New York apartment. William is an actor. He's successful enough to make a living at it, yet never mentions rehearsing, auditioning, directors, other actors, or the hassles of trying to get ahead in what is surely a difficult industry.

Sketchy details continue when William gets a part in an "independent movie" which is shooting in Europe. He never mentions what the part is, and for whatever baffling reason, Sarah doesn't bother asking. When he trades in his first-class ticket for two coach tickets so Sarah can go with him, I was ready to finally bond with them, and believe in their relationship. I was thinking of them tackling Europe together, across an ocean with only each other to cling to. They aren't well-traveled characters but for some reason meet the rush of their new and exciting surroundings with ho-hum attitudes. Shouldn't at least one of them want to have fun? Go sightseeing? Get swept away? It's as if nothing but the back and forth of maybe-I-like-you-or-maybe-I-don't mattered to either of them. I know it was a catalyst for William coming to terms with his father later on, but Sarah comes off as a manipulative child rather than sympathetic.

I did like William's relationship with his mother. That twinge of loneliness and spending Thanksgiving in "another" house, with "another" of his mother's boyfriends, when there had been so many of them sort of broke my heart. Kudos for that.

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## Karielle at Books à la Mode says

Ethan Hawke will break your heart. *The Hottest State* chronicles one year in the life of young, dashing William Harding: aspiring actor and charming lover. When he first meets Sarah, a girl unlike any he's ever seen, he knows from the beginning that he's a goner. She's beautiful. She's elusive. Every little thing she does strikes William greatly. The passion the two share, the chemistry; it's all so surreal, that even he can't believe it. He knows right then and there, that she is the one, that she's the one that he'll love forever, but little does he realize that though she may be the pursuit of his pleasure, he is just a twenty-year-old fool in love, and by time he's twenty-one, he'll just be a broken-hearted man. The way Hawke captures your interest in enthralling. He makes you become William Harding. I by all means, am not a helpless twenty-year-old boy in love, but throughout reading the book, I really felt like I was. All of William's movements and thoughts, I could relate with. It was so eerie. When William cried, I felt like crying, and when he got psychotic over his breakup with Sarah, I could feel the pain tugging inside of him. There's this one funny scene where he throws furniture around, and it's not funny like "haha!", but funny because, it's a scene where it should have been a turning point. I should have said "Wow, this William is nuts". But I didn't say that. Instead, I found myself cheering him on, because as crazy as he was, the emotion that was seeping throughout all of it, was so legitimate. This novel was by far one of them most entertaining novels I've ever read, and not only because I feel like it's something straight out of my own past, or future, for that matter. Ethan Hawke will make you laugh, and he'll make you love William's story, but in the tragic end, Ethan Hawke will break your heart.

## Jenni Lou says

I like Ethan Hawke as an actor. He's quite understated, yet intense. Sensitive and self-aware. And he surely has playing the broody, conflicted man/boy down. Those character-centric qualities are ever-present in his first novel, *The Hottest State*, though they certainly don't translate as well through his words as they do through his performances.

I must admit I was intrigued to read this because I had read most negative reviews of it. Why that piques my interest, I couldn't say. I don't typically seek out reading novels written by celebrities. In fact, I don't think I ever have read one written by anyone else. But I just sort of stumbled on it while perusing the bookshelves at the library and thought, why not give it a go?

It's not bad. It's just...forgettable. The protagonist is needy and pathetic. He latches on to a plain-Jane girl, Sarah, and becomes instantly enamored with her and grows increasingly frustrated when he can't quite figure her out, or why she doesn't reciprocate his feelings in the some comparable manner. She is guarded and cautious, scared and self-conscious. And because it told in first person from William's perspective, as readers, we aren't privy to the inner workings of Sarah. But William speculates and obsesses. And he has strange urges, such as hoping she will get pregnant or spontaneously proposing marriage. He recognizes his oddities and attributes them to a childhood of being raised without a father. He laments on the memories he has of his father, how he wishes he could have been there. How he wouldn't be so fucked up if he were.

It's isn't some psychological examination, this novel. It takes place in a rather short span of time. A few weeks, really. That's how long it takes for this relationship to begin and blossom and then deteriorate and end. More than anything it is a coming-of-age story about a man in his early twenties trying to figure out a way to exist in a world he doesn't quite like or understand.

As for the creative merits of the book, there are few. The prose is pedestrian and plain, lacking any sense of whimsy or flow. It could almost be a diary for William. Likewise, the dialogue is sort of odd and unnatural in many instances, often times taking you out of the story.

I can't say I recommend it. Again, it's not bad. It's just missing something, I think. And I suppose it didn't help that I found the protagonist kind of unlikable. He even creeped me out a bit. In the end, I just didn't understand how he formed such intense emotions and pursued this romantic relationship. At times, he didn't even seem to like Sarah. SO why bother?

I guess the same could be said for *The Hottest State*.

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## Patrick says

An incredibly visceral, raw wound of a book, perfectly detailing everyone's experience of obsessive, passionate love that ends badly.

'I loved that stupid girl so much', he says. If you can't identify with that statement on some level, you have no heart...

A great debut from a promising author, who has far surpassed expectations as an actor/writer/artist.

A quick read that's very easy to pick up again, even if it has the effect of giving you an ear to ear grin at the start and ending with you feeling like you've been gutted.

An incredible, emotional experience.

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### **Jen says**

i do not hate ethan hawke, in fact i was rooting for him the whole time i read this book. and while parts of it were beautiful, i found the characters pretty unlikable. 2 1/2 stars.

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### **Intortetor says**

temo che il problema più grosso di questo "amore giovane" ("the hottest state": probabilmente il fatto che sia stato scritto da un attore ha portato automaticamente allo stravolgimento del titolo, come si usa fare per i film) si chiama "mercoledì delle ceneri": perchè dopo aver letto un libro così ci speri che il resto della produzione del buon ethan sia allo stesso livello.

non è così, purtroppo: ma il risultato non è da buttare via, anzi.

c'è un'aria da film giovanile metà anni '90 (guarda caso quando il libro uscì), tra storie sentimentali destinate al fallimento, famiglie sparse per l'america, vita da bohemien...manca giusto la colonna sonora, magari qualche gruppo indie rock minore, qualche cover di classici anni '70 e l'inevitabile ballata acustica (perfetta per l'ultima scena tra i bambini, direi).

lo rovina parecchio questa sensazione di déjà-vu, ma al tempo stesso parecchie cose funzionano, e anche se i personaggi non sono esattamente simpaticissimi le vicende appassionano.

insomma: tutto bene per un paio d'ore di lettura che assolutamente non si rimpiangono, ma guai a chiedergli di più. proprio come a quei film giovanili anni '90 di cui sopra...

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### **Iris says**

I think it's fucked up how characters like William in The Hottest State will sometimes be considered passionate or tortured when really, when you look at all of the information laid before you, you can see that they are just manipulative, neglectful and abusive.

This book is basically about a boy, who thinks he's a man, whine and complain as the girl he likes dares not to like him back. How dare she, right? How can she even think it? He's all charm and swagger, is he not? So how can he overcome this? Call her a bitch for not wanting to hang out with him. Make her feel small for not wanting to have sex with him. Think, multiple times, about raping her for his own sordid pleasure. Actually attempt to rape her. Succeed in raping her. Smash, break, throw and destroy things in a fit of childish rage when she finally frees herself from him. Stalk and harass her to show her what she's lost. Then finally he believes he's better than she is and can continue his life. Brilliant, Mr. Hawke. Brilliant. You deserve a Pulitzer. 1/5

Worst. Book. Ever.

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## Elizabeth says

OMG YOU GUYS did you know that Ethan Hawke wrote a novel? Two novels, actually. And now you know all that you need to know about this book.

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## Whitney says

Ironically I picked up *The Hottest State* because I thought to myself: "I haven't read any male authors lately. I'm looking to get a masculine perspective on something for a change of pace." So I start to read, and I realize "Oh, shit. This is Ethan Hawke. He has emotions and shit."

The main character falls messily in love with a mysterious curvy girl who has serious boundary inconsistencies. Readers are led to empathize a little tiny bit with the protagonist's love interests, but mostly we're stuck in the protagonist's potential narcissism.

I'm glad it was a quick read.

My favorite part is some poetry the boy wrote when he was seven years old:

*The cowboy rides  
Through desert by desert  
Traveling by horses  
He gets dirty  
Like a rag buried in the sand  
And he dies full of age  
and bullets*

*A hat is shaped in lots of different ways  
A big bump in the middle  
And flat on the sides  
And nothing like a jacket.*

*Fort Worth is the hottest state I know  
My dad lives there  
My grandma too  
Most every grandparent  
except a few*

It's so cute! I want to give the boy hugs! (But the grownup not so much.)

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## Sarah says

Hawke should stick to acting.

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## **Morgan (Turbo) says**

I've read another of Ethan Hawke and thought he was good. So when I saw this book in the free box I couldn't just pass it up laughing that an actor actually thinks he can write too (like I could at a Mel Gibson or Bruce Willis novel). Quite contrary, Hawke has a writing voice that is simple, direct, and sometimes ingenious. Check out one of his character's resolutions: "I want to never waste energy degrading someone else. Also, I want to try not see life as a competition. If I can do these two things, as well as keep myself from being checked into an alcoholic rehabilitation center, then I figure I'll be A-OK" (182).

This book reads like a good satisfying meal. It's a romance written from a budding hopeless romantic's perspective. Perfect in length and depth. A good page turner.

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## **David says**

I'd been kind of surprised when I saw Hawke's name on books in the bookstore and had intended to check his writing out, but just never got around to it before now. I'd heard some bad things about his writing and wasn't sure what to think. As I do sooner or later most times in this situation, I looked for myself. After all, Hawke thanks Fred Leebron in the acknowledgements in this one, so I figured there had to be some good here. Having finished, I do have to say that Hawke is a better writer than I'd heard people say. This one isn't going on my all time favorite list or anything, and I think there are some spots here and there that seem a little bit cliché or awkward, but for the most part this is some pretty decent writing. I'm even considering checking out Hawke's other book, if that means anything.

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