

An Almost Perfect Moment



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On the cusp of the great age of disco, and in a part of Brooklyn a million miles away from Manhattan, lives fifteen-year-old Valentine Kessler and her long-suffering mother, Miriam. Valentine -- Jewish, pretty, and a touch flaky -- is an unremarkable teenager except for two things: she is a dead ringer for the Virgin Mary as she appeared to Bernadette at Lourdes, and her very being, through some inexplicable conspiracy of fate, seems to shatter the dreams and hopes of people around her. John Wosileski, Valentine's lonely math teacher who adores her from afar, embraces the martyrdom wrought by his unconditional and unrequited love. Joanne Clarke, the bitter and sad biology teacher who schemes to be John's wife, reviles Valentine to eventual self-destruction. Valentine's best friend, a former figure-skating champion, humiliates her for the crime of being "different." But Miriam Kessler -- betrayed and anguished by the husband she once worshipped -- loves Valentine only the way a mother could -- deeply, yet without knowing. Transposing one sensual appetite for another, Miriam eats and eats and seeks solace in a daily game of mah-jongg with her three girlfriends. The Girls, a cross between a Greek Chorus and a Brooklyn rendition of the Three Wise Men, dispense advice, predictions, and care in the form of extravagant gifts and homemade strudels. When Miriam's greatest fear for Valentine is realized, she takes comfort in the thought that it couldn't get any

worse. But then something even stranger happens, and Valentine's mysterious presence becomes an even more mysterious absence. Written in a naturalistic voice that echoes that of the characters, *An Almost Perfect Moment* is a dark and sharply comic novel about star-crossed lovers, mothers and daughters, doctrines of the divine, and a colorful Jewish community that once defined Brooklyn. Sagacious, sorrowful, and hilarious, it raises questions of faith and plays with the possibility of miracles with one eye on the caution: Be careful what you wish for.

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