



The Sweetness: A Novel

Sande Boritz Berger

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Vilna 1941. An inquisitive young girl asks her grandmother why she is carrying nothing but a jug of lemons and water when they are forced by the Germans to evacuate their Vilna ghetto. "Something to remind me of the sweetness," the wise woman tells her, setting the theme for what they must remember to survive. Set during World War II, the novel is the parallel tale of two Jewish girls, cousins, living on separate continents, whose strikingly different lives promise to converge. Brooklyn-born Mira Kane is the talented eighteen-year-old daughter of a well-to-do manufacturer of women's knitwear in New York. Her cousin, eight-year-old Rosha Kaninsky, is the lone survivor of a family abroad exterminated by the invading Nazis. Yet, unbeknownst to her American relatives, the orphaned Rosha did not perish. Desperate to save his child during a round-up, her father thrust Rosha into the arms of a Polish Catholic candle maker, who hides her? putting her own family at risk. The headstrong Mira, who dreams of escaping Brooklyn for a career as a fashion designer, finds her ambitions abruptly thwarted when, traumatized at the fate of his European relatives, her father becomes intent on safeguarding his loved ones from all threats of a brutal world. Everyone must challenge his injurious and spiraling survivor guilt. Though the Kanes endure the experience of the Jews *who got out*, they reveal how even in the safety of our lives, we are profoundly affected by the dire circumstances of others. Like *The Book Thief* and *Those Who Save Us*, *The Sweetness* is a poignant portrait of life during a most tragic time in history.

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