



The Fortune Teller's Kiss (American Lives)

Brenda Serotte

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There was always the incantation: “Whoever wishes you harm, may harm come to them!” And just in case that didn’t work, there were garlic and cloves to repel the Evil Eye—or, better yet, the dried foreskin from a baby boy’s circumcision, ground to a fine powder. But whatever precautions Brenda Serotte was subjected to, they were not enough. Shortly before her eighth birthday, in the fall of 1954, she came down with polio—painfully singled out in a world already marked by differences. Her bout with the dreaded disease is at the heart of this poignant and heartbreakingly hilarious memoir of growing up a Sephardic Jew among Ashkenazi neighbors in the Bronx.

This was a world of belly dancers and fortune tellers, shelter drills and vast quantities of Mediterranean food; a world of staunchly joined and endlessly contrary aunts and uncles, all drawn here in loving, merciless detail. *The Fortune Teller’s Kiss* is a heartfelt tribute to a disappearing culture and a paeon to the author’s truly quirky clan, especially her beloved champion, her father. It is also a deft and intimate cultural history of the Bronx fifty years ago and of its middle-class inhabitants, their attitudes toward contagious illness, womanly beauty, poverty, and belonging.

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