



Tattoo for a Slave

Hortense Calisher

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A "tattoo" is a bugle call, a summoning that lingers in the ear. Although Hortense Calisher's family eventually migrated north to New York City, the echoes of their days as a slave-owning Jewish family in the South still resonate with this acclaimed author, who uncovers a part of history never before so strongly and tenderly revealed.

Calisher traces her family's years in the South and their transformative move up north, beautifully evoking the mood and texture of the early twentieth century. Her family was an eccentric combination of Jewish and Southern traditions and tragedies. Her Virginia-born father, a perfume manufacturer, was twenty-two years older than her German-born mother. Marked by longer-than-normal gaps between the generations and conflicts between the mercantile and the scholarly, the "American" and the émigré, her family is characterized by Calisher as "volcanic to meditative to fruitfully dull, and bound to produce someone interested in character, society, and time."

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