

The Marriage Box

Corie Adjmi

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Corie Adjmi's captivating novel *The Marriage Box* is situated among the opulent but restrictive culture of Syrian American Jews in the 1980s.

Casey was a cheerleader at her New Orleans high school, and she mingled with a diverse range of students. Angered by her recent involvement with a drug dealer, Casey's father insists that the family return to its Syrian Jewish roots in Brooklyn. Now, sixteen-year-old Casey attends a Sephardic yeshiva, with separate classes for girls and boys, and few secular subjects.

At the yeshiva, many girls of Syrian heritage chat together like privileged "Middle Eastern goddesses." Uninterested in academics, these teenagers instead want to be married as soon as possible. Casey refuses to be part of the "Marriage Box," which is the name for a special section of her parents' beach club. Here, other Syrian American young women lounge in bikinis, showing off their tanned bodies to attract devout and wealthy husbands.

Despite her wariness, Casey falls in love with brash, passionate Michael, who believes that being Jewish is "the core of his identity." Their lavish wedding is like "'Fiddler on the Roof' spiked with 'Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.'" Soon after her nuptials, however, twenty-year-old Casey finds her housewife role to be confining. She and Michael argue with increasing intensity, as Casey objects to her husband's extramarital adventures and his refusal to let her go to college.

The Marriage Box develops Casey's conflicted emotions with finesse, contrasting the allure of 1980s music, fashion, and television with the strict rituals of Sephardic Orthodox Judaism. Strong-willed Casey craves independence, yet she also feels an innate pull toward her cultural heritage.

From the spicy scent of cumin to the gleam of gold bracelets and silver Shabbat candlesticks, *The Marriage Box* recreates a defiant young woman's vibrant and insular world.

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