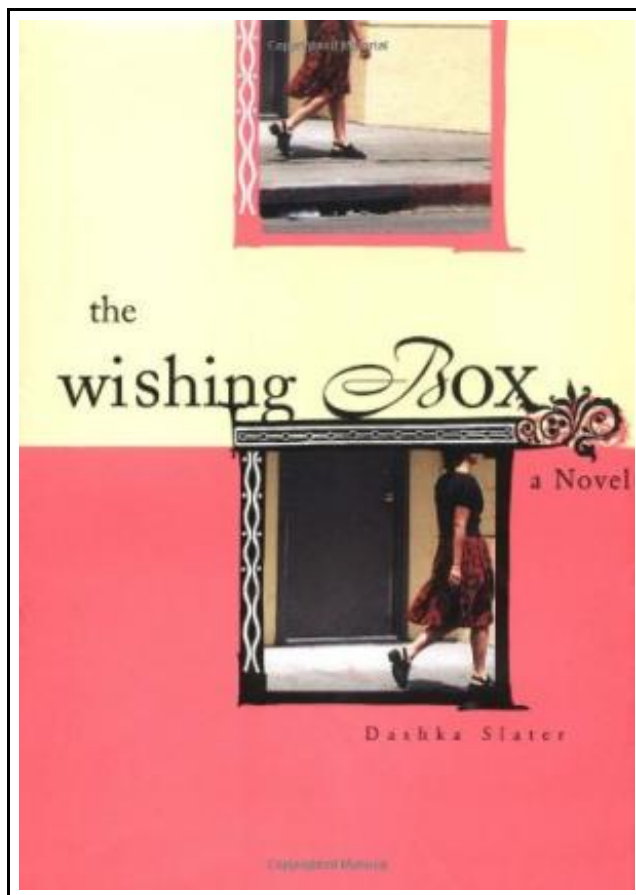


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Chronicle Books, 2000. Book Condition: New. Brand New, Unread Copy in Perfect Condition. A+ Customer Service! Summary: Reviews from: Publishers Weekly Los Angeles Times Slater's enchanting debut puts magic-realist devices to good use as it uncovers a complex family history. The interwoven narratives start in 1989, in Oakland, where 29-year-old single mother Julia Harris lives with her two young children; her downbeat sister, Lisa; and their clairvoyant, half-Mexican aunt, Simone. Julia and Simone narrate alternating chapters, with Simon's sister, Carolina, adding her voice. Simone's segments are always clear and sometimes poetic, while Julia's grow winningly self-aware. Simone's difficult cross-cultural childhood gives the narrative yet more depth, and her special powers furnish a potent narrative device. Since she can sometimes see the future or the past, her psychic abilities fill in missing links in Slater's cleanly assembled and moving "story after the story after the story." Two daughters, now in their 30s, abandoned at 5 and 7 by their father, use a spell prescribed by their maiden Aunt Simone: Put a statue of the Virgin Mary in a box and make a wish. They wish for their father, silly girls, "him or his personal effects, whichever would be less disgusting to look at." There is so much magic in fiction these days. Sometimes it is treacly; sometimes it pulls the humanity from the characters, making them prophesying angels, not people; sometimes it flummoxes the grammar when liberties are taken with language that are showy or hysterical. Dashka Slater negotiates these pitfalls with her good ear for dialogue and her allegiance to personality. She tells the story of four generations, a genealogy that sometimes blends in the centrifuge of the present; flattening the character like tracing paper as their stories overlap. But Aunt Simone is an invaluable Beatrice. "Sometimes," she admits, "second...

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