



Blooms of Darkness: A Novel

Aharon Appelfeld

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The ghetto in which the Jews have been confined is being liquidated by the Nazis, and eleven-year-old Hugo is brought by his mother to the local brothel, where one of the prostitutes has agreed to hide him. Mariana is a bitterly unhappy woman who hates what she has done with her life, and night after night Hugo sits in her closet and listens uncomprehendingly as she rages at the Nazi soldiers who come and go. But when she's not mired in self-loathing, Mariana is fiercely protective of the bewildered, painfully polite young boy. And Hugo, in turn, becomes protective of Mariana, trying to make her laugh when she is depressed, and soothing her physical and mental agony with cold compresses. As memories of his family and friends grow dim, Hugo falls in love with Mariana. And as her life spirals downward, Mariana reaches out for consolation to the adoring boy. The arrival of the Russian army sends the prostitutes fleeing, but Mariana is tracked down and arrested as a Nazi collaborator for having slept with the Germans. As the novel moves toward its heartrending conclusion, Aharon Appelfeld once again crafts out of the depths of unfathomable tragedy a renewal of life and a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.



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