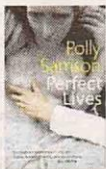




PERFECT LIVES

by Polly Samson

Virago £7.99 (223pp)
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The title of this short-story collection is of course, ironic. These sensitive studies of women with cheating husbands, babies who adore their

babysitters, sensitive piano-tuners, unloving mothers wracked with guilt, are really about the secret disappointments and quiet tragedies that behind the façade of the “perfect life”. The same seaside town appears across stories, as characters casually interconnect in this collection, and sometimes a detail from one will emerge in another story (“the loveliest cotton yellow dress” reappears in this way), to create a world loosely unified by the central conceit that all is not as it appears. Samson’s prose is by turns simple, lyrical and painterly, creating sudden, vivid pictures with a few deft strokes. **AA**