The Sad Passions (Semiotext(e) / Native Agents)

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Told by six women in one family, Veronica Gonzalez Pena's *The Sad Passions* captures the alertness, beauty, and terror of childhood lived in proximity to madness. Set against the backdrop of a colonial past, spanning three generations, and shuttling from Mexico City to Oaxaca to the North Fork of Long Island to Veracruz, *The Sad Passions* is the lyrical story of a middle-class Mexican family torn apart by the undiagnosed mental illness of Claudia, a lost child of the 1960s and the mother of four little girls.

It is 1960, and the wild and impulsive sixteen-year-old Claudia elopes from her comfortable family home in Mexico City with Miguel, a seductive drifter who will remain her wandering husband for the next twenty years. Hitchhiking across the United States with Miguel, sometimes spending the night in jails, Claudia stops sleeping and begins seeing visions. Abandoned at a small clinic in Texas, she receives electroshock treatment while seven months pregnant with her first daughter. Afterward, Miguel leaves her, dumb and drooling, at her mother's doorstep.

Living more often at her mother's home than with Miguel, Claudia will give birth to four girls. But when Julia, her second daughter, is inexplicably given away to a distant relation in Los Angeles, Claudia's fragile, uncertain state comes to affect everyone around her. Julia's disappearance -- which could symbolize the destabilizing effect of manic depression -- will become the organizing myth in all of the daughters' unsettled lives; for if one can disappear, why not all of them?

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