

## DEAR READER,

**M**y twelve-year-old niece Abby, my mom, and I sat in a one-room diner in Genesee Depot, Wisconsin, writing to prompts chosen from a book called *What If?* We did this often that summer and fall of 2006.

That day, Abby chose the prompt, and eighteen years later, it remains the first line of my novel. The prompt also gave me my title, though I had no idea then that *A Season of Perfect Happiness* would feature the diner, along with Ten Chimneys, the summer estate just down the road built by theatre greats Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in the 1930s. My mother worked as a docent there, and I was fascinated by the stories she told.

The three couples at the heart of *A Season of Perfect Happiness*, all of them connected to Ten Chimneys, want to believe, as the Lunts did, that you can design not just a beautiful home, but a beautiful life, in the same manner you might design a beautiful play—every detail purposefully chosen and artfully presented. Like the Lunts, these characters—especially Claire, who narrates the story—are determined not to let their biggest regrets define them. They strive to be their best selves, and they work hard to create lives filled with joy—in each other and in their children. But is crafting a life that is both curated and fulfilling really possible today, when confession is often confused with intimacy, as if truly knowing people means knowing not their best selves but their worst secrets? This is the question Claire will struggle to answer as she comes to realize that even happiness—maybe especially happiness—has a cost.

I've thought of that day in the diner often. Because also present that morning was grief. It's why we were there. Abby's younger brother, Sam—my nephew, my mother's grandchild—had died of a genetic illness the year before. He was seven. Writing, especially fiction, was a way for the three of us to let our characters feel what was too painful for us to process. The loss of a child and the longing to use art to help heal would become a key focus of my novel.

And yet, *A Season of Perfect Happiness* is not about loss. Instead, it asks us to consider, in a culture that accepts the necessity of honoring our grief, what it means to honor our happiness as well.

I still wonder if the Lunts' ideal is possible, and I loved exploring it through this passionate, generous, complicated group of friends. I can't wait to see how you will weigh in!

## MARIBETH

*A SEASON OF PERFECT HAPPINESS* BY MARIBETH FISCHER