



# Dept. of Speculation (Vintage Contemporaries)

By Jenny Offill

**Dept. of Speculation (Vintage Contemporaries)** By Jenny Offill

**ONE OF THE 10 BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR - *THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW***

A Best Book of the Year: *The New Yorker*, *The Boston Globe*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Vogue.com*, *Electric Literature*, *Buzzfeed*

In the beginning, it was easy to imagine their future. They were young and giddy, sure of themselves and of their love for each other. “Dept. of Speculation” was their code name for all the thrilling uncertainties that lay ahead. Then they got married, had a child and navigated the familiar calamities of family life—a colicky baby, a faltering relationship, stalled ambitions.

When their marriage reaches a sudden breaking point, the wife tries to retrace the steps that have led them to this place, invoking everything from Kafka to the Stoics to doomed Russian cosmonauts as she analyzes what is lost and what remains. In language that shimmers with rage and longing and wit, Offill has created a brilliantly suspenseful love story—a novel to read in one sitting, even as its piercing meditations linger long after the last page.

## **Dept. of Speculation (Vintage Contemporaries) By Jenny Offill Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

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This is a magnetic novel about a marriage of giddy bliss and stratospheric anxiety, bedrock alliance and wrenching tectonic shifts. Offill, author of the novel *Last Things* (1999) and various children's books, covers this shifting terrain and its stormy weather in an exquisitely fine-tuned, journal-like account narrated by "the wife," an ironic self-designation rooted in her growing fears about her marital state. She is smart if a bit drifty, imaginative and selectively observant, and so precisely articulate that her perfect, simple sentences vibrate like violin strings. And she is mordantly funny, a wry taxonomist of emotions and relationships. Her dispatches from the fog of new motherhood are hilarious and subversive. Her cynical pursuit of self-improvement is painfully accurate. Her Richter-scale analysis of the aftershocks of infidelity is gripping. Nothing depicted in this portrait of a family in quiet disarray is unfamiliar in life or in literature, and that is the artistic magic of Offill's stunning performance. She has sliced life thin enough for a microscope slide and magnified it until it fills the mind's eye and the heart. --Donna Seaman

## Review

"Shimmering. . . . Breathtaking. . . . Joyously demanding." —*The New York Times Book Review*

"Slender, quietly smashing. . . . A book so radiant, so sparkling with sunlight and sorrow, that it almost makes a person gasp." —*The Boston Globe*

"Powerful. . . . Exquisite. . . . A novel that's wonderfully hard to encapsulate, because it faces in many directions at the same time, and glitters with different emotional colors." —*The New Yorker*

"A startling feat of storytelling . . . Each line a dazzling, perfectly chiseled arrowhead aimed at your heart." —*Vanity Fair*

"*Dept. of Speculation* resembles no book I've read before. If I tell you that it's funny, and moving, and true; that it's as compact and mysterious as a neutron; that it tells a profound story of love and parenthood while invoking (among others) Keats, Kafka, Einstein, Russian cosmonauts, and advice for the housewife of 1897, will you please simply believe me, and read it?" —Michael Cunningham

"You can read Jenny Offill's new novel in about two hours. It's short and funny and absorbing, an effortless-seeming downhill ride that picks up astonishing narrative speed as it goes." —*The New York Review of Books*

"Gorgeous, funny, a profound and profoundly moving work of art. Jenny Offill is a master of form and feeling, and she gets life on the page in new, startling ways." —Sam Lipsyte

"Introspective and resonant. . . . Offill uses her novel to explore the question of how to be an artist as well as a wife and mother, when these states can feel impossibly contradictory." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Absorbing and highly readable. . . . Intriguing, beautifully written, sly, and often profound." —NPR

"Audacious . . . Hilarious . . . . An account of matrimony and motherhood that breaks free of the all-too-limiting traditional stories of wives and mothers. . . . It may be difficult to truly know what happens between

two people, but Offill gets alarmingly close.” —*The Atlantic*

“Piercingly honest. . . . A series of wry vignettes that deepen movingly.” —*Vogue*

“*Dept. of Speculation* is a riposte to the notion that domestic fiction is humdrum and unambitious. . . . A shattered novel that stabs and sparkles at the same time. It is the kind of book that you will be quoting over and over to friends who don’t quite understand, until they give in and read it too. . . . A book this sad shouldn’t be so much fun to read.” —*The Guardian* (London)

“Whip-smart, defying description, will bring your walls down around you.” —*Flavorwire*

“[A] mini marvel of a novel. . . . Unfolds in tart, tiny chapters suffused with pithy philosophical musings, scientific tidbits, and poetic sayings that collectively guide a brainy, beleaguered couple through the tricky emotional terrain of their once wondrous, now wobbly union.” —*Elle*

#### About the Author

Jenny Offill is the author of the novel *Last Things*, which was chosen as a Notable Book of the Year by *The New York Times* and was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* First Book Award. She teaches in the writing programs at Queens University, Brooklyn College, and Columbia University.

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