



Living with Snakes (Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction Ser.)

Daniel Curley

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In Daniel Curley's stories, passionate rage and cool, clear hatred alter the terms of even the most basic human relationships, etching odd patterns on the surface of the natural world--a man applies the methods of Mata-Hari to the task of keeping track of his ex-wife; the victim of a pickpocket plots psychological revenge on the criminal population of a Mexico City bus line; a spurned lover summons all his strength and courage to liberate a roomful of snakes held captive by his rival.

For the most part, the figures in the landscape of these stories are men and women performing the rituals that lead to and away from marriage. In "The First Baseman," a man in the process of getting a divorce falls in love with a player on a woman's softball team, but their conversation never goes far beyond the subject of her batting average. In "Trinity," an estranged couple brought together again by the death of their daughter finds that they cannot recreate either their love or their child. And in "Wild Geese," a man's dream about his childhood, when flocks of geese patterned the sky, is interrupted and finally shot-through by fevered images of a tedious dinner party.

Nature exists as a refuge in these stories, but it is a refuge mostly to be found in the shadow of the fear of death; in the recesses of memory; beyond the bars that isolate zoo animals from an unruly world. Demonicly honest and sometimes violently funny, *Living with Snakes* tells of a world where love is at best a touch-and-go sort of thing, where sometimes men and women are bound together not so much by affection as by mutual loss, mutual pain.

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