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## Reader's Guide

### *Author Asks*

from L. Annette Binder  
author of *Rise*

1. The idea of rising appears in stories throughout the collection. Where do you see it in the stories, and how does it play out in the individual stories and in the collection as a whole?
2. Does Ethan in the story "Rise" wake up after the story is done, or does he stay with the lady by the beach? Is this lady real? If not, what does she reflect about Ethan's state of mind?
3. When I started to think about the stories as a collection, I found that they ordered themselves into an emotional arc of sorts – from denial to anger to acceptance. Did you read the stories in order, or out of order? If you read them out of order, which story did you read first, and which one last? What effect did reading them in this way have on your experience?
4. While I've written stories in the first person, the stories in this collection are written in the third person. How does the use of this POV affect the feel of the stories? How would a story like "Nephilim," "Galatea," or "Lay My Head" be different if it were written in the first person? What would they gain, and what would they lose?
5. Just about every story I write begins with one of the characters. I think and dream about them before I begin to write, and sometimes they stay with me for a long while after I'm done with the story. Were there any characters that lingered with you after you finished the story? Which ones? And why?
6. My parents are German, and dark (or even creepy) fairy tales and nursery rhymes were a part of my childhood. Which story or stories had the strongest fairy tale-like qualities? Did the surreal qualities of some of the stories conflict with the more realistic stories, or did you find they worked together? Why or why not?
7. Why do you think Carol in "Galatea" keeps returning for more surgical procedures? Is she simply unable to move on with her life, or is something else going on?
8. Some stories (like "Halo") have sections written in the second person POV. Who is the speaker in these short sections and who is the addressee? What effect do these sections have on the feeling of these stories?
9. All of these stories are set in Colorado, where I grew up. How important was the setting as you read the stories? In which stories did the geographical setting play the most important role, and why?
10. Angela in "Lay My Head" has no direct dialogue. We hear what her mother and the neighbors say, but Angela mostly stays quiet. Was this something you noticed as you read the story? What effect do you think her silence has on the story?

# Writing Exercises

1. One of my writing teachers gave me a fascinating writing exercise. He took a story which I didn't know and reduced it to a series of seven or eight specific beats. Two characters in a car/bus/train in the present day; flashback to one day previously; a new person comes into the car; flashback to the distant past; and so on. Write this story, he told us, and it was strangely liberating to work within these constraints. (My distant flashback went back millions of years to when a star was born!) I'm not sure I'd do this again, but it showed me that there's huge leeway in even the most structured format.
2. This isn't really an exercise, but it's something I found helpful. If characters come to you, stay with them for a long while. Approach them as an actor would when getting ready for a role. Try sitting in a park or a mall or wherever they might go and borrow their eyes for a while. What do the characters see? What makes them angry? Once you feel the character, start writing and let them pull you along. I used this technique to get started on "Shelter" – I didn't know anything about my character except that he was mad about how his neighbors had let their lawn go brown.
3. Eavesdrop on a conversation (at the drugstore, the Jiffy Lube, wherever you might be) and wait till you hear something compelling. Start with that bit of dialogue and see where it leads you. Writers are vampires in their way.

# Suggested Reading

Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*. Each astonishing in its own way. *No Country for Old Men* for its perfection as a novel and *The Road* for its poetry.

Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays* — here's a novel that shows how compelling a passive character can be. The moment at the Hoover Dam is something that will stay with me forever.

Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* – so creepy and odd, with one of my favorite sentences ever: "He was too excited to eat and afraid to go home. He felt as though his heart were a bomb, a complicated bomb that would result in a simple explosion, wrecking the world without rocking it."

Michael Chabon's *Wonder Boys* — a large-hearted and funny novel. I've read it so many times I don't even bother counting any more.

Michelle Latiolais' *Widow: Stories* and Ron Carlson's *A Kind of Flying: Selected Stories* — two astonishing collections from two amazing teachers.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Grimm's *Fairy Tales*

Edith Hamilton's *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* — I read this so many times when I was little. Something about it still makes me smile now.

*The Guinness Book of World Records* — the older the edition the better.