



For Alex Kudera, fiction can both offer entertainment and proffer a viewpoint. From its dedication page to its final scene, **Fight for Your Long Day** (Atticus Books, 978-0-9845105-0-4) forwards an argument. Its concern is the plight of the so-called “freeway flyer”—the university contingent faculty member, “a foot soldier on the front lines of America’s knowledge-based economy.” But this book is no stodgy treatise. Rather, it’s a fast-paced story, told with humor at every turn. This satirical novel features Cyrus Duffleman, instructor of the “introduction to liberal guilt branded as English 101” and “sentry at the door of the baccalaureate degree.” Amid bad lighting and missing chalk, Duffleman negotiates the occasional flirtatious student, the threat of school violence, and potent conversations about race. Through this character, the book provides an exposé of academia and the labor that sustains it—one that is well-researched and perhaps based on Kudera’s ten years of experience as an adjunct instructor. In short, *Fight For Your Long Day* is the kind of novel one learns from and rallies behind. Eyebrow-raising and wry, Kudera’s take on the ivory tower certainly makes it look less pearly white.

Daniel A. Olivas’s **The Book of Want** (University of Arizona Press, 978-0-8165-2899-8) is also a book of life. And the afterlife. The afterlife in which Belén puffs her fat cigarette, blowing “magnificent, perfect smoke rings that impressed God mightily.” Such a postmortem scene must come from a confident and distinctive literary mind. In Olivas we have such a voice—one that can poke fun at itself. “Olivas thinks he’s writing a great novel like *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*,” one character proclaims, but “[h]e’s too much of a baboso to realize that he’s no Urrea.” Pay no mind to such protests. Olivas is a much-anthologized author of six books, and his name appears in some of the best literary journals.

Olivas’s background in short-story writing comes through in this short novel, which is structured as a series of vignettes. These vignettes are followed by a multi-generic final chapter and epilogue that involves a one-act play, a transcrip-

tion from an IM chat, and interviews with the characters. The book thus calls attention to its form. It stretches the conventions of the novel even as it sticks, for the most part, to realism. The book involves several Mexican Americans denizens of Los Angeles. It’s a work of realism, then, but not without a dose of the magic—linking it with important works of Latino literature. *The Book of Want* is one such important work.

The pleasures of entering the recognizable-yet-unexpected are the pleasures that **And Yet They Were Happy** (Leapfrog, 978-1-935248-18-7) provide. This prize-nominated book is a series of 340-word “short shorts” that read like poems and present-day fables. The stories are litanies born from the author’s admitted Kerouacian proclivity for list-making. “This is not story-telling, this is record-keeping,” Helen Phillips writes self-referentially. The list is a sparse form, and Phillips’s elegance comes from her unadorned style. There’s nothing extraneous in these simple sentences and compact stories. They’re tightly packed with a range of references and characters—Eve (the supportive wife of ark-building Noah), Bob Dylan (who charms and eludes our author), other Helen Phillipses, bitchy swans, and men who killed unicorns. So this work is a wondrous mélange of pop culture, autobiography, myth, and humor. And there’s a touch of the sublime too. Each of these diminutive stories create the world anew. They restore one’s sense of the earth even as they speak to its devastations. At once foreboding and light, the book sings destruction and birth. So when one reads Phillips’s plea “May there be some kind of drums or darkness in the white spaces between the words,” one knows that no such drums are needed. The thunder of these small stories resounds.

—Janelle Adsit

If it weren’t for her life getting in the way, Lorna Crawford would be on the fast track to spiritual bliss. She has taken up yoga and meditation, and she reads everything on the New Age bestseller list, from Deepak Chopra to Eckhart Tolle. She is taking a weekend silent retreat with her serene