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ter to the author." Well, consider that challenge already lost. I'll just say it: I don't know you, André Aciman, but I adore your writing. Another reviewer says, "Call Me By Your Name may prove to be the beautiful book of 2007. That is the first and only important thing to say about André Aciman's debut novel, at least after a first reading."

This lovely book, fraught with the inefable tension of first love, takes place in memory. The main character, Elio, recounts his tale of 20 years before, in the charged atmosphere of the Italian Riviera, where he and his parents live in the summer. His father, a professor whom some might suspect is a type of contemporary literature prof Aciman knows well, always takes on a grad student over the summer; this year, the American "houseguest" Oliver proves a potent attraction. The heat of summer and the atmosphere of intellectual sparring mix with Elio's sexual awakening as he learns the language of flirting and lust with another young man. The delicately balanced, splendidly strong prose hovers like desire itself, every breath one step away from the blissful surrender. I've hardly read anything more romantic, more tender or filled with longing and regret, than *Call Me By Your Name*. You may think someone who hates *Romeo and Juliet* couldn't possibly care about another romance, but you would be wrong: This book trumps genres, categories, definitions. It rises above them and dances, beautifully, on love, the thread that binds and blinds humans bent — even against our wills — on connection. — Suzi Steffen

Tokyo Dreaming

AFTER DARK by Haruki Murakami. KNOPE, 2007. HARDCOVER. \$22.95. A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF 2007.

This slim, restrained little book is a far cry from Haruki Murakami's dense, visionary *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*; it's more in line with the sweet, straightforward *Norwegian Wood*, though even smaller in scope. *After Dark* follows a handful of characters through one night in Tokyo, as 19-year-old Mari Asai stays out all night. At home, her beautiful older sister sleeps as she has for the past two months, stepping out of life and into a strange somnolent realm. Mari stays out in the coffee shops and diners of the city, reading, staying awake, balancing a waking life for herself and the sister she's only once felt close to.

On this particular night, Mari meets a friendly young trombonist; he connects her to Kaoru, a woman who runs a love hotel and needs Mari's help to deal with a peculiar situation. Stories overlap, and Murakami pulls us ever closer in, describing us — the reader, the writer — as pure point of view (and a cinematic one at that) as we watch the strange events unfolding around sleeping Eri. The tone in Eri's parts of the story is watchful, almost instructive, as Murakami describes the sleeping girl's existence; it contrasts with the involved, sympathetic perspective from which we see Mari.

After Dark presents the magic of a strange night around a story of identity, connection and loneliness. It's a mood piece colored with music (for Murakami, a jazz fan, the song playing in a diner or café

is always worth noting) and the comfort of strangers. *After Dark* is vintage Murakami in terms of the unusual world that seems to overlap with our own, but it's a slight story, an appetizer of tone and atmosphere (the nighttime city is as much a character as shy Mari). Out of this strange, long night, Murakami carefully and thoughtfully teases slender strands of plot and character to create a quiet, intimate piece that's unexpectedly compelling and unforgettable, like that last dream before waking. — Molly Templeton



Sewer Pipe Dreams **THERE'S A (SLIGHT) CHANCE I MIGHT BE GOING TO HELL** by Laurie Notaro.

VILLARD, 2007. PAPERBACK. \$13.95.

Author Laurie Notaro is a humorist known for her essays about *Idiot Girls*, dorky girls and fat brides. In her first fiction book we meet plump, 30-something, happily married Maye Roberts. When Maye's husband Charlie takes a job at a college in Washington state, Maye must leave her close group of friends in Phoenix and spend her days eating lunch alone in the much smaller town of Spaulding, built upon the sewer pipe industry. There she meets an assortment of oddballs she unwittingly turns into enemies: the bookstore clerk, the mailman, people she stalks at the grocery store and Charlie's boss' wife, Rowena, who was not endeared by Maye's inadvertent striptease when they first met at a faculty function. It's Maye's obsession with making at least one friend that drives the story. Her only hope of finding acceptance is to run for — and win! — the Spaulding Sewer Pipe Queen Pageant. She knows she could win with the help of the mysterious Ruby Spicer, the greatest queen Spaulding has ever known, but Ruby vanished decades ago. The story takes a twist when Maye locates a deranged, chain-smoking crackpot who claims to be Ruby and uncovers a sinister secret the town tried to forget. With the help of her piano-playing dog, Maye attempts to win over the town, give the snobby Rowena her comeuppance and clear Ruby's name.

Notaro herself recently moved from Phoenix to Eugene, and the Sewer Pipe Queen pageant pulls its inspiration from our own S.L.U.G. Queen traditions. The peculiar people Maye encounters — a hell-on-wheels mailman, militant vegetarians, a book club/coven — could be your neighbors. Despite a reliance on overlong metaphors that frequently fall flat and a