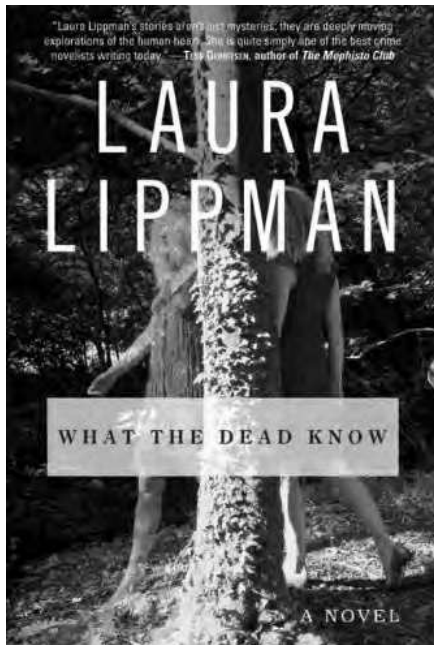


others, with the exception of his one confidant, his grandmother. He wants out, but he doesn't really know what he wants, nor how to find it. A portrait of loneliness, of trauma, of adolescent uncertainty about life and self, Cameron's book is a heart-breaker with a dose of wry humor, its title an offer of both truth and hope. — *Molly Templeton*



The Vanished Sisterhood

WHAT THE DEAD KNOW by Laura Lippman. WILLIAM MORROW, 2007. HARDCOVER, \$24.95.

Readers familiar with Laura Lippman's cracking Tess Monaghan series may be surprised by this stand-alone mystery, which contains enough feints that even experienced mystery/thriller/imposter story readers may miss some of the clues. The plot wraps around itself several times, making for an intricate unwinding: Two sisters disappear from a Baltimore mall Easter weekend, and 30 years later, someone claiming to be the younger sister shows up again near the very mall where her life changed drastically. She's been in a car accident and avoids responsibility by focusing the authorities on her claim to be Heather Bethany, the younger of the disappeared girls.

Lippman builds the suspense by writing about the present, by returning to the 1975 interactions of the family (whose members each have secrets, one of which holds the key to the disappearance) and then by unreeling the various claims and evidence that police officers, social workers and many others go through as they deal with the claims of "Heather Bethany." Even the smallest character has a weight and detailed thought process that moves Lippman beyond her previous writing, solidly constructed as it has always been. The creepy light she casts over every detail works well enough at destabilizing the reader that though the revelation seems obvious when one gets there, it's not easy to figure out ahead of time. But unlike some mysteries, *What the Dead Know* wouldn't be ruined even if the reader figured it out; that's how good the writing is. I admit to being a more hopeful person and hopeful writer than Lippman seems to be, and sometimes her take on human beings feels a bit too painful, but she's absolutely convincing both at recreating the atmosphere of the mid-1970s and at building suspense until the soft landing of the revelation arrives, puffing gently but thoroughly at the survivors' carefully rebuilt lives. — *Suzi Steffen*

Hunted and Haunted

THE LION HUNTER by Elizabeth Wein.

VIKING CHILDREN'S BOOKS, 2007. HARDCOVER, \$16.99.

I fail to understand why readers aren't snapping up everything Elizabeth Wein can produce, why major movie studios aren't investing huge sums in the rights to her gorgeous, elegant, terrifyingly real series that covers post-Arthurian politics and kingdoms in Aksum (modern-day Ethiopia and Eritrea). Oh wait, I think I just answered my own question. Sure, the tales may feature the most incredibly intricate spy network since Megan Turner Whalen's *The Thief*, not to mention the complexities of Arthur's son Medraut (Mordred), who has essentially deserted England and thrown his lot in with the royalty of the kingdom of Aksum, but ... they're set in Africa. Me, I'd pick Wein's intense, emotionally present and tightly plotted writing over that of any other YA fantasy I've read in the past few years.

The cycle began with *The Winter Prince* and continued — and continued to improve — with *A Coalition of Lions* and the high-action, high-tension *The Sunbird*, focusing on Medraut's son Telemakos. By the time Wein came out with *The Lion Hunter*, her rich painting of political intrigue and her smart chronicling of the effects of trauma (not to mention the way supposedly royal, supposedly loving adults use and abuse children) simply blew any other competition out of the water. Not that there's really a competition; Susan Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising* series and Wein's Aksum series top the Arthurian charts. Considering how much adapters butchered *The Dark Is Rising* for this year's movie, perhaps I (and Wein) should be grateful there's nothing in the works. I suppose this might be a handsell book for librarians and booksellers (the cover ... eh), and I'd urge them to do just that. But the complex imagery, tight plots and fascinating intrigue of Wein's series should continue to draw readers for years to come. Will Telemakos survive the web that continues to draw around him? If the follow-up, *The Empty Kingdom*, doesn't come to this desk soon, I'm not sure I will survive *Lion Hunter's* cliffhanger ending, one in which I screamed at Telemakos, "NO!! DON'T! NOOOOOOOO!!!!" But as for



buying the book and its prequels, let me gently urge young fantasy fans, "Yes! Do! Yeeeeeeessss!" — *Suzi Steffen*

Variety is Key

VARIETIES OF DISTURBANCE by Lydia Davis. FARRAR, STRAUS & GIRoux, 2007. PAPERBACK, \$13. FINALIST, 2007 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FOR FICTION. A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF 2007.

Lydia Davis is dry — very dry — in her humor, so don't let the more than 50 short stories collected in the paperback original *Varieties of Disturbance* bring you to the brink of tears and desperation without a good laugh. This is life analyzed with an eye for surprise, attempting to find truth in the mundane details we all carry with us. In these often very short stories, Davis is the anthropologist/psychologist/sociologist hellbent on deconstructing her characters' thoughts, actions, artifacts, whatever, for the sake of discovery (but not necessarily revelation or characters succeeding in the end). Quite often, Davis' characters neither succeed nor fail but merely keep on keeping on, and, like watching a baby wake from a dream to immediately start wailing, it's both curious and heartbreaking to take in.


These are stories that deal with old people nearing death, that deal with taking care of the very young, that finish where their titles leave off, such as in "Suddenly Afraid," with the story completing the thought: "because she couldn't write the name of what she was: a wa wam owm owamn womn." Many could be considered prose poems, such is the lyrical beauty of their internal rhymes and haiku punctuation.

Then there are the four heavyweight stories embedded within the collection. Despite their relative length, these aren't necessarily the conventional short stories amongst a sea of experimental flash fictions. Indeed, "We Miss You: A Study of Get-Well Letters from a Class of Fourth-Graders" and "Mrs. D and Her Maids" are just as lacking in any traditional narrative as the heavily footnoted, Robbe-Grillet-inspired "Southward Bound, Reads *Worstward Ho*." Davis has the confidence to collect the evidence and let the chips fall where they may. And she just may be battling Miranda July for the year's driest humor. — *Chuck Adams*

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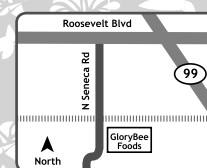
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