



A VISIT FROM THE GOON SQUAD

A DAZZLING SPIN THROUGH TIME



By Jennifer Egan, Knopf, \$25.95, 288 pages, ISBN 9780307592835, also available on audio

REVIEW BY JILLIAN QUINT

Fans riding high from Jennifer Egan's critically acclaimed *The Keep* have much to look forward to in her new novel, **A Visit from the Goon Squad**, which turns away from the neo-gothic and mind-bending while retaining the unexpected humor and postmodern breadth of her earlier work.

At the book's start, we drop in on the lives of Bennie Salazar, an aging record executive, and Sasha, his aimless, kleptomaniac assistant. Sasha goes on a mediocre online date, while Bennie brings his nine-year-old son to see a band he has signed but knows he can't break out. Then the narrative takes an unexpected turn, making great leaps in time and location to show us not only how these characters got to be the way they are (and flashing forward to what they will ultimately become), but the ways in which the ancillary players in their lives have touched and connected them. We meet Scotty, Bennie's former bandmate from the Bay Area punk scene; Lou, the group's self-destructive mentor who takes his children and young girlfriend on a trip to Africa; Rob, Sasha's suicidal college friend who struggles with his own identity in the Internet's early days; and Alex, Sasha's date from the opening chapter, who goes on to see a world in which technology and music intertwine in surprising, though not implausible ways.

Chapters jump from first to third person, from heavily footnoted magazine articles to PowerPoint presentations, yet Egan's scope remains simultaneously manic and highly controlled. Indeed, one gets the sense that she knows so much about her characters' lives that she had the luxury of curating only the choicest moments for our reading pleasure, the result of which is a series of pastiches that deftly and lyrically illustrates the ways people and culture change, yet stay remarkably the same.

shoulder when she was just nine. Since then Rose has only known to move from one bad man to another.

Jackson knows that suffering doesn't necessarily make one saintly or compassionate; it's just as likely to make one wary and dangerous. Rose resents her virtuous next door neighbor and steals from her. She sees nearly everyone as an enemy or someone to be dismissed, and when she finally tracks down her mother—a woman who's almost as self-obsessed as she is—she behaves with a maddening, punitive childishness.

Jackson has a magical way with words, injecting fearless insight throughout the novel. **Backseat Saints** is rough going in places, but it succeeds because of Jackson's insistence on telling the truth about Rose Mae and her dangerous and unhappy world. It's the work of a first-rate writer.

—ARLENE MCKANIC

EVERYTHING LOVELY, EFFORTLESS, SAFE



By Jenny Hollowell
Holt
\$14, 256 pages
ISBN 9780805091199

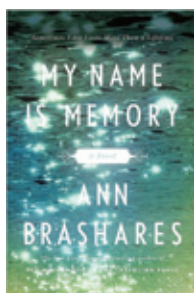
DEBUT FICTION

Everything Lovely, Effortless, Safe may be Jenny Hollowell's debut novel, but the precision and grace with which she tells the story of Birdie Baker, an aspiring actress in Los Angeles, makes Hollowell seem like a veteran.

When we first meet Birdie, she's growing up in small-town Virginia, the only daughter of evangelical parents. On the outside, Birdie is following the path to a religious life, but for as long as she can remember, Birdie has dreamed of becoming someone else. At age 20, she marries a young elder brought home by her father, but two years later, she walks out on her pastor husband and her parents and hops on a bus to Los Angeles.

Now, nine years later, Birdie's life in Hollywood isn't exactly as she had hoped it would be. Her resume lists a handful of unmemorable roles in films and commercials, and her steadiest gig is as a body double for a spoiled, frivolous actress.

MY NAME IS MEMORY



By Ann Brashares
Riverhead
\$25.95, 336 pages
ISBN 9781594487583
Also available on audio

GENERAL FICTION

Literature is filled with lovers that not even death can divide. First there was Heathcliff and Cathy, then Edward and Bella; now in Ann Brashares' entrancing new romantic saga, readers will be swept away by Daniel and Lucy, whose love is truly one for the ages.

Daniel is both blessed and cursed by "the Memory"—he is able to remember his previous lives and recognize the reincarnated souls of people he once knew. In present-day Virginia, he comes across Lucy, though he knows her as Sophia, his one true love. Initially Lucy has no knowledge of the tumultuous past she and Daniel have shared, but with his gentle coaxing, the secrets lying deep within her soul begin to reveal themselves to her. And with

them comes the realization that she and Daniel must identify and confront the ancient threat that has always managed to tear them apart.

In **My Name is Memory**, readers will trace Daniel and Lucy's love over centuries and continents, intoxicated both by the pair's passion and by Brashares' rich historical and geographical detail. A potent mix of *The Time Traveler's Wife*, *Twilight* and something entirely new, **My Name is Memory** is the first installment in a planned three-book series that will remind readers that when it comes to love, hope springs eternal.

—STEPHENIE HARRISON

begins: "It was an airport gypsy who told me that I had to kill my husband." Joshilyn Jackson's fourth novel isn't a series of funny, trashy set pieces out of Dogpatch; rather, the tale Jackson tells is grim, and unless you count the narrator's dog and a few minor characters, there's not one likable person in it.

It's a testament to Jackson's talent that we stick with her protagonist, Rose Mae Lolley (aka Ro Grandee), despite the fact that she's vicious, impulsive, deceitful and about as dim as the aforementioned dog. She's also the victim of a husband who's even more of a monster than she is. We hope she either gets away for good or kills him, for there's no doubt that the psychopathic Thom Grandee will one day kill her. By the time the book opens, he's already come close a couple of times.

But Rose has been reared in violence and chaos since childhood. Her mother, a rare devout Catholic in the ironically named town of Fruiton, Alabama, abandoned her when she was eight. Claire Lolley left her daughter with a man who tried to eradicate his sorrow in drink, and when that didn't work, he took his rage out on his young daughter—he first dislocated Rose's

BACKSEAT SAINTS



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WOMEN'S FICTION

You only think you know what you're in for when **Backseat Saints**