

A
SLOW
CURVE



BARBARA HENNING

A

SLOW

CURVE

A
SLOW
CURVE

BARBARA HENNING

Monkey Puzzle Press
Denver, Colorado

all rights reserved. no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief excerpts. printed in the united states of america.

interior and cover design: Jordan Antonucci

interior and cover art: Laurie Price

A Slow Curve

Acknowledgements and Process: I drove out west in the winter of 2011. Twice I passed through the oil fields in Texas, once at dusk and once at noon. Later that summer I taught at Naropa and while I was there, I read Bobbie Louise Hawkins' book *One Small Saga*, a story of her life with her first husband. In this novel, she is traveling, in my poem I'm traveling, both of us are moving through love and space. I designed a process of extracting phrases and words from *One Small Saga*, and then quilting these floating words and phrases into *A Slow Curve*. Quale Press is publishing *A Swift Passage* in 2013, and *A Slow Curve* will be included.

ISBN-10: 0985170565

ISBN-13: 9780985170561



monkey puzzle press

1548 krameria st.

denver, colorado 80220

monkeypuzzlepress.com

For Bobbie Louise Hawkins

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>IF YOU WALK FASTER, IT STROLLS FASTER</i>	1
THE CENTER OF CHRISTIAN THINK RADIO	2
<i>TO BE RECKONED WITH</i>	3
OR LIGHTENING OR HAIL OR SOMETHING	4
AND HE WAS TAKEN INTO THE STORY	5
THE BACK OF THE FRONT	7
THE PHILIDELPHIA EAGLES FALL TO THE DALLAS COWBOYS	8
THERE WAS <i>THAT</i>	9
VISUAL TRANSMISSION	10
ONLY THEN WILL SUCCESS BE POSSIBLE	12
FOR ABOUT TEN MINUTES, THE HOUSE IS RATTLING	13
THE SLOPING PETALS OF AN IRIS BLOSSIM	15
IF YOU'DDA TALKED TO ME	16
SEATTLE TO EUGENE TO PORTLAND	17

WOMEN, NAKED LIGHT BULBS AND LINOLEUM 18

THERE ARE SOME BENEFITS 20

WE'LL COME, OMNIPOTNECE 21

IT GETS THIS WAY, I THINK 22

COMING DOWN DOWN DOWN 24

I'LL PUT THEM ALL IN A STORY BY AND BY 25

WHAT MATTERED WAS THE ENTIRETY 26

AS IF TO CONCLUDE AN INCH 27

YES I'D LIKE A SOFT CHAIR 28

AS IF WE HAVE FINALLY ARRIVED 29

WHEN IT STARTS POURING 30

THE FLOWERS GUST INTO THE WIND 32

AT MONTAUK 33

IF YOU WALK FASTER, IT STROLLS FASTER

Just be yourself, says a woman on the radio while I'm following a big grey truck perhaps full of perfume with a sexy woman painted on the back door. *Intimacy in even the slightest stripping.* She's wearing a pink bra and a furry pink shawl and her lips are open as if she could suck you into her mouth and wrap you up in her pink fur. *We went over the falls in a mindless rush.* Along the roadside, tall thin trees with no leaves, looking very brown and parched, but also feathery and delicate.

THE CENTER OF CHRISTIAN THINK RADIO

We recycle plastics. I'm for that. Don't you agree Ched? *Alright, I guess.* I'm for recycling anything. I don't want to be accused of being hostile to the universe. So sure I take my plastic milk jugs out to the curb. It only makes sense from a conservative point of view. Don't you agree Ched? His partner is skeptical break a fall a belly flop *We'll talk about this in just a minute Jim.* Ched's next topic: *Why do you think President Obama don't make that birth certificate public?*

TO BE RECKONED WITH

Red winged black birds are falling from the sky, dead, thousands dead. I thought maybe they were sucked into a thunderstorm, the man says on the radio, but I was wrong. There was an eye witness in Beebe City and he said there were black birds perched in trees in big numbers. They can't see well at night so they couldn't have flown into a storm. After the cannon went off a few times, my friend went outside and he could hear the sounds of wings flying low, flying into trees. This was just before midnight on New Years Eve. Maybe it was the fireworks. Or lightening or hail or something. *Porpoises lower their voices to the range of their captors.* Black birds falling from the sky, a western sky, blue with big splashes of white, the weather just warm enough to open the window.

OR LIGHTENING OR HAIL OR SOMETHING

A man and woman are standing beside their car, a wreck, duck tape and cardboard covering the side windows. Across the gas island, the man tells me they need money to get to El Paso. She's pregnant and heavy. Some mother to tell. Can you help? It's starting to get dark. I give them \$5.00. There is the strong smell of oil in the air. The stars that were so vivid not long ago are now hidden behind a thick mist of dust.

AND HE WAS TAKEN INTO THE STORY

On the way back from a rest stop, a big old guy moves to the side so I can pass—I mean he might be my age, but he's in terrible shape, big stomach, scowling, and he looks at me with a look that always scares me, the way, for some reason, some rough redneck men look at me, when I'm just passing through their space, with a combination of desire and hatred, as if they'd like to force me to have sex and then shoot me *Looking back with her little eyes the moon was a definite and vivid crescent.* It's good to get in the car and drive away.



Science

THE BACK OF THE FRONT

Once when Mook and I were hiking in Dharmasala, he brushed against a plant and his ankle instantly swelled up. A few minutes later, a travel guide happened by. He looked at Mook's ankle, picked some leaves from another plant and rubbed them into his skin. Miraculously, the itching stopped. There's always an antidote nearby, he said, and then he disappeared around the bend with his entourage. There's a yoga sutra—when you are stressed or fixed on a negative thought, think the opposite. It's always nearby, one thought next to another, and it helps to see more clearly. Through the dust and the glare from the setting sun, a sign for Midland College. I put my mind elsewhere, adjacent. Crawling along on the service drive, I can't see more than a few feet, just following the car in front of me and then, oops, back on the highway again, the sun sinking with oil fields all around.

THE PHILADELPHIA EAGLES FALL TO THE DALLAS COWBOYS

Hovering above the horizon, a yellow half circle, with a narrow red outline. Miles and miles of scrubby fields with oil pumps excavating ancestor plants and animals. I fill up the engine and speed past monstrous refineries, horrifying like Zug Island with its steel and iron mills outside of Detroit, miles of sprawling tanks and towers, pipes and pistons. No wonder they want to have their guns. Mega war material, oil refineries, greedy politicians. Big money takes the table. Even the clouds are dark and ominous. They spread a shadow over Texas Gas and Crude oil. On my right, a military base. The word *unit* and the word *correction* stand out in the misty dust. A hard consonant. Red lines shoot across the skyline, the dust and the smell of oil so thick it seems like the end of the world. A capitalist nightmare. *Or a state of domestic felicity.* Just past dusk, when I leave the oil fields, there is a clarity of vision, so that even an exit sign stands out as a relief.

THERE WAS *THAT*

A few weeks ago, I went up to Herald Square just after the big snow storm. Many days with no sunlight. The snow was melting and was covered with sooty black smoke and urine from passing dogs and men. You have to be careful you don't kill yourself on a day like this, slip off the curb and fall into a big icy puddle in the middle of a crowd of Christmas bargain hunters. That's why I left New York City in 2005, I tell my accountant Howie. But then I have to remind myself, it's mostly the way I'm seeing, just a reflection of my mind today. *These boots are as good as any.* But it is what it is, too. Mind and reality interact with each other. One hundred miles past El Paso and heading west like the gold miners, like Dorothy and Toto but with speed side by side moving with the wind Miles of open land in every direction. A double-decker train on the right and mountains far into the distance. The horizon *a slow curve into the sky.* Yes, there was *that* and there is *this*, too.

VISUAL TRANSMISSION

Tucson is usually somewhat peaceful, but today a boy buys a semi-automatic handgun and goes on a shooting spree in a shopping center parking lot. I prop my cellular connection up on the counter and talk to my lover while he's cooking in his kitchen in Long Island and I'm doing dishes in Tucson. Then I am on the floor collating books and doing yoga and he's lying in his bed, talking and watching me to move together among the clutter from one room to the next then outside without losing reception to see the saguaro, the mountains and the bright blue sky. My shoes are dusty from the dry ground. Missing you, dear. From Tucson Airport to Laguardia. Gliding, not falling. Your little boy between us on the sofa. Then he falls fast asleep and you carry him upstairs to bed. We watch the rest of Harry Potter, but become involved in our skin and drift off into the bedroom. *Later I slip into the front room.* Tactile reception has its limits. Outside the window, Long Island is covered with a thick layer of snow.



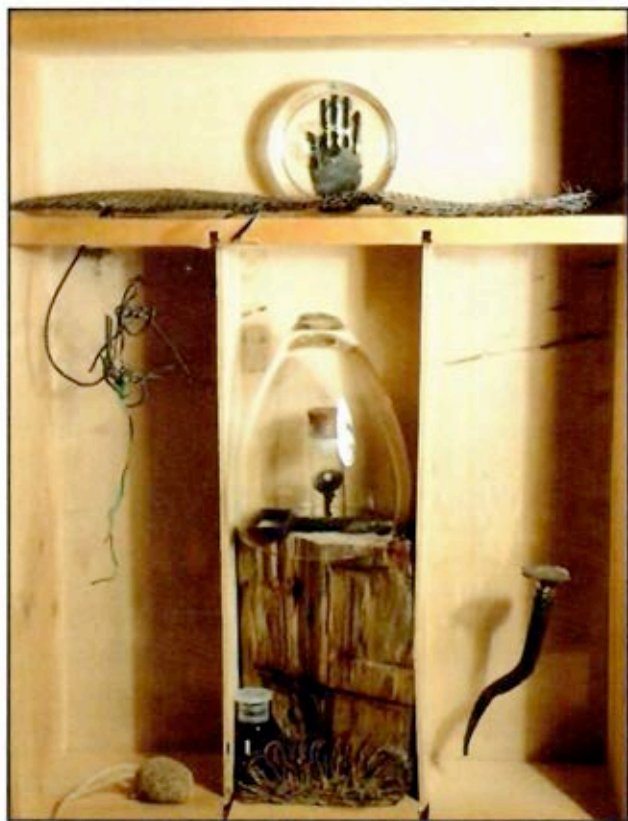
Nest Egg

ONLY THEN WILL SUCCESS BE POSSIBLE

Protests in Tunisia, Cairo, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Oman. I drink a glass of water and wonder if I should live with my lover. Instability. Strife. Hundreds of thousands fleeing, oil prices climbing. The thought of living in the suburbs, so far from the city makes me anxious. I generally rely on my own sense of things, but today I go to his counsel, the *iching* and read: Do not press forward, be gradual and gentle. Things that accord in tone, vibrate together. Only then will success be possible. *Or the rhythm of a motor that won't catch.*

FOR ABOUT TEN MINUTES, THE HOUSE IS RATTLING

Probably it was an earthquake, a woman says the next morning while we do dishes in the ashram kitchen in San Francisco, nonchalantly, as if she is referring to a thunderstorm. After meditation, I check my email. Panic. Suffocation. Heartache. In her sleep last night, Akilah Oliver died. She wasn't sick. It was a surprise. Turn over to look at the clock, and then roll flat and then . . . A few weeks earlier, we sat at the same table. We *are* at the same table. I find an email from her. See you soon at the Mullen talk. Hope it's much warmer there than here. . . . Fall asleep and then turn over to look at the clock and then . . . Some years ago her son, her only child, a very young man, died a sudden death after being denied emergency care in an LA hospital. I am weak and broken. Just like that, gone. The mother and the son. See you soon What you said What you didn't The river is flowing down to the sea. Mother carry me, down to the sea.



Sin Titulo

THE SLOPING PETALS OF AN IRIS BLOSSOM

You must see this, Norma Cole says. As we leave the cafe and walk down the block, Norma moves very slowly, using a cane after paralysis from a stroke. Behind us, old warehouses, one of them refurbished as a post-modern hotel. Around the corner, Norma points with her cane. See that, she says, making *a slow curve into the sky*, passing over a row of angular pastel three story buildings, Swiss new age and behind them a towering row of poplar trees, winter brown and wavering in the wind.

IF YOU'DDA TALKED TO ME

Steve Katz and I read together at Moe's Bookstore. Despite his aging fragility, he picks up my heavy suitcase and carries it up the highest flight of subway steps I've seen since Moscow, the Bart in Berkley. In the train, we observe the passengers. It's much quieter than the New York subways. Suddenly a man screams at a young woman for talking on her cell phone. She stands up and moves to the other side of the car. Then a robust Latina stands in front of him and says, You're waco Mister and if you'dda talked to me like that, I'dda knocked your head off. Behind her a row of quiet folks, watching. *Buildings smashed flat by war.* When we are ready to go, Steve stands up, pulls up his pants, shifts his weight and barrels off the train.

SEATTLE TO EUGENE TO PORTLAND

It's raining in Seattle and it's raining in Eugene. The windshield wipers only work on fast and this big automatic rental car seems to automatically make a u-turn in bus only lanes. Pitch dark and not knowing which direction I am driving. In Portland when I finally climb into the back seat of an old car full of young poets heading out to the Way Post, it's still raining. After the reading, a young woman tells me she is a hula hoop dancer, revolving fire and light and that she almost started crying when I was reading a poem about Detroit. Detroiters always miss home, she says.

WOMEN, NAKED LIGHT BULBS AND LINOLEUM

In letter after letter Jane Bowles goes over the most insignificant issues, unable to come to a decision, constantly overwhelmed by multiple possibilities. Impact closer, wiser not. Her characters make u turns and zigzags. She ridicules her own suffering and indecision. She loves women, naked light bulbs and linoleum, and she constantly nods to Paul. His writing comes first and she's very insecure about her own. But her writing is so splendid. To decline. To be less than needed. To fall short. After she dies, the doctor says, For her it was fatal, the early life of pleasure, the drinking, the excitement, given her sensibility. After a while, her friends became embarrassed that she might lose control. When she was a grown woman, trying to hold on to her sanity, her mother called her, my little princess, asking if she had candled her ears. There are some benefits, I think, of economic necessity and *a sooty bit of cemented yard*. On I-10, the big trucks and the trains go by, and on every side of me, far distant horizon and jagged mountains.



Ticket

THERE ARE SOME BENEFITS

In Macy's on 34th Street, my friend is checking out the price of shoes and searching for sales. I'm in Texas, passing a group of motorcyclists on Harleys, wearing sneakers instead of black hell's angel boots. The wide open treeless desert, I tell him, it's like driving on a two lane highway on the moon. The mountains seem like big piles of sand that the wind has blown into shapes. Then traffic slows to a standstill. Lines of trucks waiting for inspection and men in uniforms stopping cars. I turn off the phone and put it in my bag. Seven cars pulled over to the side, one guy on one side of a truck and another on the other while a big German shepherd circles the vehicle, sniffing. A guy climbs up on the cab to talk to the driver. They don't open the truck, they just depend on the dog. There are many ways to fall. On the cab side, we move into the against. Then the truck pulls out and the man looks at me. Are you a US citizen? . . . Ok, go. I guess I look safe, with my white face, brown hair and glasses. Little do they know.

WE'LL COME, OMNIPOTENCE

The magic bus from Quebec on tour disappears and then reappears, swerving with the wind. I stop at a rest area and then back on the road, and they're ahead of me again. The land is flatter now, the mountains far off in the distance. It gets this way, I think, right before the oil fields, coming in from the west this time, nine miles to Pecos. Water tanks. Dust and dirty air. Some huge smooth mounds of some kind of shale, must be those big chunky black spots on the aerial maps. A lot of trucks on the road now. In the heat of the afternoon, a butterfly and a flock of birds, black birds of some sort. A big plant or refinery, HALIBURTON says the sign. I pull into visitor parking to take some photos. Odessa, home of George Bush senior and now the Haliburtons, too. Between them, a matter of money. I imagine living here. How long would it be before the oil runs out? What are you going to do when it's gone, George? Enjoy one's darkening? Well when it's gone, we'll go elsewhere. It ain't gone yet.

IT GETS THIS WAY, I THINK

What looks so horrific at dusk in the middle of a dust storm when the western setting sun is glaring in your eyes, what looks horrifying then, doesn't look that bad in the light of day. I stop and watch *the sun in the leaves*. Still monstrous wealth, and kind of hellish looking, but around the bend, *a slow curve into the sky* and hundreds of white windmills. On the other side of the road, an oil field with jack-pumps going up and down amongst an orchard of uniformly planted small pecan trees. You can smell the oil as the turbines majestically revolve. It's possible to live in one spot and grow our own food, but we are zigzagging across the earth, horizontally with the desire to go faster and faster. Then prairie land, open space, horses grazing, the color green appears, and *we blossom into an enormous round*. Austin is like Ann Arbor in the desert, an oasis with mega health food stores and a university. Take from the land and the air and multiply. We mean to do it right this time. I read poetry in Dale and Hoa's lovely house on the side of a hill. Very graceful, the woman and the space, with a poetry salon, folding chairs, and poets listening and buying books. It is warmer here. Poetic culture all over the USA, even in Texas.



Inside Out 9

2

COMING DOWN DOWN DOWN

Less than one hundred miles to go. The sky is pale blue with a rose colored sunset and purplish clouds here and there. Almost all the trees are bare. A beautiful night to drive into the city. Not much traffic through New Jersey. Heading steadily downward toward sea level, from the idyllic country, so serene, gliding over a newly tarred highway, swooping down between trees with wiry brown fur, a month before greenery, up ahead the crux of the V. The clouds lie over the horizon. It's not a western sky, but still immense. Coming down down down and then the street widens into ten lanes and zoom all roads merge together, gliding into the city under the clouds, now heavy and dark and then the city with its lights spreading out. I text you. Lower and lower. You text me. Pay a toll and then lower yet into the Holland Tunnel and then I emerge inside an amazing gigantic throbbing city with thousands of toilets flushing at the same time. On Second Avenue a man is standing in front of his office building, looking into his cell phone. He smiles when he sees me and then he climbs into the car. My lover.

I'LL PUT THEM ALL IN A STORY, BY AND BY

Out on the island, we go shopping for garden plants and then to the beach together. Naked inside our clothes, I am cold so he holds me inside his jacket. I like your skin. I like your skin, too. As we walk along the shore, he talks about when he was a boy and there was a separate beach for African Americans. Their side was very crowded and small. He would look over through the gate at the other people, the whites with their luxurious space *in the depths of the ship* his mother's skin was whiter than mine. Her father was a Jewish guy, he says, and she only saw him once. She was afraid of him. Even long afterwards *there continues to be the feeling.*

•

With burning sage, Honorable Spirits of Yi please reveal our destiny. By the nightlight reading a story by Dylan Thomas and it is as if I am in a dream, the words highlighted and then disappearing into the prose.

112

WHAT MATTERED WAS THE ENTIRETY

Who he was, where he was. Sitting on a park bench I'm worried but succumb yield bow down to be above intent *in the cool of the afternoon* the trees are thick with leaves and birds. The traffic sounds preempt more rain, like the world making a low roar before the storm. Don't worry, It's just me. My chair tilts and crashes to the floor. And then we are in bed again. You would stick out, the only one. His little boy pokes me—Can you count by fives? by sixes? backwards? In the middle of a circle made with tire tracks, we blow bubbles. Not just disappointment, something else has occurred, something like empty holes burrowed into our thinking mind and emotional body.

AS IF TO CONCLUDE AN INCH

Twelve noon In New York City, I'm sitting in the car waiting for the street cleaner to pull up behind me. Then I cut out into the center and quickly angle in behind him, cutting off any cut takers. Listening to Peter Thompson talk about his book, *Wars of Afghanistan*. Very complicated tribal wars carried over centuries. We are involved too much, he says, in a reconciliation of conflicts we don't understand. *It is a hurricane*, I rush to conclude. But today the air is clear, except for a little wind making it difficult to bike uphill, legs heavy, the wheels turning so slowly. A trucker passes, yelling, Maybe you can go slower, Lady. At a light I pass him and yell into his cab, The turtle wins. Then I hit the top of the tiny slope on Manhattan Island and coast downhill, my wheels spinning, my hair blowing in the wind.

YES I'D LIKE A SOFT CHAIR

No feeling of sacred privacy anymore in a public park, Louise says, as she blows the smoke away from me. You are my only non-lawyer friend, she says, and when Roberto was in the third grade, he told her that she was the weirdest mother in the whole third grade. Our little wild ones. Then one day, he came home and said, she was not the weirdest mother, but his friend Michah's mother, she was definitely the weirdest one.

AS IF WE HAVE FINALLY ARRIVED

When little Luke is sitting quietly looking at a book, the afternoon light sifts through the blinds onto his skin and his soft and smooth new limbs. *In all likelihood, there's no real danger.*

•

An old woman just walked past wearing a low red top hat, yellow short sleeve blouse, white Jamaica shorts, a little hot dog on a leash. She has henna red hair and big yellow framed glasses and buck teeth. She stops, looks in the window at me for a moment and smiles. The East Village. I imagine her years back, jaunting along this same avenue on her way to some underground club.

WHEN IT STARTS POURING

It's like living in a lake. When I look up and through the locust leaves there is a light in the sky *a soft grey glimmer* My salad is deep green and light green with half circles of radish red. Thunder. And then water comes through the screen and rolls off the aloe leaves. When it stops, I take a walk. Kneel down with a woman named Denise to look at a big green bug with beautiful variegated wings, stuck in fear on the door grating. We both take cell phone shots. I break off a locust twig and lift him away. He spins his wings and slowly magically propels himself across the street. More insects, Denise says, now that they have stopped putting rat poison in the park. The red tailed hawks do a fine job. When my etymologist friend looks at the photo, she tells me, it's a green lime hawk moth.



Pass Age - evidence & cadence

112
THE FLOWERS GUST INTO THE WIND

Dramatic music and muffled conversations coming from the direction of the park. It sounds like a film. I go out to mail a letter. *His voice comes down through the ceiling who he was, where he was* not so many people on the street in August. There's a film in the public circle with hundreds of quiet people, sitting and reclining on the ground. Subtitles. Sounds like Goddard. Contempt. Yes, a couple arguing and making up. Lots of slow bodies, panning out and then up close posturing. A film about a film. Walk past an ambulance inside the park, doors closed, lights flashing. Across the street and all is well. I take my lover's name out of my poems and turn the books about Taoist sexuality around so I can't see the spines. Looking down at the floor, I notice a little black curl. I wet my baby finger, pick it up, study it, and then flick it into the breeze. With personal drama, sometimes we tend to forget the rest of the world.

AT MONTAUK

At Montauk, Martine and I are both in lawn chairs, reading. Little children, women and men parade in front of us with varying body sizes and colors. The tide comes up suddenly and laps right over our knees. In a damp moment, I grab my bag and lift it up high, just in time. As I hand Martine HD's *Vision and Meditation*, I say, I don't think I actually read this book today, but I did look at each word. We laugh *to look askance*. The mind and the meditative moment may never visit each other. Is it this? Is it that? Well, it just is.

Barbara Henning



Photo by Martine Bellen

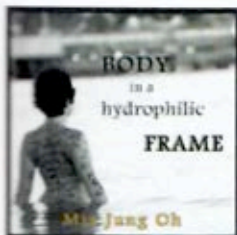
Barbara Henning is the author of seven collections of poetry and three novels. Her most recent books are a collection of poetry and prose, *Cities & Memory* (Chax Press); a novel, *Thirty Miles from Rosebud* (BlazeVox); a collection of object-sonnets, *My Autobiography* (United Artists); and a book of interviews, *Looking Up Harryette Mullen* (Belladonna). Forthcoming is *A Swift Passage* from Quale Press. Barbara grew up in Detroit and has lived in New York City since 1983. She teaches for writers.com, as well as Naropa University and Long Island University in Brooklyn, where she is Professor Emerita.

Featured Artist: Laurie Price

Laurie Price has been creating visual work and writing for a few decades. The featured works are from a series titled *Inside Out / De Dentro Hacia Fuera*. These assemblage boxes are completely made from recycled materials and ideas. Ongoing visual work/photos can be seen here: graciouslyeconomiesandcorrugatedshadows.blogspot.com. She has a new book of poetry forthcoming from Lunar Chandelier Press (in Brooklyn, NY), entitled *Radio at Night*.

other chapbooks from

MONKEY PUZZLE PRESS



Body in Hydrophilic Frame is a rare look inside the complexities of the writer's cocoon. A body wrapped and smothered, shattered and laced with grit. This, and birth. A raw and intentional exploration of language, space and communication. Min Jung Oh's has set a new standard for innovative poetry.

Poetry / \$8.00
Published: September 2012
ISBN-10: 0-9851705-4-9

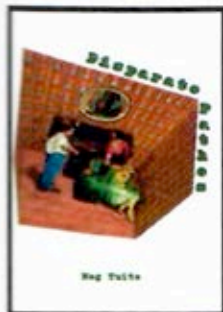
A modern day Beat combination of Rocky Balboa uppercuts and Kerouacian human perception, *THE WEEKENDER* exhibits the greatest fear of all rebellious writers: ending up inside the slammer with the pros.

Fiction / \$8.00
Published: July 2012
ISBN-10: 0-9851705-1-4



With tooth and nail, Meg Tuite scrapes not under the skin, but under the bone to find the marrow of meaning and purpose in the lives of her characters. Her unique voice and style redefine what it means to be a woman, and to be a writer.

Fiction / \$8.00
Published: January 2012
ISBN-10: 0-9826646-9-9



poetry - \$8.00



ISBN-10 098517056-5

ISBN-13 9780985170561



9 780985 170561

50800



monkeypuzzlepress.com