

A CONVERSATION WITH LIGHTSEY DARST

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

In one sense, this book is deeply personal. *Find the Girl* springs from my middle school years (6th-8th grade). That was a rough time for me. Not that anything in particular happened; it was

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just the usual awfulness. I remembered this time so clearly for years, but I just didn’t think about those memories much (and I certainly never talked about them). Then they started coming out in my writing.

What research did you undertake in writing *Find the Girl*?

I read some CSI-tech type books, accounts of real cases and so on. I read some books about serial killers (not many—they’re often disgusting). I read a little on archaeology. I read a lot of pulp detective novels. I also had a lot of conversations with women. I would tell them what I was working on and they would tell me stories. For me, that’s research.

How long did it take you to write the collection?

Find the Girl took two years of solid work. That’s from when I knew I was writing it and it was a book to when I completed the nearly-final revision. In that time, I wrote and rewrote the book so many times I began to

feel like an archaeologist, digging down through the layers of my own Troy. The layers went deep because the earliest poem in *Find the Girl* was written in 2002, and many poems that fed the book (even if they didn’t end up in it) were written before 2005, before I knew what I was doing.

What do you hope your readers take away from *Find the Girl*?

An experience. The experience will be different for every reader, but I hope it’s unsettling yet beautiful. I hope readers find themselves driven through the book like Snow White running through the woods. I hope they wonder whether they need to go back for a missing clue.

What was your journey to becoming a published poet?

I remember thinking of myself as a writer from a very early age, before I actually even wrote anything. That’s one answer. The other answer is that I never wanted to be a poet. I became a poet by discovering that I could not care enough to do other things. I wanted to be a historian—but I found I didn’t care about facts; I wanted to be a professor of literature—but I found I didn’t care about theories (they’re interesting, but I’m not a believer); I wanted to be a fiction writer—but I found I didn’t care about plots or characters. Thus, poetry!

How do you most enjoy spending your time when you’re not writing?

Dancing! I take ballet class two or three times a week and I have since I was four and a half. I love that exploration and lift. I’m always learning something new in dance class.

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Poetry Winner

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Find the Girl

POEMS

Lightsey Darst

Find the Girl
by Lightsey Darst

COFFEE HOUSE PRESS

Find the Girl



SUMMARY

From Snow White to the Yde Girl and Helen of Troy, to JonBenét Ramsey, this lurid and lyrical debut explores the transition from girlhood to womanhood and America's fascination with missing and exploited children. Topical and timely, Lightsey Darst's poems draw from both the oldest tales and the current vein of child/young woman endangerment horror. The poet recalls and responds to true crime exposés, pulp detective fiction, classic fables, modern novels like *The Lovely Bones*, and TV shows like "Law @ Order."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the collection's main themes?
2. What fairy or folk tale characters were important to you as you grew up, and why?
3. What have you witnessed? What is the role of a witness?
4. Which places and times in *Find the Girl* do you most connect with? Why?
5. Which poems reminded you of yourself or someone you know? Were the memories associated with your reading positive or negative, and why?
6. Do you like to watch CSI-type shows? If so, why?
7. Why is voice so important in this book? How does reading the poems out loud affect your experience?
8. Did you find the stream-of-consciousness sentences to be creatively freeing or distracting? Did the poet's style successfully enhance and emphasize her main themes?
9. Did you prefer to read the poems individually or in a sequence? Can the poet's themes and styles be better understood by taking one poem at a time randomly or reading the collection in the given order?
10. What does this collection of poems say about the coming-of-age experience of young women?

ABOUT LIGHTSEY DARST

Originally from Tallahassee, Florida, Lightsey Darst is a writing instructor, dance critic, and dancer who lives in Minneapolis where she curates a writers' salon. The recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, her poems have appeared in the *Antioch Review*, *Diagram*, *Gulf Coast*, *Monkey Bicycle*, *New Letters*, and elsewhere. *Find the Girl* is her first collection of poems.



Learn more about the author and her work at www.lightseydarst.com.



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