



## **Pulp and Paper (Iowa Short Fiction Award)**

*Josh Rolnick*

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“I glanced out the window as my train pulled into the station and saw the girl who killed my son.” So begins Josh Rolnick’s powerful debut collection of eight stories, which utilizes a richly focused narrative style accenting the unavoidable tragedies of life while revealing the grace and dignity with which people learn to deal with them. The stories—four set in New Jersey and four in New York—span the wide geographic tapestry of the area and demonstrate the interconnectedness of both the neighboring states and the residents who inhabit them.

In “Funnyboy,” a grief-stricken Levi Stern struggles to come to terms with the banality of his son’s accidental death at the hands of Missy Jones, high school cheerleader. In “Pulp and Paper,” two neighbors, Gail Denny and Avery Mayberry, attempt to escape a toxic spill resulting from a train derailment when a moment of compassion alters both their futures forever. “Innkeeping” features a teenager’s simmering resentment toward the burgeoning relationship between his widowed mother and a long-term hotel guest. “The Herald” introduces us to Dale, a devoted reporter on a small-town newspaper, desperately striving to break a big-time story to salvage his career and his ego. A teenager deals with the inconceivable results of his innocent act before an ice hockey game in “Big Lake.” And in “The Carousel,” a Coney Island carousel operator confronts the fading memories of a world that once overflowed with grandeur and promise. Throughout, Rolnick’s characters search for a firm footing while wrestling with life’s hardships, finding hope and redemption in the simple yet uncommon willingness to act.

*Pulp and Paper* captures lightning in a bottle, excavating the smallest steps people take to move beyond grief, heartbreak, and failure—conjuring the subtle, fragile moments when people are not yet whole, but no longer quite as broken.

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