



# Thirst

*Ken Kalfus*

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This collection of marvelously inventive and surreal stories by a distinctive new voice blends the fabulism of Calvino and the contemporary angst of DeLillo with a geographic and metaphoric language that is his alone.

## Thirst Details

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Author : Ken Kalfus

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## From Reader Review Thirst for online ebook

### DilanAc says

It's interesting that no one has this book on Shelfari. It has a very complimentary blurb by David Foster Wallace on the back cover. You would think that at least would have sold a few copies.

Mostly I found it uneven. Some parts work, some don't. No story was an outright success but every one at least intrigued in some way. For example, the longest piece in the book, "No Grace on the Road" did not hold together for me. The main character was cruel beyond understanding, his wife tolerant beyond understanding and yet the ending was quite beautiful.

Each piece is so completely different in style and tone, it's hard to believe that they were all written by one person. Perhaps Mr. Kalfus's style hasn't jelled yet. I expect more and better things to come from him. "

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### Trevor Pearson says

*"No, no. I mean very thirsty. Let us say that you miss two meals. Then you are very hungry, yes. Your stomach hurts, you are faint. That is not so uncommon. You can remain many days without eating. But have you been so thirsty? So thirsty that you cannot take another step, you cannot even think. That is how thirsty you must be in the desert before you allow yourself the most tiny ration of water. Just a taste really, only enough amount to live and remind you that you remain thirsty. In Europe water runs from leaky faucets, washes streets, spills from fountains, am I right? Pools. Ice rinks. Water Piks. People take showers long enough to conduct sexual acts, do you know that? It is not francs that make this country rich, but its water."*

The term thirst has been brought back to prominence on the global stage in recent years. You realize once you hear it mentioned on a talk show like The Ellen DeGeneres Show, something, whatever it may be, has finally jumped the shark. Thirst in this sense is a reference to a look of lust, pouty lips, eyes gazing all over a person's body and ready to pounce. In the digital age thirst isn't relegated to one gender or humans for that matter, in this day and age every living thing can look thirsty enough. In Ken Kalfus' Thirst he takes the strong desire, craving and longing feeling to a level far beyond just sex.

**The Joy And Melancholy Baseball Trivia Quiz** is a fictional story about common and strange occurrences within the game of baseball. Pitchers pitching without control happens, hanging them out to dry also happens occasionally, but what rarely happens is resentment towards the sport that let them down. There are also stories revolving around the convoluted unwritten rules of the game, self-policing, and how one bad decision by the ruling authority can lead to the apathy of a fan base and the relocation of a once beloved team. The author also raised a question about cheering a team or players, and does a team really exist if it's not being reported by the media. My favourite was the 55 pitch battle between pitcher and batter, protecting the plate just to get an advantage, it must have been at least a 30 minute at bat and this in a time when there was no pitch clock. Suit is a tale of a man in desperate need to grow up. If an arrest, lawyering up, a hair cut, and a court date won't do it perhaps a new suit will sway him; but what does the future really look like? **The Republic Of St. Mark 1849** is about the last young man of his family in the historic city of Venice. At this

point Venice was nothing but war torn and disease ridden. The man's been preparing to die all of his life, he has become invisible to the opposition, Cholera doesn't even want him; he can now die the way he wanted, as the last hope in a dying city.

*"The best life is the one that prepares you best for death. This is the life in which you gradually lose your ties to the earth: those to your parents, your siblings and cousins, your wife, your children, your comrades. Rather than being struck down when you feel yourself to be most loved, it is better to lose your teeth, your hair, your eyesight, and then your loved ones and thus for your body to lose weight in increments, so that in the end you barely disturb the soil of the earth you tread."*

**Night And Day You Are The One** is a tale about a man who doesn't know yet it but he's living a double life. He suffers from a sleep disorder, that is what he does know, but what leaves him confounded is the bouts of surrealism that begin to merge his alternate lives. It's hard enough keeping one life in order, throw in another one and a sleep disorder on top of that; I'm tired just thinking about it. This is one reason why a small minority prefer their sleeping life to that of their waking life; just as confusing but more answers. **Cats In Space** was not the cat's meow or even its pajamas from my perspective. It reminded me too much of the movie Gummo and what path adolescence can lead you down. Besides the movie I couldn't get the voice of Bob Barker out of my head telling the viewers to "Help control the pet population. Have your pets spayed or neutered." **The Weather In New York** is kind of funny as an older retired man and native New Yorker flies home to his father's home from Florida during a blizzard to try and persuade his octogenarian father to join him. As the winter shocks his system and brings out the worst of him the father just wants to read the paper. In **Among The Bulgarians** a young man travels with his American family to of all places Bulgaria. At the time of the story Bulgaria is a communist country and after spending the summer in this alien land he can't remember much of anything and has this strange feeling of being less American while back home with his friends in Long Island.

*"And now he had returned home, the trip was over. Well, that too was incredible. He had never expected to journey this far in time. He marveled at the passing of every moment: the fact that he was here, in Nadelman's mother's car, and that this too in another moment would be no more than a memory, a kind of dream as insubstantial as his previous anticipation."*

**Le Jardin De La Sexualité** was a two part short story about a family noticing the prevalence of sex after moving from Dublin to Paris. Sex is depicted in the billboards in the sky, and art on the streets; there is no escaping it and it seems to be on the residents mind. While looking after two impressionable minds a babysitter wonders about the right age to broach the subject of sexuality? And who should be responsible for discussing it? You begin to wonder if any person holding on to their virginity with a death clutch lost it the moment they stepped foot into gay Paris. **Rope Bridge** is one of the few straightforward stories in this collection but one of the more psychological and conflicting. As time goes on people get bored, the eye begins to gaze and the mind starts to wander. Life is not about waiting to die, animal instincts kick in and challenges are accepted in order to address some pressing questions and feel alive again. Steps must be calculated in order to get the answer you were hoping for while also preserving the status quo; a rope bridge for sure, but it can turn into a slippery slope with one false move.

**No Grace On The Road** is a story of division. Besides the obvious language barrier there is a financial divide, a cultural divide, and a spiritual divide as a high ranking military official returns to his birthplace

with his American wife. An environmental event brings the man closer to the realization that he isn't who he thought he was as native tradition trumps common sense during a time of crisis. **A Line Is A Series Of Points** is a refugee story that highlights the potential loss of civilizations when focus is so narrow and survival is in question. **Invisible Malls** sounds like a great place to spend the day with the family. You can buy pretty much everything you could imagine it's just up to the consumer to pony up. Each mall offers very unique items but the common thread is the psychology of consumerism: desirable items always remain out of reach for the frugal buyer, there's always a remedy for something, lining up for days for that limited edition item, food courts that deep fry everything, commercializing the galaxy, and even a store where you can buy packets of time. Nothing is sacred anymore.

*"Did the hours tick away? No, there was no clock. The rain falling - that is, crashing, drumming, rattling, popping, hissing, and, if you will, ringing like a spill of coins - on the tin-paneled section of the roof marked the only passage of time. It was a time that could not be represented by the even sweep of a second hand, nor that of an hour hand, nor by the publication of calendars nor by the magnetic resonance of cesium. It came in floods. In a roar. First a second, then a century. History was only a sequence of events and if nothing happened - as nothing here ever did - no time has passed at all."*

What I found most interesting about the author's style was how as a reader you never felt like you were in a groove or settled in while reading this collection. From story to story you didn't really know what genre to expect, and from page to page within a story the outlook could be turned on its head. For example, after a few sexually heightened stories we are thrown into a story about baseball and many of its historical quirks. Now you see I was told when I was inexperienced in sex to think about baseball to prolong the experience but while reading it kind of killed the mood. Good job sir. Recommended.

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### **David says**

Half great, half forgettable. I once wrote Kalfus to thank him for the great ones in this collection, and the guy actually wrote me back a thoughtful, kind note. Now we're friends on facebook. This is what technology can do for you.

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### **Mikee says**

A collection of stories, of indescribable breadth, all deeply evocative. Such a delicious read.

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### **Chris Blakelock says**

Freaky-deaky good in ways I'm not sure I comprehend yet

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### **Babette says**

crazy short stories on all kinds of topics. On a trip to Minneapolis we stopped into the Loft Literary Center. They have a Milkweed Press store there and I bought this and An American Brat.

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### **Jacob Russell says**

Le Jardin de Sexualite, the two part story that heads the collections, as perfect a piece of short fiction as any I've read.

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### **David says**

Nice collection. I especially liked "Rope Bridge", "The Joy and Melancholy Baseball Trivia Quiz", and "Cats in Space".

Worth a look. (3.5 stars.)

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### **Alvin says**

Well crafted and original stories. I liked them all except for the one about baseball. A little like David Foster Wallace only not as funny or annoying.

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### **Milkweed Editions says**

Salon.com Book Award Winner

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### **Molly says**

A nice range within this collection.

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### **Aimee says**

Some stories were exceptional and some were awful.

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### **Rob says**

A few quite good stories, reminiscent of Calvino and Borges, surrounded by some okay stories. And then I remembered, Calvino and Borges do a pretty good Calvino and Borges as well--so I'll read them instead. If you only read one story from this collection, though read "Night And Day You Are The One"

I'll probably continue to be suckered in by DFW cover quotes, in spite of this bit of a misfire. And, if I didn't happen to give so many 3 star reviews as to render them all meaningless this would have gotten three stars again.

And now I've just talked myself into bumping it back up to three stars, now that I've reviewed my review

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### **Karen Carlson says**

Consistently good. Detailed comments on all stories (with possible spoilers) at [A Just Recompense](#).

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### **Rand says**

I have found myself drawn back to this modest collection again and again over the past 14 years.

Sometimes a similar book will appear and the urge to revisit Kalfus will goad me again down the path of memory.

At least two times I have contemplated selling this paperback. Each time I have thought better of it, recognizing that my future desire to reread these stories outweighs my lust for credit at the local used book mine.

In retrospect, there are times in my life when I wish that I had this book handy to share aloud with another—notably "The Joy and Melancholy Baseball Trivia Quiz" but also "Night and Day You are the One", both of which subvert narrative form in pleasingly different ways.

Equally unforgettable are: the homage to Calvino in "Invisible Malls" & the opening piece (a sardonic send-up of a post-modern copyright page) AND the first "real" story, "La Jardine de Sexualitie". (view spoiler)

And the other stories are all mostly good, if somewhat more conventional in form or subject matter. There are one or two which I admit to not having finished, still. There is time yet, yes?

Previously I have thought ill of this book, accusing it of not being "whole" in some way. I now see that this collection is unified by its wanting.

And I too do want.

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