



# Something in My Eye: Stories (Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction)

*Michael Jeffrey Lee*

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"I was drawn to Michael Jeffrey Lee's line-up of loners and drifters, imperiled children, and haunted psychos neither because I want to hang out with these bad boys, nor because I plan to cross the street when I see them coming, but because the invitation to inhabit their minds, to see the world through their eyes, and to watch their often unsettling stories play out in space and time enables Lee to do all sorts of extremely interesting things with consciousness and language."—Francine Prose, judge for the Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction

Michael Jeffrey Lee's stories are bizarre and smart and stilted, like dystopic fables told by a redneck Samuel Beckett. Outcasts hunker under bridges, or hole up in bars, waiting for the hurricane to hit. Lee's forests are full of menace too-unseen crowds gather at the tree-line, and bands of petty crooks and marauders bluster their way into suicidal games of one-upmanship. In *Something In My Eye*, violence and idleness are always in tension, ratcheting up and down with an eerie and effortless force. Diction leaps between registers with the same vertiginous swoops, moving from courtly formality to the funk and texture of a slang that is all the characters' own. It's a masterful performance, and Lee's inventiveness accomplishes that very rare feat—hyper-stylized structure and language that achieve clarity out of turbulence, never allowing technique to obscure what's most important: a direct address that makes visible all those we'd rather not see.

**Michael Jeffrey Lee** lives in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he earns his living as a typist, waiter, and nightclub singer. A frequent contributor to *Conjunctions*, he is also an associate fiction editor at the *New Orleans Review*. He is at work on a novel.

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