



## Maud Casey

**Drastic**  
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**Q: A poignant sense of loneliness and a subtle longing for connection run throughout the stories in *Drastic*. Is this the way you see the world too? Where do these heartbreaking characters come from — are they drawn from real life or your imagination?**

**A:** The characters, for the most part, start in reality, but by the final draft of a story, they have become so distorted that they've spun off into some other made-up realm. A character might start with something as tiny as a signature gesture or phrase cadged from real life, but then the real element becomes heightened, twisted, grotesque, until the characters take on their own peculiar lives. At least, that is always the hope. The story, "Relief," began with something true — I'd dreamed I had insomnia — but Flora is like me only, as John Updike would say, as dreams are to reality. Flora becomes a different kind of truth, more recognizable. Seamus Heaney calls this "contemplatable intimacy," rendering something private and personal accessible to the reader.

**Q: Throughout nearly all of *Drastic*, the characters are reclusive and introverted, and participate in their lives as if in a dreamlike state, not quite understanding what is happening around and, sometimes, to them. Because writing is such a solitary act, do these characters mirror the feeling you have when you are creating them?**

**A:** Writing is certainly a solitary venture, sometimes scarily so, but I think the characters are reclusive and introverted because those are the kinds of personalities I was interested in exploring at the time. How do these characters make their way in the world? The subtle longing for connection, that poignant sense of loneliness is perhaps even more acute with these types, more tragic, because they so desperately want to find a way out of themselves into the world and can't reach outside of themselves for whatever reason.

**Q: Were these stories all written in the same time period or over a long span? If they were written over a long period of time, is it difficult to conjure the strange, beautiful atmosphere of a story such as these when you have had breaks in between? Do you have specific techniques you use?**

**A:** I wrote a first, skeletal draft of these stories, and then rewrote them over the course of a year almost seven years later. Each story was an utterly different experience in terms of revision. Some I completely dismantled. "The Arrangement of the Night Office in Summer," for example, has only one or two paragraphs of the original draft left. Others, like "Talk Show Lady," are mostly intact. The revision was more subtle. The process was very different for each story. What remained constant was a need to immerse myself in each story while I was rewriting it. I can only work on one thing at a time. I'm no multi-tasker. I can barely chew gum and walk.

**Q: In "Relief," Flora's friend Peter becomes one of those "formerly-nerdy-now-excruciatingly-hip" writers and leaves their friendship behind because it revolved around "possibility, not achievement." Is this a phenomenon you have witnessed? How can friendships survive success? Is it more difficult for artists/writers than people in business to remain friends when one of them becomes more successful?**

**A:** I think there is always some degree of envy and jealousy among friends, particularly friends who are striving to do similar things, but the size of these feelings in proportion to love and loyalty depends on the strength of the friendship itself. As far as whether this is a more difficult issue for artists and writers, again I think it depends. I suppose artists and writers do have a reputation for being more emotionally volatile, throwing paint brushes and typewriters, that kind of thing, but part of that is unnecessary theatrics and myth. I don't think it's any more or less difficult, it just gets expressed differently. In Flora's case, she's invested in her own misery to a certain degree. It becomes, consciously or not, the thing she does best. Peter's success may be a factor in the demise of their friendship, but Flora's inability to move beyond bitterness is also a big part of the problem.

**Q: In "Drastic," Josephine thinks, "The trick...was to learn to tell your own narrative in a way that allowed you to influence your own evolutionary path." Many of the characters seem to live their lives as narrative, removed one step from actually experiencing their lives — Lucy in "Trespassing," Rita in "Talk Show Lady," Bella in "Genealogy." Do you think people need to make a narrative out of their lives?**

**A:** Absolutely. The way we tell our lives shapes the raw material, gives order and meaning to events that might otherwise seem chaotic and unwieldy. There's something very comforting about making narratives out of our lives. Suddenly, poof, there's structure, voila, movement, ta-dah, cause and effect, meaning with a capital M.

**Q: When you were writing these stories, did you imagine the characters as thinking of their lives as stories so that a certain distance from their own lives could be achieved?**

**A:** Unfortunately for them, I don't think my characters are that self-aware. That's what draws me to them in the first place. They don't always see what's in front of them. Some of them, Flora and Rita, don't even realize the extent to which they are distancing themselves from their own lives. That's part of the pathos. Others, like Josephine and possibly Harriet, are struggling to retell the narratives they feel they've inherited.

**Q: Most of the characters work in temporary jobs or are drifting or are in some state of "in between." You mention in the acknowledgments that you worked at temporary jobs. Can you talk about that experience and how it has influenced your writing?**

**A:** I had a series of pretty strange temp jobs. In addition to making me an extremely fast typist, they provided rich material. Like Lucy in "Trespassing," I worked as a secretary in a Whole Body and Unclaimed Dead Program. I remember the first time I saw a dead body being embalmed in the morgue, and being very moved. Here was someone I might have spoken to on the phone, offering their body for medical research. At the risk of being overly dramatic, the liminal state of being a temp lends itself pretty neatly as a metaphor for the liminal state of being human. At my various jobs, I'd write notes for stories between faxing and answering the phone. There's often a lot of down time as a temp. After six years, I had lots and lots of notes.