

## INTRODUCTION

The 2013 Knickerbocker Prize



*Lauren Groff*

WHEN HEATHER JACOBS, the founding editor behind *Big Fiction*, asked me to judge the inaugural Knickerbocker Prize, I agreed swiftly and with gusto. Far too few places publish novellas these days; it's a terrible shame. Even though novellas are difficult—too long for most readers to digest in one sitting, and too short to sell as their own autonomous books—they are the most elegant of literary forms. A good one is as economical as a story and as powerful and resonant as a novel.

When I was handed the stories that made the semifinal cut, I took my cues for judging from the journal itself, which is capacious, exciting, and, above all, beautifully made. I read the stories blind, slowly, and with great pleasure. There were plenty of wonderful stories in the bunch, a number of which I would have been pleased to see published in the journal; but I was waiting for the ineffable, the flare in the gut that told me I was in expert hands.

I found this lightning pulse in both “Sandy and Wayne” and “Half-Boy,” the first- and second-place winners. These stories thrilled and moved me; in both cases, at tense moments in the stories, I had to stand and walk around the room in agitation, in order to calm myself enough to go on. Though they could not be more different—“Sandy and Wayne” a love story on an Arkansas road-building crew, and “Half-Boy” taking place in the humid Florida of the last century—the authors of both of these stories won me over with their dedication to the precise detail, the perfect description, and the largeness of their characters’ longing.

These two stories are both brilliant and moving: I am thrilled to help bring them to your attention. I hope you will love them—and *Big Fiction*—as much as I do. ©~©



LAUREN GROFF is the author of the novels *Arcadia* and *The Monsters of Templeton*, and the story collection *Delicate Edible Birds*. Her fiction has won Pushcart and O. Henry prizes, and has appeared in journals including *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Ploughshares*, *One Story*, and *Glimmer Train*, and in two editions of the *Best American Short Stories* anthology.