

Flynn, Nick
SOME ETHER
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Flynn lives in Brooklyn and is a member of Columbia University's Writing Project, where he instructs young people and trains teachers in creative writing. His essays and poems have been published in a variety of distinguished periodicals. This collection marks his debut. There's little reason to hope things will improve when three of the four opening poems deal with suicide and the poet teaches at a university, but—save the razor blades for another day—in this case they do. In fact, those first poems are first-rate. They are definitely not of the egghead life-is-pointless variety. Flynn's perspective is from the slightly cocky stance of a survivor by his own wits, not the flinching cower-and-cringe so popular among victims of fate. Flynn's poetry fights back in a style that, for all its toughness, is compassionate. His verse is grounded in gritty details not, despite the title, floating among ethereal abstractions. He has an ability to speak in the vernacular while remaining articulate. Perhaps most irritating to his professorial colleagues, Flynn engages in that low-prole entertainment so disdained in academe known as humor. It may be that there's no devil in Flynn's cosmology to explain the shit that happens to people, but, quoting folksinger/theologian Tom Waits, he suggest it's "just God when he's drunk." Unfortunately, perhaps owing to the average reader's saturation with trauma and dysfunction, the volume begins to weigh on one. It's heavier than it needs to be. The grittiness begins to seem as though it were airbrushed on, as though the author no longer lived in the poems but was merely slumming.

Despite some unevenness, these are good poems about survival, a topic most will find far more interesting than the breast-beating sanctimoniousness of victimhood.