

## FICTION

**What we've lost**

BY BECKY OHLSEN

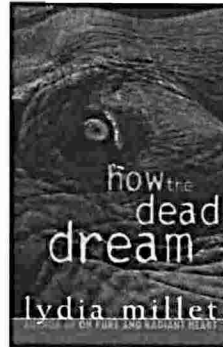
From the first page of Lydia Millet's new novel, *How the Dead Dream*, you can tell that her protagonist, Thomas (known as T), tends toward obsession. He studies the faces of dead presidents on dollar bills with an intensity and reverence unusual, to say the least, in a six-year-old. He keeps his money close—often in his mouth, to his mother's consternation. But to T, the faces of Jackson and Hamilton are neither figureheads nor simple currency. Idealized in green, they represent the sublime potential in humankind.

T's almost religious view of the institutions of government and finance, especially the latter, defines his young life. Reserved, purposeful and never distracted by the social dramas that afflict his classmates, T subtly and successfully maneuvers in various markets to surround himself with money. After college, his first big project is a fast-and-cheap retirement community in California. He falls in love with the perfect woman, and they cruise the manicured streets of the project in T's pristine Mercedes, the future sure and bright.

But uncertainty creeps in. T's parents drift away, his colleagues seem offensive. Then disaster strikes, and his world cracks open. Mourning a tragic loss, T begins to notice other irreplaceable losses. Slowly, his obsession turns from those who direct the making of the concrete world to those who are made extinct by it. Fixating on animals that are the last of their kind, T starts breaking into zoos at night to ponder the cosmic loneliness of the almost extinct.

It's to Millet's credit that the reader's sympathy never flags, that the suffering of a selfish, greedy fortune-builder remains heartwrenching. The intelligent, sharp-humored charm of her narrative voice aligns the reader with T from the start. In lyrical passages that trace T's deeper musings, Millet makes the personal universal, raising the stakes so that each realization has the weight of a revolution. And, like all revolutions, it's an untidy process, leaving the future uncertain. ♡

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**How the Dead Dream**

By Lydia Millet

Counterpoint  
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