

twist, the tender vulnerability she exposes in her characters gives this earnest collection heart. (Oct.)

☆ LEAPING MAN HILL

Carol Emshwiller. Mercury (Consortium, dist.), \$14.95 paper (224p) ISBN 1-56279-111-7

Revisiting California's Owens Valley and the Ledoyt family in 1915, Emshwiller (*Ledoyt*) elucidates the grim realities of her characters' lives with poetic tenderness. In spare but animated prose, she illuminates the healing power of love in the story of narrator Mary Catherine, who has come to the Ledoyts' farm after a harrowing childhood spent with a series of abusive stepfathers and a self-centered mother. Plainspoken Mary Catherine has been hired to teach Abel, the fatherless, nine-year-old boy who has never learned (or perhaps never wanted) to speak, but communicates in mischievous ways. His mother, Oriana, has lost touch with reality, living in the past when her husband was alive. Abel's older sister, Charlotte, cruelly burdened with the responsibility of running the family farm, has also suffered loss in the death of her dream of being an artist, while Abel's brother Fay and cousin Henny are angry, violent and brooding. Henny is bitter and self-loathing after losing his arm in battle, and though Mary is first attracted to Fay, she falls in love with the withdrawn Henny. Their romance is riddled with obstacles, mainly because Henny has lost the desire to be a part of society. Mary Catherine's evolution is touching; initially a frightened hired girl who believes that "everything I've ever hoped was too much to hope for," she becomes an integral part of the Ledoyt family. Under her care, Abel discovers speech, and Henny confronts his own fears when he fights for her love. Emshwiller borrows elements of traditional romance, but layers her plot with dimensional characters whose emotional depth and yearnings are explored in alternating viewpoints and distinctive voices. Permeated with Western atmosphere and studded with small surprises, this is both a heartfelt family drama and a tender love story that marks Emshwiller as a writer of distinctive talent. (Oct.)

THE REMAINS OF RIVER NAMES

Matt Briggs. Black Heron, \$22.95 (200p) ISBN 0-930773-56-X

The countercultural excesses of the 1960s and 1970s cast a long shadow on the family at the heart of Briggs's keenly intuitive debut effort—a collection of 11 linked stories—in which narrators alternate between four members of a doomed and unnamed

family. As the book opens in the early 1980s, middle-schooler Milton and grade-schooler Dillon have just been ditched by their parents, Art and Janice, who fled their Seattle-area house when the police closed in on Art's pot-growing operation. Mom and Dad eventually return, but their misadventures repeatedly throw the family into chaos just as the two boys enter adolescence. Art serves jail time, Janice takes the kids and leaves him, then lives with a succession of boyfriends and finally kicks Milton out at age 16. Desperate for some form of stability, Milton pursues exercise and violence, growing into a powerful weight-lifter and a would-be rapist, while little brother Dillon becomes bookish and defiant. Sweetly, and unexpectedly, the adult brothers cling to each other with a bond forged from their dysfunctional childhood—but one senses that nothing can really save them, not even romantic love, which Milton finds in a bar and Dillon finds in a waitress like his mother. The book's bleak outlook is reflected in its title, which stems from one of Janice's friends, Joe, who tells Dillon that nothing has value but "the old names of places... they are the only spoken thing that is not a lie." Briggs exhibits an impressive gift for conveying dark situations and murky motives with illuminating clarity. His multivalenced prose frequently spotlights his characters' befuddled, soulful searches for greater meaning, capturing the atmosphere of ambivalence, despair and stifled hope around a family painfully unraveling as two boys roughly, uncertainly, become men. (Oct.)

WINGS OF DESTINY

Catherine Lanigan. Health Communications, \$24 (500p) ISBN 1-55874-690-0

"Emotions rushed through the room, battering the walls like a tropical hurricane. Metaphysical questions bombarded each other as Yuala read his thoughts, and Rachel read those of her mother." Readers unfamiliar with Lanigan's (*Romancing the Stone*) flamboyant prose may mistake this overly melodramatic—at times truly mawkish—multigenerational historical romance for a bald-faced lampoon of the genre. But such is not the case, and Lanigan's young protagonist is nothing if not earnest in her quest for social justice and psychic well-being. As the story begins on April 15, 1906, three days before the catastrophic earthquake in San Francisco, heroine Barbara Kendrick is a fearless young journalist on the brink of exposing the corruption of city officials. Then her mentor, 91-year-old city founder Jefferson Duke, presents her with his diaries and his mother Rachel's writings, and the

meandering epic slips back to 1774. Rachel—the fair-skinned daughter of Yuala, a Jamaican-born African voodoo priestess, and Henry Duke, a wealthy white man—is herself destined to love a white Charleston planter; their son, Jefferson, makes his fortune in a white man's world. Meanwhile, a Chinese clan led by malevolent Nan-Yung pursues the other descendants of Henry Duke, whose brother Andrew mired Nan-Yung's grandfather in the opium trade. The two families converge on San Francisco, and as the earthquake rocks the city, centuries-old accounts are settled, and Barbara discovers her true place in the Duke family history. Apparitions, telepathy, clairvoyance and portentous dreams notwithstanding, Lanigan's research is sound, and the climactic descriptions of the historic earthquake ring true. The fulsome prose becomes less distracting as the narrative unfolds, but this is nonetheless an unashamed foray into romantic terrain. *50,000 first printing; major ad/promo; 5-city author tour.* (Oct.)

FYI: Released under the heading of *Visionary Fiction/Inspiration from a leading publisher of paperback titles on human relations, psychology and self-help, this volume is HCI's first hardcover publication.*

FAMILY BLOOD

Mary Hazzard. Ariadne, \$21.95 (233p) ISBN 0-918056-10-1

An absorbing portrait of an American family takes shape against the backdrop of WWII in this tale of stifling '40s mores. Robert Davenant is a conservationist and scientist in a Michigan university town, a conscientious but emotionally restrained and often cold father and husband. His wife, Grace, earned her Ph.D. in anthropology but relinquished dreams of a career when she married, raising five demanding children while writing a euphemistic weekly newspaper column on the "joys" of her large family. Robert's own frustrations—he too is overwhelmed by his many offspring—surface time and again in barely concealed contempt for his wife and harsh treatment of the children. Clara Jane, their precocious oldest daughter and the novel's primary narrator, picks up on all of her parents' anxieties, though on the surface her childhood seems idyllic: she reads, rides her bicycle and writes plays for her siblings to perform. Grace's efforts to successfully maintain the illusion of a large happy family are meticulously and convincingly described. The strain begins to show when Robert's obsessive spinster sister, Mildred, moves in, and intensifies when Grace finds work on a science quarterly