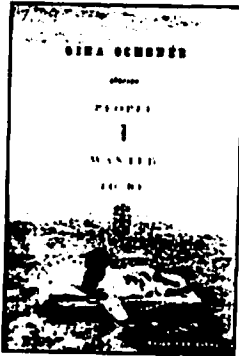


# Booklist

March 15, 2005

☆ **Ochsner, Gina. *People I Wanted to Be*.** May 2005. 204p. Houghton/Mariner, paper, \$12 (0-618-56372-5).



Ochsner's first book of stories, *The Necessary Fall to Grace* (2002), won numerous awards. In her latest collection, she revisits similar territory in stories set around the globe, often in places such as the countries of the former Soviet Union, which are rich with culture and wild beauty yet also bleak and repressive. Her characters, too, move fluidly between paradoxical states of gratitude and despair, clarity and misunderstanding, and accomplishment and failure, and there are no neat divisions between the living and the dead. In "Articles of Faith," a Finnish man and woman try to conceive a child, while the ghosts of their dead or unborn children play, just out of reach, in the frozen yard. In "Halves of a Whole," after a teenager's beloved twin sister dies, she is astonished to find a new sense of freedom. Many characters speak about the shortfalls of words: they're "like leaves," says one character, "one more way to hide ourselves from each other." In these remarkable stories, which draw from folklore and myths, Ochsner's flawed, wholly sympathetic characters miraculously stumble into small moments, shaped with a delicious sense of the absurd, which connect them to a world that's magical, merciful, and infinite. —Gillian Engberg