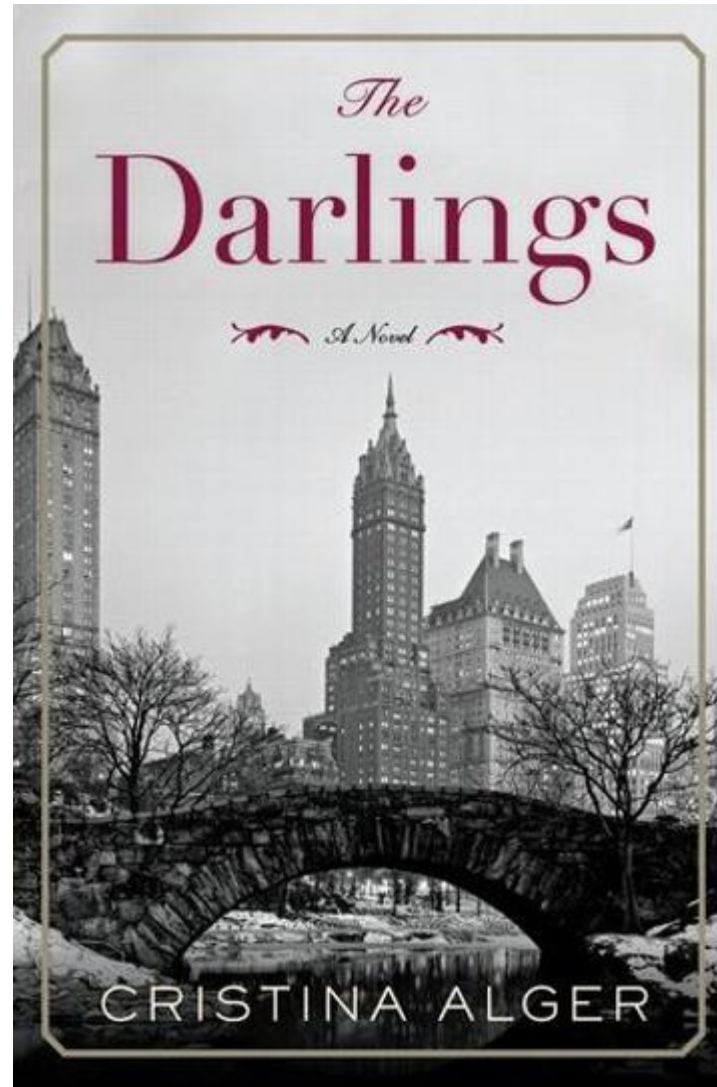


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### ***The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review- Hot off the Presses***



Cover Image of *The Darlings* by Cristina Alger;  
<http://cristinaalger.com/>

**The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review  
Presents: *The Darlings* by Cristina Alger**

Author bio: Cristina Alger graduated from Harvard in 2002 and from New York University School of Law in 2007. She has worked as an analyst at Goldman, Sachs, & Co. and as an attorney at Wilmer, Cutler, Pickering, Hale, & Dorr. She currently resides in New York City, where she was born and raised. *The Darlings* is her first novel.

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### **Review by Nicole M. Bouchard~**

The message that seems to lie at the core of *The Darlings*, the fictional fall-from-grace portrayal of a family that stood in the center of Wall Street infamy, is that no one is untouchable; the pervasive economic down-turn with its implications, consequences and anxieties lurks in every corner, from behind the closed doors of the penthouses belonging to the super-rich, to middle class suburbia, to the very streets of America's golden city. It is an ambitious debut novel that aims itself at the heart of a controversy whose wounds are still gaping open and raw. It endeavors to do what seems impossible; to dole out justice and yet, somehow make the guilty understood, exposing their frailties, flaws and misguided intentions until they merge into sympathetic characters in the reader's consciousness.

What drew me to the book initially, having read true accounts of the 2008 financial crisis, was that a debut author would choose to tackle a direct perspective, through the use of fiction, on an issue that has not yet been dulled by decades of history- an issue that still runs hot in the bloodstream of the nation. Due to the nearness of the themes, I wanted to read whether the fictional characters responsible would be portrayed as extreme, flat-out villains or rather the opposite for controversy's sake- misused figures in the wrong place at the wrong time who truly didn't

know what was going on and did their best to patch a sinking ship as it went down.

Alger, much to her credit, does neither. Her characters are distinctly human for better or for worse. The book invites its audience to ponder the gray area without pardoning or condemning. Alger demonstrates reserve with the wisdom to tread lightly and creates characters that have redeeming qualities; I believe this balance is partially owed to the fact that the majority of players in the book are, to state it simply, not the worst. Again, comparing to true accounts I've read of some of the real personalities behind the financial crisis, there were individuals who were far more extreme and it would have taken nothing short of a planets-realigning miracle to make them relatable. Alger discerningly doesn't go down that road but instead, keeps the story focused on characters one doesn't mind staying in the company of for the length of the book.

The Darlings are a New York power family; because the patriarch, Carter, had to struggle at points in his youth to keep up appearances of solvency, there is still a driving hunger behind his personal life and work ethic to maintain the status quo- one that is based on the belief that looking like you have everything is just as important as having it. In all the books' families, the look of success, perhaps more than its acquisition, is paramount. Ines, Carter's wife, seems at first glance and throughout much of the book to be an icy, superficial socialite. When the veil is drawn back to show her pain, sacrifice and vulnerability all in a very short period of time before Thanksgiving dinner, the effect is profound. The two daughters, Lily and Merrill, differ from one another in nearly every way spare for the fact that at heart, both they and their parents are allegiant to the family unit and will do nearly anything for its preservation.

It is Merrill's departure from this that makes her character infinitely more accessible; the character arch is well sketched here as Merrill gains dimension and comes to life three quarters of the way through the book.

It is through Lily, however, in chapter three that the novel takes off at a run. The vulnerable perspective through which Lily sees the world, seems to be the catalyst- the beginning of a domino effect- that begins the reader seeing into all of the other characters intimately as though the author, in forming Lily, unlocked the secret of expressing the true essence of each of the characters through the art of seemingly insignificant moments, personal details and back stories:

*"She couldn't explain why, but the inarticulable sensation that something was wrong had been following her everywhere, like a shadow. It lay heavy on her lids in the morning when she woke; it sat with her in the afternoons, gnawing away at her insides as she went about checking her e-mail, having lunch, running on the treadmill." (36)*

*"Lily had, therefore, accepted her mother's determination that Merrill was smart and Lily was pretty. The distinction was made so early on that Lily couldn't remember a time when anyone in the family thought otherwise. Of course, Ines had never come right out and said this. But she did say it, again and again, in those countless small ways that leave a distinct impression, like footsteps on a stone stair." (40)*

After this chapter, the reader is hooked in and the ride doesn't stop until the last page.

Paul Ross, Merrill's husband, is thrust into the center of the family

crisis when Morty Reis, the Darlings' long-time friend and business partner commits suicide. Scandal, investigation and media hounding are unavoidable. Delphic, Carter's hedge fund company, comes under scrutiny from the SEC when it turns out that the multibillion-dollar fund they were heavily invested in appears to be nothing but a Ponzi scheme and it's CEO has just jumped off a bridge. Although Paul took the role of general counsel at Delphic only a few months prior, he could still be used as a pawn in the investigation to deter blame from other parties-including Carter:

*"By the time it was over, Carter would have sold Alain, his friend and business partner of twenty-plus years, down the river, and there would be no looking back. Other casualties were possible, too; Paul, for example, wasn't outside the strike zone. But Sol quieted these thoughts. There was only one person whose interests he had to protect, and that was Carter. The call was tough, but it was clear."* (226)

Backdated wire transfers to off-shore accounts, investigative reporters and the choices that will make or break his personal life can ruin or save him. Paul's character, in comparison to the rest of the striking personalities, is plain or rather average enough for the reader to essentially slip inside of, imagining themselves in his shoes and observing the others through him.

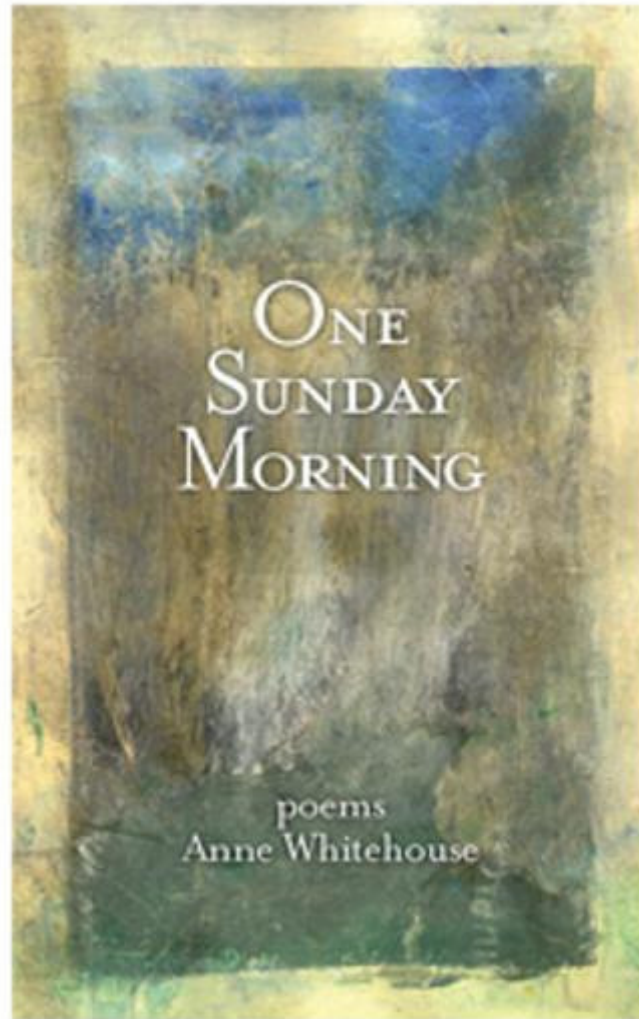
Personal motives and family ties conflict with one another along a tangible thread of tension strung throughout the novel to form a web that seamlessly connects everyone involved, CEO's to secretaries. Even the glamour of New York City society life and the vacation homes in the Hamptons do little to insulate anyone from reality and from what is shown of the behind-the-scenes personal relationships of the "privileged", the enviable become anything but. The novel, on the surface, is about the kinds of

dealings that contributed to the financial crisis but upon closer inspection it is actually an awakening to what is most important in life- how to be true to ourselves and those we love.

## *Excerpt from The Darlings*



[Excerpt from The Darlings](#)



Cover Image of One Sunday Morning by Anne Whitehouse;  
<http://www.annewhitehouse.com/>

**The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review Presents:  
*One Sunday Morning* by Anne Whitehouse**



Author bio: Anne Whitehouse was born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, and graduated from Harvard College and Columbia University. She is the author of the poetry collections—*The Surveyor's Hand*, *Blessings and Curses*, *Bear in Mind* and the recently published *One Sunday Morning*. Her novel, *Fall Love*, is available in ebook format from Feedbooks, Smashwords, Amazon Kindle, and iTunes.

You can visit her website at [www.annewhitehouse.com](http://www.annewhitehouse.com)

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### **Review by Cheryl Sommese~**

*One Sunday Morning*, the latest of four poetry collections by New York poet Anne Whitehouse, wastes no time underscoring life's complexity with its opening and title poem, "One Sunday Morning." The central theme woven throughout the book is that nature, with its beauty, banality and grandeur, can also be chaotic, unpredictable, and cruel. Though this dichotomy is difficult to reconcile, Whitehouse's work seems to accomplish it quite effectively.

Within the pages of this spellbinding collection, there's an undeniable perplexity and wonderment when observing realities beyond our power. Still, it seems the poet feels no need to control the situations, nor does she feel compelled to make excuses for them. Instead, like an architect, she meticulously draws out the details of the happenings through clear structural lines and foundations. As she does this, a calm order presides over the scene. Whether visualizing the aftermath of animals falling victim to other animals or children falling victim to parents, Whitehouse recognizes the moment, is impacted enough to

convey the moment, but is not ruled by the moment. This provides a wonderful residential community for sundry emotions. The essential message seems to be that sure, things we don't want or plan happen, but it's how we react that affects the outcome. It's as if the author instructs the reader to rise above that which he or she cannot change. Granted, this message may be age-old, but the ingenuity in Whitehouse's delivery defies stereotypes, making it fresh and new.

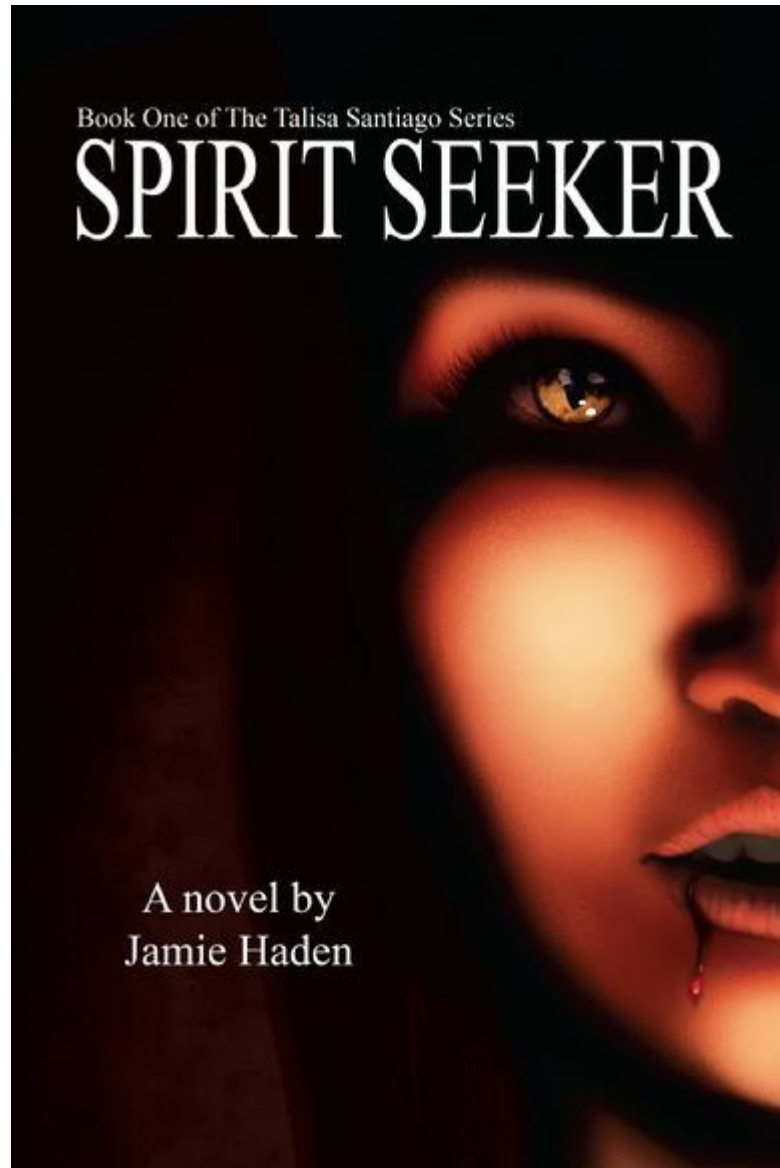
Gathered in fit form, there does not seem to be one extraneous poem in the collection. Rather, some of the metaphors, such as in the poem, "September Song", left me craving more. The poem reads, "My leaves are drying up, changing their colors, growing brittle. One by one I will shed them. Let me be content with what I have left." I no longer count myself among the youthful crowd and some of my leaves are drying, but there is hope in the new ones that are taking their place. They may not be as visually appealing as their predecessors, but visual appeal can be overrated. It was in finding common themes with nature as an individual that I was able to relate more deeply to the poems. Like Frost, Whitehouse uses accessible natural imagery with symbolic intent.

I recommend *One Sunday Morning* with a note to the reader that this is a book to slowly savor. The poems' charms cannot be fully appreciated in one read. To comprehend the total value of the book's simplistic brilliance, I believe you must re-read the free verse poems, ponder their significance and feel the meaning; only then will you stare face-to-face with Whitehouse's signature talent.

## *Excerpt from One Sunday Morning*



[Excerpt from One Sunday Morning](#)



Cover Image of Spirit Seeker; <http://jamiehaden.com/>

**The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review presents:  
*Spirit Seeker* by Jamie Haden**

Author Bio: Jamie Haden lives by the seashore in North Carolina with her husband and three young daughters. Jamie has a Bachelor's degree in philosophy and taught middle school in Kentucky and North Carolina. She draws on her Cherokee heritage in her works, lending a Native American voice to her fiction. *Spirit Seeker* is her first novel.

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### **Review by Nicole M. Bouchard~**

The storytelling in *Spirit Seeker*, the debut young adult paranormal novel from Jamie Haden, is a blend of mythic motifs, Native American philosophy and the trappings of teenage, angst-ridden adolescence in the modern world. Its dips into folklore and transitions from the ordinary everyday to the fantastical are vaguely reminiscent of the novel, *Windflower*, by Nick Bantock and Edoardo Ponti. The story chronicles the journey of Talisa Santiago to an island off the coast of North Carolina where she will discover the hidden aspects of her heritage, the darkest realms of her desires and her larger destiny as a "spirit seeker".

Characters and settings come across clearly throughout the book; the reader can visualize the students gathering in the mornings by the water near the school on Silence, the mysticism of the healers in flashbacks of the desert and the wonders of Cave Island all frequented by the well-drawn cast of personalities in the story:

*"As I gazed out to the summer sea, images of twinkling sands swept across my mind. The dark, unfathomed ocean with its mysterious tides filled my soul with a holy presence, for I knew its depths were seldom seen. However, when I visited the corners of my life, it wasn't water I longed for. Instead, it was the deserts of my past, a place of total isolation."* (4)

Talisa's mother along with her best friend Miguel and her love

interest, Jag, are main characters that are easily seen and understood. More abstract characters like her shaman grandfather (inserted through flashback) and Father Sky, her sometime mentor, are vivid and lingering enough to make an impression.

Talisa herself is a bit more complex than any of the other characters in that her motivations don't always seem to clearly tie in with the outer circumstances or inner feelings that trigger them. As an inexperienced, isolated and often sheltered young girl of sixteen now in her sophomore year of high school, one can understand her attraction to the "bad boy" archetype made manifest in Jag. Some of her early physical observations and desires, however, seem to be those of a worldly, experienced woman. These seem to be a contrast to her age-fitting struggles between immaturity and maturity. Once in the throes of young romance, she walks the line between love and obsession. Her collapse into her feelings without care or pause is authentic to the power of first love.

Yet once she is admitted into Jag's heart, does what it takes to risk entering his dangerous world and indulges in the physical passion of consummating their bond, she suddenly lets her eyes and mind wander to another of her friends that is closely connected to Jag. Although, at book's end, her restlessness between settling down on the island with her engagement to Jag or getting an education and going out into the world is understandable, her wandering attention begs a question about the strength of her convictions and what truly made her undertake her quest. Similarly, Jag, despite seeming more deeply in love and committed to building a future together, has a brief encounter with an old flame that is met with only half-hearted resistance. It might be that once the forbidden is

obtained, it loses its luster.

In her young way of diving into situations too soon, overlooking the signs, ignoring her instincts and later, literally not giving thought to the use of protection, Talisa seems, despite her thirst and receptivity for spiritual enlightenment, to be much like the natural forces of the storm which the island comes under the mercy of; spinning like a whirlwind from one thing to the next, inviting extremes without thoughtful pause or acknowledgment of consequence. Through the awakening of her inner gifts, her capacity for spiritual understanding is demonstrated, but to be at one with herself and develop wisdom beyond indulging her wants, she still has a long journey ahead. It can be said that the story does its job in eliciting a reaction; even though the reader might not fully understand or agree with a fictional character or circumstance, they are concerned enough to be thinking it over.

The story premise incorporates a myth about Silence, animal spirits living a dual life in certain humans and real jaguars prowling a secluded island. Wanting to know if it was possible to have jaguars on the east coast, a bit of research confirmed that in maps from the 1800s and early Native American artifacts, jaguars could be traced to as close as West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Florida. The tale of Jag who possesses both a human and animal spirit, was an aspect of the extraordinary paranormal in the book. In being prompted to want to learn more about jaguars, I read about the Olmec—an early culture in the Gulf Coast region — who developed a "were-jaguar" symbol for sculptures and figurines showing stylized humans with jaguar traits. In the later Mayan civilization, the jaguar was believed to be a go-between communicator for the living and the dead.

It is in taking the highly unusual and blending it with myth and

reality that the author weaves a unique, compelling story. Though the storytelling is present in this indie title, one distracting setback that could be addressed in a future printing is the frequent occurrence of misplaced words, duplicate sentences, grammatical and general typographical errors. In terms of character and descriptive settings, as a debut YA novel, *Spirit Seeker* speaks to the paranormal niche in a distinct voice all its own.

### *Excerpt from Spirit Seeker*



[Excerpt from Spirit Seeker](#)

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