

## ARTS

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2006

## A Family Relationship Story, With A Twist

By HELEN UBINAS  
COURANT STAFF WRITER

You're likely to think, as you read Adam Davies' second novel, "Goodbye Lemon," that it's just another well-written tale about a son coming to terms with a difficult relationship with his father.

After 15 years of self-exile, 32-year-old Jack Tennant is back home in a Baltimore suburb with the family he has fled: Adair, his emotionally absent mother; Pressman, his alcoholic older brother; and Guilford, his stern ex-Marine father, who has just suffered a debilitating stroke and whom Jack blames for a family tragedy.

Make no mistake, Jack doesn't want to be there. But he finally gives in to his mother, who pleads with him to come back and see his estranged father, and to his girlfriend Hahva, who thinks he needs closure in order to move forward with his life — and with her.

But then, Hahva doesn't know about the day in the Tennant family history that has affected every member of the clan even though they've never spoken of it since — the day Jack's younger



**GOODBYE LEMON**  
by Adam Davies  
(Riverhead Books,  
289 pp., \$14)

brother Dex (known as Lemon) drowned.

And she certainly doesn't appreciate the irony of a son who was locked out of any relationship with his father years ago now being summoned back to help unlock his father from a debilitating ailment. "... you are

going to have to literally love him back to health," Guilford's home health aide says.

She tells the family most people who suffer from "locked-in syndrome," a condition that has left his father mentally intact but unable to speak or move, die from lack of attention.

It all seems bitterly fitting. Jack had "wished his whole life to be the recipient of his father's attention," to be noticed and loved "the way he deserved to be." And now he is being asked to help the man whose inability to talk about

*Adam Davies' second novel illustrates that no matter how much you think you know about families — or yourself — surprises are always possible.*

one son's death has left another desperately searching for answers.

"Maybe he wasn't great at sports but wasn't terrible either," Jack wonders about Lemon. "Maybe he liked normal kid things and was afraid of all the normal kid scary stuff. Maybe he thought Pressman was aces but didn't really like me because — even though I was only one year younger — I was still too little to be much fun. Maybe he tried but failed to love our mother, just like Press and I did. Maybe he was afraid of our father, too, and deep down inside his

heart somewhere he knew that one day he would drift out too far into Lake George when our father was supposed to be watching him — not drinking — and that no one would be there to save him. . . . I don't know any of this and it breaks my heart. What else can I do but try to write him back to life."

You get it, or at least you think you do. This is Jack's opportunity to come to terms — or not — with his family, his father and a younger brother he barely knew but whose death has defined his life.

But then Davies, who lived in West Hartford when his father Michael was editor and publisher of The Courant, and whose first novel was "The Frog King," turns the table. And suddenly the narrator and the reader realize that even when you think you know all there is to know, there is always something new to learn — about our families, ourselves and the often flawed notions that define our lives and our relationships.

And he shows us something else: how very dangerous silence can be, and how easily it can take on a life of its own, until it threatens to overcome your life entirely.