

A Gram of Mars

Becky Hagenston

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In her debut collection of short stories, Hagenston places poignant reminders of the basic and elemental bond among women of all ages. *A Gram of Mars* contains eight short stories that introduce characters who carry the anxiety and desire for happiness to extremes. The character's voices are clear and though we have heard their stories before, their circumstances are fresh.

This book is what some would call "a girlfriend read." In the title story, a young woman realizes that she harbors the belief that her divorced parents could reunite. Each subsequent story contains other insightful yet sometimes unrealistic ways of dealing with whatever reality is present: the mother who answers plaintive phone calls from women who have been dumped or dismissed by her son. She finally concludes what may be considered "close enough to happiness" is all anyone can have. In *Holding the Fort*, a woman whose husband has decided to leave her realizes "she will never live here again. She will take what's hers and go someplace else where she doesn't have to fill the empty spaces Glen left behind."

Hagenston has given readers a chance to look at our own fears and doubts. No life is ever perfect and she seems to reinforce that idea through her character's adventures. Families may be the vehicle but the individual is always the key player. There is proper time given to the notion that these marriages were "good ideas that went wrong" yet each character can make a choice that will change the course of whatever has happened or may. Readers may feel worn down after reading these tales, but more likely relieved that your own life has less dramatic peaks and valleys.

KATHI HOUSTON (January / February 1999)

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