

How Gone We Got

Dina Guidubaldi

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Observations on emotional displacement are conveyed through visceral language and brave storytelling.

In Dina Guidubaldi's profound but emotionally raw short-story collection, *How Gone We Got*, her protagonists seem to be looking for transcendence but stuck in the mundane. They are characters troubled by shifts in identity, and this emotional displacement is as agonizing to read as it is redemptive.

Take her magical realism story, "The Love in Your Mouth," in which a woman reacts to her boyfriend's infidelity by biting off part of his tongue. The violent episode inspires the couple to start fresh in a sleepy Florida seaside town. The woman feeds jellyfish to her boyfriend in order to see if he can taste again, and this brush with fatal toxins sends the man packing and sets the woman free to really start anew in the Florida heat. "She misses him already," Guidubaldi writes, "but it's sea-like: the pain surges in and goes out again, rhythmic and predictable."

In the superb "Sometimes They Talk Back," the protagonist is obsessed with sunlight. "I often looked to my shadow for solace—if I could see it on the grass, on the wall, on the sidewalk, then I must be there too." She was once abandoned by an alcoholic father who spent his days inventing robots, trying to get them to feel and to use sarcasm. Her father's coldness and the robots' flaccid utterances of "I love you" all lead to a dramatic scene in which she cuts her boyfriend to see if he's real.

The concise and fantastical "What I Wouldn't Do" reveals the selfish roots of love when one partner builds a city to hold the love of another, even surgically enhancing horses to become unicorns.

Throughout, Guidubaldi's dark themes are rich with visceral observations and clever descriptions. She is brave enough to take readers into blood and sadness, and in doing so, she gives the characters enough perspective to recognize the authentic in life. *How Gone We Got* is a heady and rewarding read.

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (Summer 2015)

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