

## How High? ---That High: Stories

**Diane Williams**

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Diane Williams constructs scenes of gentle sadness in the micro entries of her short story collection *How High?—That High*.

Here, even everyday situations, like unconfessed infidelities, slow-moving illnesses, and incompatible personalities, can become the scenes of soft calamities—the most devastating tragedies of all. Everyone deals with misfortune, Williams knows, but it's how people react—or refuse to react—that's worth examining. Her short entries range from single paragraphs to a few pages in length, and their spare prose evokes deep feelings of discontentment, loneliness, inadequacy, and imminent loss. Whether single or partnered, her characters are almost always alone in the end, separated from others by death, discomfort, or disinterest.

Many of the stories deal with domestic upset. In "O Fortuna, Velut Luna," a woman is stood up for a date; in "Garden Magic," the narrator is in the process of losing her lover's affections. The stories take place in ordinary, recognizable locations, emphasizing that their situations can happen to anyone. Their characters can't always define what is wrong, but they can feel it, inside and out.

Every word matters in these micro entries, and "Finished Being" is among the collection's most impressive feats, packing a book's worth of mystery and emotion into a single sentence. The book's appraisals of intimacy, relationships, and the lack thereof are startling and frank. Despite the book's general candor, much remains unsaid, encouraging the careful dissection of each sentence—and personalized considerations of what it all means.

The short stories in *How High?—That High* peek into quotidian moments; despite their small slivers of space, they have outsized emotional and intellectual impacts.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2021)

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