

How the Light Gets In

Melissa Volker

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Wyatt's world is literally falling apart in *How the Light Gets In*, an engrossing yet subtly profound story about a teenager consumed by misery—until he leaves reality.

Wyatt is fairly certain that he was once normal, but he can't quite remember when. His days are devoted to his art; it distracts him from his pain, brought on by bullies and the "chunks" that disappear from the world around him. There is another world in his drawings. There, he meets Ellie, the only person who might actually understand what he's going through.

Wyatt's struggles are real, even if his solutions are magical. His difficulties are recognizable and authentically drawn; he inspires empathy. Volker writes the hardships of depression well; even without the text diagnosing Wyatt, its comparisons and descriptions showcase his feelings in a tangible way.

Wyatt is sometimes more inventive and flowery with his speech than the average teen, though his language fits with his creative spirit. He is most imaginative when he's being snarky—it's his self-proclaimed protection tactic of choice. He builds up walls through his actions that are reinforced by the narrative's prose, revealing the severity of his depression while taking care not to reduce him to his mental illness.

At times, *How the Light Gets In* reads as a character study; at others, as an empathetic offering to those suffering the way that Wyatt does. Wyatt's troubles direct the story; there is no traditional upward trajectory in the text. But that mirrors reality, and that is what this story does best: it invites recognition and offers a new take on a struggle that many people face. It is unique and hits close to home.

HANNAH HOHMAN (September/October 2018)

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