



## Rising Abruptly

### Gisèle Villeneuve

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*These stories are a literary ode to climbers and the mountains that captivate them.*

The seven quirky stories in Gisèle Villeneuve's new collection, *Rising Abruptly*, all have mountains at their heart. Beginning when a young woman falls in love with a gendarme, and ending with an older couple on their final climb together, these are stories about self-discovery and, especially, obsession.

Four of the stories are set in the Canadian Rockies, the author's home mountains. One story takes place in Borneo, where a man climbs Mount Kinabalu to escape the relentless heat while he waits for his woman friend to return home. The cousins, Rachel and Jeanne, appear in two stories: the first as preteens lost in a sudden storm near their home in Montreal and the second, decades later, when Rachel travels to meet Jeanne in Nepal. Both girls lost a parent in the Himalayas decades earlier, and the linkage adds poignancy to both stories.

Villeneuve writes with an appealing sense of humor. "Onion," one of the longer stories in the collection, explores the romance between a climber and an insomniac on a mission to make the "perfect pickled pearl" onion. When she removes a cocktail onion from her drink and sensually begins to eat it, "he couldn't begin to imagine what she could do with a gherkin." In this case, it's not the climber who's obsessed, but the pickler at home.

The author knows the vocabulary of mountains and climbing, but these are not realistic stories. Hallucinations appear at high altitudes. The prose is often fragmented, as if the characters are conserving energy for the climb. Dialogue is atypically formatted and, especially with characters from eastern Canada, sprinkled with French. The clever wordplay keeps the characters emotionally at arm's length.

The characters' relationship with mountains evolves throughout the stories, creating an arc that models a romantic relationship: infatuation, the conflict between independence and commitment, and the acceptance of love coupled with death. *Rising Abruptly* is a literary ode to climbers and the mountains that captivate them, and presents a fascinating portrait of passion for the high peaks.

KAREN ACKLAND (Fall 2016)

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