

The Loss of All Lost Things

Amina Gautier

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Loss is an ordinary human experience, and Gautier captures its commonality well, making The Loss of all Lost Things an emotionally triumphant collection.

Amina Gautier's short story collection *The Loss of All Lost Things* is an exquisite portrait of human experiences and the ramifications of loss.

Loss assails every character in the collection's fifteen stories. Some have lost their children; others have lost their identity, direction in life, and capability. Some mourn a loved one's death, and some lament a lover's desertion. No matter the type of loss they suffer, the characters don't deny their pain, loneliness, and bewilderment. They feel it, grapple with it, and endure it, aware they must cope with "the living that muscles through" their day-to-day existence.

Gautier's narrative style is subtle. Story openings pull back the curtain on character lives, which are in full progress when the stories begin. Interest in protagonists' personalities and predicaments is instantly and immediately earned. Skillful, unadorned, and economical prose builds emotional intensity sentence by sentence. A slow, steady, and breathtaking depiction of searing loss emerges; it unfolds in an almost uneventful manner, in prose that is never blatant, but is rather measured, commanding, and haunting.

No life-altering epiphanies conclude these stories, though characters do reveal, in precise terminology, understandings of who they've become in their loss. In "Most Honest," the divorced narrator eschews his situation: "Divorce is my wife's word. I prefer *dissolution*. It makes our marriage sound like a crystalline substance, glittery yet hard, succumbing to forces greater than itself." In "Lost and Found," an agonizing narrative about a kidnapped boy, the boy considers himself "lost instead of taken ... Things that are taken are never given back. Things that are lost can be found." In the collection's title story, told from the boy's parents' viewpoint, the grief they suffer from the kidnapping defines them: "It's all they have left of him. They keep it to themselves, feeding and sucking on who they are—the parents of a lost boy."

Melancholy and remorse permeate the collection, yet the heaviness isn't unbearable. Loss is an ordinary human experience, and Gautier captures its commonality well, making *The Loss of all Lost Things* an emotionally triumphant collection.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (Summer 2016)

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