

Who's Your Daddy

Arisa White

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In an imagined letter to her father, Arisa White writes, "Do you remember, I bear the name you conjured, its attention turned to your shorelines, to the father missing in us both?" Though he never answers, White travels to Guyana, her father's homeland, as is covered in *Who's Your Daddy*, a painful and introspective exploration of parental absence.

In portions that read like vignettes, the book begins with the small moments of White's early life to establish its themes: a lack of protection, difficulty with trust, fear of abandonment, wanting to disappear, and wanting to be seen. In place of White's father are uncles, stepfathers, and a mother who claims, "you raise your daughters, and love your sons."

As White's yearning to understand her father's absence continues, she uses a blended of poetry, prose, and collage to tell her story. Though most of the language is her own, some is borrowed from others with absent fathers, resulting in a kind of communal voice of abandonment.

Care and nurture play a central role as well. A poignant moment comes when White's lover welcomes her to sit between her knees and have her hair combed and braided, her scalp massaged, and her forgiveness granted. Welcoming images of water heal White, though they devastated her family in the past. Her ability to re-envision the metaphor is powerful.

When White rediscovers her father, she negotiates what to do with an absence that persists in spite of his presence. The clarity with which she characterizes his self-absorption is observed in keen terms, not without kindness. It takes the alchemy of poetry and metaphor to resolve his past with the present man and find forgiveness.

Stark in its honesty, emotional, and compelling, the cross-genre memoir *Who's Your Daddy* reconsiders forgiveness and who is worthy of it.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (March / April 2021)

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