

Where Can I Take You When There's Nowhere To Go

Joe Baumann

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Joe Baumann's *Where Can I Take You When There's Nowhere To Go* collects surrealist short stories with grotesque physical manifestations of people's emotional lives at their centers. Predicated on extended metaphors, their effects range from punny to existentially confounding, from horrifying to sublime.

"We Adore These Bodies Until They Are Gone" takes as its premise the instantaneous evaporation of the bodies of people who have lost their will to exist. After witnessing one such evaporation at a local bar, a shiftless young academic is reminded anew of the urgency of his life and of the love he shares with his partner.

Many other stories feature romantic relationships between men too. In "Heave Your Dead to the Ground," Harvey's domestic partnership falls apart while stray body parts rain down on the couple's housing development. Media outlets rush to investigate the cause of the body parts, and theories soon abound: some people blame God, others the government, and still others the residents themselves. But Harvey is too close to the events to investigate the cause, so he accepts his dreadful fate with a shrug.

Several stories draw from established lore. "Forgotten Folk" is about the ghosts that visit a couple with a mutually tenuous memory of people from their past; "Look At Me" is about a young man who accidentally infects his boyfriend with vampirism. Other stories include fresher inventions, with high school athletes wooing one another with homemade gifts of cumulus clouds, houses of the deceased ascending into the sky, and blood crying out from open wounds.

Where Can I Take You When There's Nowhere To Go manifests the complexities of love, loss, and grief into bizarre realities and investigates them in a dire search for meaning.

ANTHONY HAMILTON (November / December 2023)

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