

## You Lose These + other stories Goldie Goldbloom

### About the Book

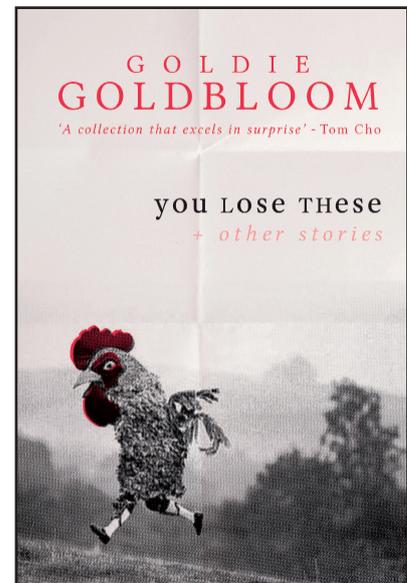
You Lose These is a collection of short fiction set in Australia and the United States. Its stories are situated at different points in time. Locations range from outback and suburban Australia to small-town America and big cities like New York and San Francisco.

Yet this range does not prevent the collection from achieving a wonderful cohesion. In her acknowledgements, Goldie Goldbloom writes that 'this is a book about folks not finding love, not loving themselves, or not being able to give love'. These are stories about people on the edge of society: misfits like Drusilla Ann Gherkin who believes in the transformative power of birthdays, Soile in 'Never Eat Crow' whose diet is based on the consumption of questionable meats, and the cancer survivor Masha in 'Undesirable' who regards herself as damaged goods because she is still unmarried. Even those characters in the midst of communities or relationships feel themselves to be alone because they apprehend the world differently to those around them. They include Marvelous Lemonjello and his midlife crisis, May Appeldorn longing to attend her estranged daughter's wedding, Marnie Gottfried whose husband persistently phones her from beyond the grave, and Tzivia Davidov and Geo Bloom in the brilliantly executed title story 'You Lose These'. Even poor old Jesus can't get a look-in in Wittenoom.

Goldie Goldbloom has the gift of inviting reader empathy through intimacy. Through each character, we view the world from the inside out. The greater theme of these stories becomes one of the struggle of human beings against loneliness and of the need for inclusion and acceptance. Abidingly, the feeling is there but for the grace of (insert appropriate deity), go I.

For an expansion of these themes of social ostracism and the longing to be loved, the reader would be well rewarded by reading Goldie Goldbloom's debut novel, *The Paperbark Shoe*.

An author who offers intriguing parallels with Goldbloom is fellow Western Australian Elizabeth Jolley, a writer who delivers dark wit, compassion and a healthy dose of the absurd with her stories about people on the edge of society.



## About the Author

Goldie Goldbloom's short fiction has appeared in *StoryQuarterly* and *Narrative* and she has won the Jerusalem Post International Fiction Prize. Her stories have been translated into over ten languages, and often reprinted and anthologised. Goldie is the author of *The Paperbark Shoe* (Fremantle Press, 2009). The American version of this novel was published in 2009 under the title of *Toads' Museum of Freaks and Wonders* by Picador USA and won the 2008 Association of Writers and Writing Programs' (AWP) Novel Award, the 2011 GLCA New Writers Award for Fiction and is a finalist in the *ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Award*. Goldie grew up in Western Australia and, even though she lives in Chicago with her eight children, has never given up her Australian citizenship.



## Discussion Questions

1. What is a short story? How does this collection affirm (or trouble) your understanding of the genre?
2. Some of these stories ('Raw Milk', 'Disposable', 'This Is What I Want; This Is What I Don't Want') are very brief. Are they still short stories? How do they uphold or subvert the form?
3. What does the collection's title refer to? How is this idea applicable to many (if not all) of the stories in this collection?
4. How does the cover image complement this meaning?
5. This is a collection of broad geographic and character diversity. What do Goldie Goldbloom's characters have in common? What do her locations have in common?
6. What is meant by 'gothic' writing? What elements of Australian and American gothic might be discernible here?
7. What does Goldbloom's title story 'You Lose These' share in common with James Joyce's *Ulysses*? Why has Goldbloom chosen to mimic *Ulysses* in her story?
8. Examine the range of story structures and forms in this collection. In what ways do different choices of form and style support content in Goldbloom's stories? You might consider character point of view, length, elements of repetition and interesting language use.
9. Consider the role of Jesus in 'The Resurrection of the Messiah'. What is the purpose of the irreverent depiction of Jesus Christ? Is it effective?
10. Have a look at 'The Road to Katherine'. What kind of a kid is Care? How does

Goldbloom create tension in this story? How does the reader feel by the story's conclusion?

11. What sorts of ambiguities are at play in 'Never Eat Crow'? What kind of an ending does the author leave us with?
12. Is 'Undesirable' a story of optimism? How does Goldbloom balance aspects of tradition, belief and expectation against the need for human happiness and desire?
13. What revelations does May Appeldorn come to have in the story 'I Have Tasted Muskrat'? What kind of a relationship does she have with her husband, and what does she come to understand about her daughter? What does the author want the reader to think will happen next?
14. How does Lennie really feel about his neighbour Rosie in 'The Seventeen Reasons I Hate You'? How does the story's ending help to create the story's meaning?
15. Many of these stories contain ambiguities or complex emotions. Consider this statement in relation to the stories 'What She Saw in the Crystal Ball', 'If You Cut Off Her Head, a Horse Falls Out' and 'Tandem Ride'.
16. The spectrum of love in Goldbloom's stories is vast. Discuss in relation to 'The Lady and the Leper', 'C.H.A.R.M.I.N.G.' and 'If You Cut Off Her Head, a Horse Falls Out'.
17. What social groups and subcultures do you identify in Goldbloom's stories? How does she choose to depict them? Are there any contradictory depictions of the same group? Why do you think that is?
18. Goldie Goldbloom says in her acknowledgements that 'this is a book about folks not finding love, not loving themselves, or not being able to give love'. The book's epigraph, a biblical citation, reads: 'And God saw that Leah was unloved'. In what ways does Goldbloom write about an absence of love – and in what ways does she write about love?

## Interview with Goldie Goldbloom, May 2011

What things can you do with a short story that you can't do with a novel?

Read it in the bath in one go without having to change the water. Burn it easily. Turn it into a paper aeroplane that sticks nicely in your physics professor's beard. Wedge it under the kitchen table to stop the wobbling. Go broke by writing it instead of a novel. Use it to wipe your bum if you are out in the bush without toilet paper. Colour it all in black with a crayon. Download it online without losing all those photos you were saving from the office party in case you needed to blackmail someone. Remember most of it when you tell it to your bestie over the phone. Roll up bits of it to turn into one of those dangly screens that stop the flies coming in. Use it to line your cockie's cage. Fake having read it when

your teacher asks if you've done your homework. Pop it in the microwave under a slice of pizza. Swallow it if you are interrogated as a spy. Send it through the mail without mortgaging your firstborn child to Rumpelstiltskin.

Who are your favourite short story writers and why?

It's a cruel world where you are asked to pick amongst your favourite children.

They are all my favourites. All of them. Every time I read a good short story, I yell out to my kids and say, "I just read the best short story I've ever read!" and they call back "You said that last time!" and it's true.

But some writers who I've come back to again and again are Jim Crace, William Trevor, Eudora Welty, Anton Chekhov, Angela Carter, Lydia Davis, Antonya Nelson and the one, the only, Alice Munro.

But for sheer delight, a dear dear friend of mine, Ray Daniels, who I am convinced will one day win the Nobel Prize.

Why did you choose the title *You Lose These* for this collection?

Ha! I didn't. I'm completely crappy at selecting titles for my own work. I tend to choose things that sound like I was abducted by aliens and had Muppets surgically implanted in my brain. I'm pretty fortunate in having Georgia Richter at Fremantle Press as my editor. She reins me in and insists that "Dorkface City and the Fungal Outcropping at the Rubbish Tip" is inappropriate for serious literary fiction.

I love *You Lose These* as a title because it encompasses a lot of what I was trying to say in this collection. The losses we accrue in life are the impetus for many of my stories.

And, bonus! It makes me sound like I'm making a spoof of Ulysses. Which must mean that I'm really smart and have probably read it ...

In the book's acknowledgements you write that 'this is a book about folks not finding love, not loving themselves, or not being able to give love.' Why is lovelessness important?

There are very few fiction writers today writing about happy couples, with the possible exception of Charles Baxter, who does it brilliantly, the evil genius. There's a reason for the lack of happy couples in stories. When you are happy, there's nothing to propel a story. "I love you!" "I love you better!" "No, I love you more!" "Well, I love you to the moon and back!" It gets boring fast.

So I write about the opposite of love, in the same way that an artist will use negative space to define what is real and tangible and important. Love is the most powerful human emotion. It's profound and transformative and often excruciatingly painful. Good short stories have many layers, some visible and some not visible, and some which are like harmonics played on a harp, distant, unearthly echoes of our own lives. So what I'm really writing about is love, our very human desire for love, but it sounds like a distant bell.

You're not sure if you really heard it or not. Lovelessness is what is in the words.

The stories in this collection showcase a tremendous diversity of characters. Don't you ever run out of ideas?

I run out of milk a lot. And bread. And fresh undies. But I have a mind that likes to traipse all over the joint and cavort in odd locations. Most people call this being wildly disorganised or, at best, being a space cadet, but I prefer to think of it as researching. And I take really weird jobs and befriend eccentric people, just so I can see and hear freaky stuff.

Believe that and I have a bridge I'd like to sell you too.

Can you give an example of how an idea of yours developed into one of the stories in this book?

At least three ideas need to crash into each other for a story to interest me. The ideas can't be too similar; they have to exert pressure on one another. When I was thinking about 'The Telephone of the Dead', I had been wondering for a while what would happen if God let people who had died suddenly, slowly disconnect from their loved ones over a year. Would it be better or worse? And at the time, I was working in the Chevra Kaddisha, a Jewish group which prepares dead bodies for burial and someone mentioned the Midrash that God lets people out of Hell on Friday afternoons, and then I was visiting a friend and she has this funny collection of British phone booths and it reminded me of Doctor Who, and then, the image that tipped the scale and led to the actual story, was when a complete stranger began telling me how her husband was hit by lightning several times but lived. I can't explain how all of these ideas came together to create 'The Telephone of the Dead' but all of them struck me in the particular way that I associate with the aha-moment of storiness.

What's next for Goldie Goldbloom?

If you are offering chocolate, it'll be chocolate, thanks.

But if not, well then, I'd best be getting back to my next novel, *The Bearded Lady Falls in Love*. By now, I hope you realise that there will never be a novel with that title published by me, if Georgia has anything to do with it. Instead, it'll probably be something called *Communal Thinking* or *The Walking House* or *The Sodomist's Tale*. Sorry. That last one was probably me talking again.