

The Wrong Heaven

**Amy Bonnaffons,
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Amy Bonnaffons' witty, moving short story collection *The Wrong Heaven* is a masterful exploration of the bitter delights of being human.

The eponymous story, "The Wrong Heaven," opens with two lists: "Evidence of Jesus Being on My Side" and "Evidence Against." The artfully arranged items on each list are by turns odd, significant, and poignant, ranging from "tomatoes" to the "Word of God." The entire story, really, could be described in the same way: "odd," "significant," "poignant."

"The Wrong Heaven" alternates between the narrator's commentary on her life and a series of conversations she has with two electric Jesus and Mary statues. The counterpoint between the narrator's earnest voice and the events of her life, between the sincerity of her confusion and the absurdity of the story's details, creates a darkly comic tone appropriate for the story's subject matter. At heart, the story is about death--and the white lies we tell ourselves to cope with its bleakness. And yet despite the serious subject matter, the story ends hopefully, in a moment of beauty and human connection.

It almost seems too much to ask that the remainder of the stories in this collection meet the standard set by this opening gem. But Bonnaffons delivers, again and again.

Like the first, titular story, many of the stories in the anthology immerse us in a world of dubious miracles: a restless woman chooses to be transformed into a horse, a dying woman is visited by a startlingly sexy angel, a miniaturist's tiny, ordered worlds develop minds--and motion--of their own. Other stories in *The Wrong Heaven* remind us of what brutality and joy can be contained even in the most ordinary of circumstances.

Her characters are often emotionally unmoored, looking for something, someone, to tether them. Ultimately, like all of us, they must try to find a mooring point within themselves. That some succeed is what we hold onto long after we finish reading.

The sometimes surreal little universes Bonnaffons creates offer genuine insight into what it means to long for the sublime in a sometimes ridiculous and lonely world. *The Wrong Heaven* is a dark and whimsical funhouse mirror. It plays games with our expectations to reveal deeper, more eloquent truths than simple reflection can show us. The experience can be disconcerting, heartbreaking, and amusing--and never fails to entertain.