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In the Body

Allison Baggio. ECW (IPG, dist.), \$18.95 trade (300p) ISBN 978-1-77041-054-1



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This impressive collection of 12 short stories and one novella from Baggio (*Girl in Shades*), linked by the theme of the connection between body and soul, investigates how people react during critical junctures in their lives. "With Daddy," for example, shows a man, kicked out of the house by his wife, kidnapping their young daughter. "Mom said that his beer was the main reason he had to leave," the child tells us. "That it was the biggest problem. That's ridiculous, I had said to her. Beer is not a problem; it's just a fizzy drink in a can." In "Birthday Boy," the mother of a 19-year-old Vietnam War draftee cannot bear to see him go and acts drastically to stop him. And in "One Too Many," a woman struggles with her fiancé's bizarre desire to lose a leg. "From the time I was a boy," he tells her, "I never felt right having the left one." Though the concluding novella, "As She Was," about a high-school student seriously injured in a motorcycle accident, presents a richer array of characters than the preceding stories, it suffers from weak pacing. Baggio's shorter efforts remain this book's most substantial achievement. Agent: Natalie St. Pierre, HSW Literary. (Oct.)