



At-Risk

Amina Gautier

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In Amina Gautier's Brooklyn, some kids make it and some kids don't, but not in simple ways or for stereotypical reasons. Gautier's stories explore the lives of young African Americans who might all be classified as "at-risk," yet who encounter different opportunities and dangers in their particular neighborhoods and schools and who see life through the lens of different family experiences.

Gautier's focus is on quiet daily moments, even in extraordinary lives; her characters do not stand as emblems of a subculture but live and breathe as people. In "The Ease of Living," the young teen Jason is sent down south to spend the summer with his grandfather after witnessing the double murder of his two best friends, and he is not happy about it. A season of sneaking into as many movies as possible on one ticket or dunking girls at the pool promises to turn into a summer of shower chairs and the smell of Ben-Gay in the unimaginably backwoods town of Tallahassee. In "Pan Is Dead," two half-siblings watch as the heroin-addicted father of the older one works his way back into their mother's life; in "Dance for Me," a girl on scholarship at a posh Manhattan school teaches white girls to dance in the bathroom in order to be invited to a party.

As teenagers in complicated circumstances, each of Gautier's characters is pushed in many directions. To succeed may entail unforgivable compromises, and to follow their desires may lead to catastrophe. Yet within these stories they exist and can be seen as they are, in the moment of choosing.

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