

THE EXAMINED LIFE

How We Lose and Find Ourselves

By Stephen Grosz

240 pp. W. W. Norton & Company. 2014.

[Stephen Grosz](#) is an American-born psychoanalyst in London, with over fifty thousand hours treating the dispirited and the delinquent. By listening to and understanding the stories they tell, Grosz "help[s] people to change" (x). But change entails loss and so they resist, holding fast to the stories. Even "when a fire alarm rings, [most] people do not act immediately. . . . They stand around" (122). *The Examined Life: How We Lose and Find Ourselves* is a collection of thirty-one enigmatic vignettes of stories tightly held, and their unravelling fifty minutes by fifty minutes, day by day, year by year in Grosz's consulting room. The stories coalesce around five life events: beginnings, telling lies, loving, changing, and leaving. Grosz succinctly describes each patient's conundrum, and then, humbly, universalizes the tendency. Emily's parents "made her the problem so that they did not have to deal with problems of their own" (140). Graham is a bore; he wants to be "seen [without] seeing. . . refusing to let the present matter" (150). A young architect wins a competition and then loses his wallet, preferring loss to his anxiety over colleagues' contempt. Counter to industry hype, we [never recover from loss](#) and we never get closure. According to Grosz, getting closure is an empty promise that traces back to hospice pioneer Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of

death, which spawned [five stages of grief](#). Instead, Grosz listens and his patients feel heard. They edit their narrative and find the nearest exit. — Lisa Thaler (author, *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*), 7 May 2022