

Disorder

Amy Crider

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Tender and tortured in equal measure, Amy Crider's *Disorder* is a mystery that gradually reveals itself to be a perceptive character study.

In a wintry upstate New York town, literature student Diana has gone missing, and her roommate Wendy is committed to finding her. There's only one major problem: Wendy is bipolar. As she casts her eye on possible suspects—like the professor whom Diana was having an affair with, the professor's wife, a temperamental ex-boyfriend, and the offbeat and off-putting head of the literature department—she comes to realize that she can't trust her own perceptions.

Disorder takes a slow-burn approach, witnessing events from Wendy's perspective as she attempts to get her life in order, but teeters on the edge of a breakdown. Random clues, as with an accident involving a deer, and a poetry book that might contain plagiarized content, take on sinister implications, like jigsaw pieces that don't quite fit together.

While the mystery of Diana's disappearance drives the plot, the story's primary interest lies in Wendy's struggle to be a better person, and to maintain a grip on her sanity. In one gripping passage, Wendy endures a manic episode, ping-ponging between euphoria and paranoid confusion. The result is a compelling, sympathetic portrait of mental illness, marked by spare, evocative storytelling.

Staying true to its university setting, *Disorder* has its share of intellectual humor, including an imagined exchange of letters between Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, as well as numerous poems and songs that underscore Wendy's moves from lucidity to mania and back again. Her efforts to regain a hold of her life are arresting, and the emotional weight of her inward work lingers long after the mystery has been resolved.

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