

★ **In Every Moment We Are Still Alive****Tom Malmquist**

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Malmquist's immersive prose perfectly limns the demands of living within the chiaroscuro of deep grief.

In Sweden, two expectant parents await the birth of their first child. But a routine trip to the emergency room begins parenthood for one parent, and ends it for the other. In Tom Malmquist's harrowing story of loss, *In Every Moment We Are Still Alive*, "all you can do is fall to pieces and then come back."

Neither Tom nor his partner Karin are prepared for her bad bout with the flu to morph into acute myeloid leukemia. Karin's life-threatening diagnosis requires that she be put into a medically induced coma, and that their child, Livia, be delivered two months prematurely.

Suddenly, Tom's life is transformed into a chaos of shifting diagnoses, emergency interventions, and terrible grief as he's shuttled back and forth between hospital wards, trapped between the life he's known and the inexorable changes bearing down on him.

Malmquist's narrative gives form to grief through the story's formal construction. Familiar conventions—from paragraphs to dialogue to narrative linearity—loosely cohere, only to fall apart and reform in new ways as the story shifts between past and present. The paragraphs themselves are dense, tight, and claustrophobic; dialogue is unmarked by quotation marks or paragraph breaks. This structure of controlled chaos slowly reveals Tom and Karin's life together, as flashbacks are interspersed with an overwhelming present.

The pain of the narrator's experience is almost palpable; this book is hard to read in the best of ways. Malmquist perfectly captures the oppression and laboriousness of various systems—from hospitals to social security to mortuary services. Connections between people are hardly any better. It's almost impossible to keep straight the rotation of doctors, friends, and family. The kaleidoscope of characters is disconcerting and anxiety-producing. In contrast, Tom, Karin, and Livia are a tight knot in the center of it all.

With a unique form as tightly wound as the voice of the narrator himself, *In Every Moment We Are Still Alive* is infused with deep urgency. A great stylist, Malmquist's immersive prose perfectly limns the demands of living within the chiaroscuro of deep grief.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January/February 2018)

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