

States of Motion

Laura Hulthen Thomas

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Personal yet universal, complex yet straightforward, these stories deal with grief and stripping away the familiar.

Laura Hulthen Thomas ruminates on the harried and heartbreaking minutiae of everyday people in her riveting short-story collection, *States of Motion*. These eight tales take the seemingly familiar and subvert it, revealing the discord that aggression and sexual trauma can cause.

Set in a series of small Michigan towns, each of Thomas's stories brims with emotional nuance and a sense of grief. Loss is a key theme, as both major and minor characters grapple with how to keep on living after their lives have faced some kind of upheaval. Opening with "The Warding Charm," Thomas pulls no punches, inhabiting the conflicting viewpoints of a twelve-year-old girl confronted by her attacker. From there, a bevy of stories vacillate between the profound and the arcane, creating a perfect snapshot of the intricacies of human relationships.

Thomas's writing is compact and strong, unwinding beautifully as her stories progress. A feeling of terse calamity resides right under the surface of each story, coloring character motivations—from an aged man's compulsion to unfaithfulness in "The Lavinia Nude," to a dutiful husband's secret, violent stirrings in "Reasonable Fear." No story is overly long or undue in scope, and each piece is successful both independently and as part of Thomas's larger oeuvre.

Though dealing greatly in suffering, *States of Motion* refrains from being preachy or resolution-driven. The trauma that characters inhabit just exists, as opposed to serving as a conduit for meaning. There are no easy fixes, and a great deal of subtext can be gleaned from things left unsaid. Stories are terrifyingly familiar and foreign all at once, evoking myriad emotions.

Familial ties, especially the relationships among parents and children, are another powerful element. Nearly every story is dependent on a parent-child relationship that has become damaged in some way. "Sole Suspect" provides a perfect example, focusing on a grieving father forced to contend with both the maddening agony of loss and a town's suspicions in the wake of his daughter's disappearance.

Personal yet universal, complex yet straightforward, the stories in *States of Motion* represent the innumerable ways in which entropy can set in when the familiar has been stripped away.

AMANDA ADAMS (May/June 2017)

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