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Short Stories

Widow
Michelle Latiolais
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"Wandering is better than place sometimes, than home, than destination," writes Michelle Latiolais in the opening story of *Widow*. In wandering, this particular widow can almost convince herself that she is not so alone.

Each of the women in these seventeen stories finds herself unsteady on her feet and facing loss of various degrees, shapes, and sizes. For some, widowhood is how loss appears, and now they must make their way alone in the world. For others, change manifests in the jarring actuality of their aloneness in the face of crumbling marriages, infidelity, or a troubled relationship.

But these women have not given up. Latiolais uses the finest details to weave strands of hope, however temporary or mundane, into the lives of her characters. And while some stories are similar in terms of structure or characters, the language of grief is always original.

Latiolais most poignantly articulates the human experience through small details. A newly widowed woman in "Place" waits for a massage in a spa as she has done many times before her widowhood. The receptionist—who usually remains behind the desk—steps out to drape a towel over her shoulders, a small act of attention. "It wasn't a moment that could possibly mean anything to anyone else, other than it was a moment that pulled the human animal back into the fold—a moment that said there were a few in this species who didn't shame you with their violence."

While gestures are used to communicate, objects become vessels of something new. In "Pink," a woman fantasizes about dying, having her cremated body used to make a tea or coffee set, imagining "his tongue against the thin bone china lips her fired bones would make…Why not begin every morning entering her?"

The settings of these stories are diverse, including a church sanctuary, a strip club, a doctor's office, and various kitchens. The stories are short, some no more than a page, yet each

leaves an imprint of hope or understanding. Grief, Latiolais makes clear through the lives of her characters, knows no boundaries, obeys no rules. But while grief may consume, it doesn't replace life. Her widows keep fighting.

Latiolais is a professor of English at the University of California at Irvine. Her first novel, *Even Now*, received the Gold Medal for Fiction from the Commonwealth Club of California.

S. Hope Mills