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A Gate at the Stairs by Lorie Moore, Vintage, 2009

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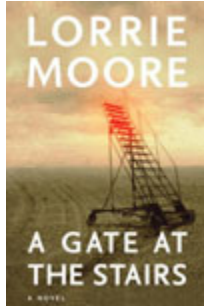
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Recommended Readings



A Gate at the Stairs

by Lorrie Moore, Vintage 2009

Reviewed by Hilene Flanzbaum

Tassie Keltjin, the idiosyncratic narrator of Lorrie Moore's most recent novel, *A Gate at the Stairs*, is worth knowing. Brilliant and cynical, yet hyper-sensitive to the world, Tassie loves language: the reader gets the privilege of reading her thoughts, and is thus treated to intricate metaphors, and layer upon layer of description. Moore's writing is a cornucopia of words, overabundant and sometimes too lush, but nonetheless, this is a fascinating novel whose main character reminded me of my own Midwestern college students who can seem taciturn and reserved but are actually experiencing lives too keenly to comment.

A Gate at the Stairs, which was on many critics "ten best lists" in 2009, moves slowly at first. A seemingly aimless twenty year old becomes a nanny for a well-off middle-aged couple, supposedly unable to conceive, who will soon adopt a child. For the first three quarters of the book, we follow Tassie as she observes the family: the wife, a chef of organic and trendy foods, her quixotic and mysterious husband, and their foster child, a bright and beautiful one-year-old who has already had three mothers. This should be enough upon which to build a novel; yet by the end of the book, the narrator faces a mounting set of tragedies, rooted not only in her personal circumstance, but in the national and political circumstances of our day.

Come see Lorrie Moore will at Butler's Visiting Writers Series on Monday, November 1.

- Hilene Flanzbaum is Allegra Stewart Professor of English at Butler University.