

# TIES

BY DOMENICO STARNONE ; TRANSLATED BY JHUMPA LAHIRI · RELEASE DATE: MARCH 7, 2017

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**F**our years after leaving his wife and children, Aldo returns to them, ready to rebuild.

Starnone's (*First Execution*, 2009, etc.) latest work begins with a bang: "In case it's slipped your mind, Dear Sir, let me remind you: I am your wife. I know that this once pleased you and that now, suddenly, it chafes." So Vanda writes in a letter to her husband, Aldo, who's left her, and their children, for a younger woman. It's a familiar enough narrative, repeated often enough in Western literature and popular culture to seem clichéd, banal even. But it's Starnone's exquisite artistry that sculpts this story into something much finer. The first portion of the slim book is taken up with Vanda's letters to Aldo, letters sent over the course of the years he is away from home. But the second section skips several decades ahead. Vanda and Aldo are together again. They have been away on holiday and, when they return, find their house ransacked: furniture overturned, glass broken, books and boxes of papers of all sorts scattered everywhere, trampled underfoot. It seems that thieves have been by in their absence. The break-in forces a kind of confrontation between Vanda and Aldo and the past they haven't spoken of in years. Starnone's work is subtle and nuanced, and, in Lahiri's elegant translation, his prose is fluid and clear. It is by no means comprehensive. You will not hear from all sides; you will hear hardly anything from Lidia, Aldo's "other woman," for example. The book is a snapshot, a sliver of a marriage. It is as vivid and devastating as anything you will read this year.

A slim, stunning meditation on marriage, fidelity, honesty, and truth.

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