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RUMINATE



BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS / 61

Winter 2021-2022 \$15

ruminare

**RUMINATE IS A COMMUNITY OF CREATORS
CULTIVATING AUTHENTIC SELVES,
NOURISHING CONVERSATIONS,
AND SPIRITUALLY SUSTAINING LIFE TOGETHER
THROUGH ACTION AND ART.**

Ruminate Magazine is Ruminare's quarterly print journal that invites slowing down and paying attention. We delight in laughter, deep reading, contemplative activism, telling stories, asking questions, and *doing small things with great love*, as Mother Teresa said. We are particularly excited about sharing stories, poems, and art from voices that aren't often heard.

PLEASE JOIN US.

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From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you!

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2021 Janet B. McCabe Poetry Prize

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FIRST PLACE

ARAH KO
Fish Eye

SECOND PLACE

CHRISTINE SWINT
*For the Forced Amaryllis in
My Lockdown Living Room*

HONORABLE MENTION

JANE MEDVED
He Who Names the Animals

FINALISTS

**BC HOLMES
SALEEM HUE PENNY
SUPHIL LEE PARK**

**JED MYERS
BETHANY SWANN
MARGARET WACK**

FINAL JUDGE MATTHEW OLZMANN WRITES:

FISH EYE BY ARAH KO: I love the movement and temporal sophistication of this poem. How there's an initial stillness—as the speaker focuses us on a single object—that then shifts into a historic expansiveness as, through the fish eyes, we feel the scale of memory and the scope of the speaker's grief. The scars on bare feet, the cumulative anxiety of “each tragedy made small / as short grained rice,” the present “ballooning / until the future and past touch,” and the voice of the ancestors all combine to give this poem a sense of simultaneity, realms of feeling unfolding and converging across time.

FOR THE FORCED AMARYLLIS IN MY LOCKDOWN LIVING ROOM BY CHRISTINE SWINT: This poem's rush of joy and exuberance are quite intoxicating, but there's also a richness in the way those emotional qualities are complicated both by the setting (a pandemic lockdown) and the points of sensory contrast throughout the poem (the flare of the blossom against the “wan light,” petals scrolling from a “dark throat,” sunbeams softened by that scrim of pines). I applaud this poem's tonal complexity, and how its celebratory reach for hope also creates a space for a type of quiet mystery as well.

HE WHO NAMES THE ANIMALS BY JANE MEDVED: This poem is a surprising and poignant meditation on naming, agency, and identity. I admire it for the way it twists away from and into its primary conceit, how the poem organizes itself around a parallel between the serpent and the self, then adding layers of figurative resonance with each new turn.

MATTHEW OLZMANN is the author of two collections of poems, *Mezzanines*, which was selected for the 2011 Kundiman Prize, and *Contradictions in the Design*. His third book, *Constellation Route*, is forthcoming from Alice James Books in January 2022. A recipient of fellowships from Kundiman, MacDowell, and the National Endowment for the Arts, Olzmann's work has appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *Pushcart Prize XLV*, *Kenyon Review*, *New England Review*, *Southern Review*, and elsewhere. He is a Senior Lecturer of Creative Writing at Dartmouth College and also teaches in the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.

editor's note

The truth: I've been trying to write this editor's note for months.

In my first draft, I meditated on the nature of beginnings and endings through the lens of my dog's recent passing.

He left us on a sunny afternoon in early October. In the days leading up to his at-home euthanasia, we traveled to all of the places he'd loved in his year living in Reno, Nevada. We visited the shores of Lake Tahoe, where he'd once swam after floating sticks and toys in the shallows. We strolled along the downtown riverwalk, stopping to observe the ducks, geese, coots, and pied-billed grebes that call the Truckee River home. We spent a morning at the city's off-leash dog park, our flat-coated retriever exhibiting flashes of interest before falling, exhausted, to lie in the grass.

In the end, he died in his bed on the floor of our apartment. The vet and her assistant stepped outside to give us a moment to grieve. Our cat waltzed out from the bedroom, stopped for a curious sniff, and continued on, completely oblivious.

Afterward, I drank one too many beers and cried more than I had in years. I was overwhelmed with a mixture of grief, guilt, and uncertainty that, in the end, we'd done the right thing. It felt wrong—choosing the day, time, and method of a living creature's death. Who was I to play god, scheduling our dog's final departure as one would their semi-annual dentist appointment?

Needless to say, it was the first time I'd had to oversee a pet's journey over the so-called "rainbow bridge." Deep down, I understood that this was the burden of pet ownership, but I longed for some definitive sign, a clear communication from our dog that he was ready to pass on.

In reality, endings are rarely neat or mutually agreed upon.

Companies downsize and employees are laid off. Two people in a romantic relationship drift apart. Death comes, whether we want it or not.

For me, the last six months have been full of a number of new beginnings and endings. In July, I left my teaching job in Michigan to move to Nevada to be with my husband. In August, I started my position as Editor of *Ruminare Magazine*, still not fully unpacked in my new apartment.

The job has been both extremely rewarding and, at times, exhausting and overwhelming. The economic landscape has always been stacked against print literary magazines. Finances are tight. Staff work many more hours than those for which they are paid.

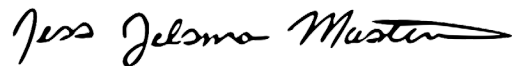
If there's one thing that keeps me hopeful, it's that, beyond the confines of my apartment, life continues to carry on.

Yesterday, my husband and I drove to the Tahoe Meadows Trail. We strapped on snowshoes and hiked to the peak of the ridge, an 8,556-foot elevation. As I sat on a tree stump, a brave mountain chickadee landed on my hand. It plucked a sunflower seed from my mitten and took off again, there for little more than the span of a single breath.

May we all have such a moment.

Yours in both the light and the dark,

Jess Jelsma Masterton

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jess Jelsma Masterton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

readers' notes

ON BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

When I turned sixteen, my mother offered me the opportunity to smoke a pipe, just as her mother had offered her brothers—my uncles—when each turned the same age. After a short while, both uncles gave it up.

Since girls weren't supposed to smoke pipes, Mom didn't get that chance. Instead, she became a lifelong cigarette smoker.

Twenty years later, I confided to my wife that I had the feeling my daughter really didn't like kissing me goodnight when I would tuck her in bed at night. I quit smoking the day she came home from school with a button that said, "SMOKING STINKS."

JOEL GREENWALD, VOORHEES, NJ

Today, we are running 108 kilometers.

Orange juice on my chin, I make my way to the starting area. I'm wearing a running skirt despite the early chill because the forecast calls for heat. My running backpack is on, strategically loaded up with Tailwind (an electrolyte drink), a peanut butter sandwich, and a couple of energy gels. I am wearing compression socks because my feet and lower legs will start to swell through the day. A ballcap rests on my head with sunglasses perched on the rim for

when the sun really hits. I put on my "race hair" by ritually threading a thick braid through the back hole of the hat.

And now, we must wait. We are standing in that narrow band of minutes before the starting horn. The body is ready because the mind is ready. Chins are lowered. Endorphins are already filing into position like soldiers. I feel an expanding burst of enthusiasm building at the back of my throat. Restraint is part of the game. *Stay controlled*, I tell myself. *Very soon you will be able to let go. Wait for it. Wait for it.*

I love beginnings and entrances. Thresholds, clear windows, open doors, and road crossings. Stepping through, witnessing movement and progress. Imagining upcoming yelps of pleasure or challenge. Imagining what's next. Holding out a hand to be pulled. Holding of here-we-go breath. Holding of space with the thud of an increasing heartbeat. Filled to the brim, I am so, so close. Three, two, one. *Go!*

**LAURA MANUEL, EDMONTON,
ALBERTA, CANADA**

Beginning and ending without a lead singer (for seven years), Lightning Nation auditioned *ad nauseam*, saying *No* to

everyone who didn't holler as good as Ian Gillan. The guitar player, Hugh, did the singing ("temporarily," supposedly), but he simply didn't sound good. That didn't stop me from muscling Peter's bulky bass speakers to his weekly practices.

From the window of a tall building in the Los Angeles warehouse district, the downtown city skyscrapers in view—where there was no such thing as too loud—I often savored the dynamism of the big city lights and the thundering '70s-style hard rock even though they played in the '80s. I yearned to be a poet, so I offered to write lyrics for Lightning Nation, but Peter said, "Since the Beatles wrote their own songs, we must keep to that standard, too."

So I kept carrying gear like a good roadie. I drove from San Bernardino to Hollywood—about seventy miles—on Tuesday and stayed until I had to be back to work on Thursday. A security guard, I had to keep my hair short which made me feel inferior to my friends who all had long head-banger hair. Yet it felt great to be backstage with the band when they performed live, drinking contraband beer (purchased cheaper elsewhere), not the expensive stuff that everyone else at the nightclub had to buy—yes, I was special, for I was a

friend of the band, had my name on the coveted list to get in for free.

DANA STAMPS II., RIVERSIDE, CA

After I won a high school election, my mom bragged to her sisters around the Scrabble board. But what did she say that summer when I met Trouble? He drove a '63 Pontiac Tempest, midnight blue with ivory leather seats. He taught me to "powder puff" in ladies' races when I wasn't fellating in that creamy interior. I smoked a joint, got sloe-gin drunk, was suspended from college, and married Trouble. At Scrabble, Mom's lips tightened. But who knew I'd scrap Trouble, ditch risk, and eventually become a librarian? Now I play Scrabble and have let trouble settle down to lowercase.

MARY KAY FEATHER, SEATTLE, WA

I come upon a spread of driftwood, giving the beachside an air of wreckage and ruins. I delicately recall how Emma, my sand-colored terrier of fourteen years, patiently and meticulously used to absorb the full three-dimensions of each piece. Today, I see the arduous cycles of life, death, and rebirth: first, the driftwood was a seedling, then an actual tree. Then, it was severed from the tree, and it

readers' notes

ON BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

washed through lakes, or rivers, drifting into the sea. Now here it sits, smoothed by the tide and wind, bleached by salt and sun, giving it a new form.

As I sea haunt alone, I imagine Emma's paw prints newly pressed on the wet sand, knowing that no wave will erase her existence.

**CLARA OROPEZA,
SANTA BARBARA, CA**

I stand in the living room. Rain over glass.

I walk through the empty house. Sand settles in the floor. A closet with his Mariners jacket. The "box," Pop's old office—inside, a portrait of C.S. Lewis smoking a cigar; paperbacks, shock-wave physics books. Nana's table of unlit candles. White walls lined in memory.

Let a word be a home full of candlelight. A lamp at the end of the hall.

I come to the front door. Papa carved it when this house was his. A wood-hewn ship at sail, below it, each wave a curl, and I am called back to words of Boethius around the lip of a shell:

To see thee is the end and the beginning.

Thou carriest me and thou goest before.

Thou art the journey and the journey's end.

This is the house my parents will move into come April. Let it be filled again with yellow candlelight, a flickering table she once set with care and bread.

I open the door.

Moon half full, alabaster jar shattered and streaming with nard. I can do nothing but walk to the water's edge and lean down, take the water in my open hands, let it fall over my arms, press it into my forehead, over cheeks and eyes closed.

Brush of sound against rock, a voice in blue. Jesus was always entering and exiting, walking through water and through doors, to the boat and the table. He had no place to lay his head, but He knew what had no beginning, no end.

The home in me that was empty will be filled.

Thou art the journey and the journey's end.

*Thou carriest me and thou goest before.
To see thee is the end and the beginning.*

HANNAH HINSCH, SEATTLE, WA

Three years ago, my husband suddenly collapsed and died. That ending was the sign of a new beginning for a woman who was a mother, a grandmother, and a college graduate who had never

lived alone. Never. When my youngest daughter offered to come live with me, I looked around my two-bedroom condo and said, “No, thank you for offering, but I have to learn how to be a single adult all on my own.”

When COVID-19 arrived, I decided I could never tolerate solitary confinement. A neighbor felt the same and we became intermittently immersed in each other’s “safety-bubble.”

It was wonderful to be touched again. To not only text or email or call but to talk in real life to someone who laughed and snuggled and then went home. To hear things I hadn’t heard before and to say things I hadn’t shared before.

When vaccinations arrived, I got mine and he got his. So did his wife and his daughter.

I was able to spend time with my children and grandchildren, to drive across the state to visit my aunt and an uncle, to spend the night with a high school bestie and her husband. My single life was not quite normal but it was opening.

Then the Delta variant began its surge and my neighbor wanted to renew our friendship.

An ending had opened up my world to a new beginning. Now, this new beginning seems to be something I need to end. For his sake and for mine.

NAME WITHHELD

On my thirty-second birthday, I was given a copy of *War and Peace*. My sooty fingerprints still cover the first pages, remnants of a former life. Slogging through the first chapter, I sat on the wool rug in front of the woodstove as snow fell silently outside. Part of me was going to die that night. “A beginning for an end?” the book would ask.

Four winters prior, my mom had grown ill. Naive to what it means to become a caregiver to a parent in your twenties, my husband and I decided, chivalrously, that it was our job to save her. He flew three thousand miles, rented a car, and drove her and her cat back to our home to live with us. In four years, my mother would be glowing with health. But me? I would be a shell of my former self. A body of flesh emptied of life—a beginning for an end.

There in front of the fire on my thirty-second birthday, Prince Andrei rode past the old barren oak and saw it as a symbol of his own life. He declared “that it was not for him to begin anything fresh.”

readers' notes

ON BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

I nodded in recognition. On his return trip, Andrei looked for the old oak only to find “a tent of sappy dark green.”

“No, life is not over at thirty-one,” he said to himself. “Nor at thirty-two,” I choked out between sobs on the floor in front of the fire.

**JEN CRATSENBERG,
SOUTH KINGSTOWN, RI**

My first son, fifth child, was born six years ago this Saturday, October 2nd. He came ten days early, as autumn began, the day after I chaperoned a field trip to a farm. He was born in a blowup pool in our living room in the early evening while a friend took our daughters to eat Chipotle. We named him after my husband’s father, though the name, Stephen, didn’t feel right for a baby. He died seventy-five days later on a sunny winter afternoon, December 16th, while napping in my bedroom, just after the sugar maple outside our window lost all its red leaves.

In January, I decided that I wanted, *needed*, another child, another baby. Some people, my oldest daughter and husband included, thought I might be replacing Stephen or inviting more great loss, but I couldn’t quiet the longing. I learned on May 1st that I was pregnant

and, a few weeks later, that it would be another boy. I spent fall, the anniversary of Stephen’s life, in my third trimester, terrified that the baby might stop kicking or breathing inside me and reliving the year before, each of those seventy-five days.

I felt like Mary that December, anticipating something looming and possibly terrible. True, named after another relative, came on December 30th, also born in the living room.

He is four now, at preschool, as I write. He asks us to tell him about Stephen. He tells me he would like his own tree if he dies. He experienced his first death this weekend: a chick, his favorite of the brood, a yellow one who let him hold it, killed by our dog chasing it. We buried the bird by the front porch, True laying the soft, downy body in a small hole in the earth.

ERICA JENKS HENRY, OAK PARK, IL

This July, I moved out of my parents’ house for the second time in my adult life.

The world’s tangle of coronavirus and a bout of deep depression had sequestered me home from my dorm in Manhattan to the quiet streets of residential Chicago where, following my parents’ recent divorce, my mom lived alone in what used to be our family

home. I had been locked in intermittent skirmishes with depression since primary school, but this episode was drastic, brought on by a handful of factors, all future-oriented in the way things are when you near the end of college.

It was on my mind often then: Where an ending stops and a beginning starts. How to draw a map so you'd know which one you stand in the midst of, and how to tame them so they might arise at your command. In those ten months at home, I felt smothered by a final punctuation mark, stuck, hellishly, in an ending of epic proportions—a breakdown of the life I had built for myself. What was beginning, I feared, was a permanent regression, an empty shadow of adulthood slipping out of my grasp.

As the weeks passed, I took up therapy and Prozac and writing. I finished my first short story and started another. I learned that beginnings were everywhere, not only where I wanted them to be—but there, too. I felt that things would never be the same, and I decided, much later, that maybe it wasn't a bad thing.

This July, I packed my life into cardboard boxes and signed a lease on an apartment in New York. This is how life goes on, I learned, beautiful

and terrifying; an ending arrives, a beginning follows. So it changes. So it goes.

BLUE MERRICK, NEW YORK, NY

He said “Yes.” Or he would have if he could have. My husband only had strength enough to nod once under his oxygen mask.

“You are dying, Joe. They’re going to stop the pain. No surgery, like you said. You’re dying now. Do you understand?”

Nod.

“Is it okay, Joe?”

Nod.

Tears pour down my face. The nurse beside me weeps, monitoring his vitals. Adding more morphine to his IV.

“I love you, Joe.”

Small nod.

They move us from the ER to a private room.

I stroke his face.

Soon the pain, and he, are gone.

Silently, I nod.

CYNTHIA TRENshaw, FREELAND, WA

Each little community had a disparaging single descriptive verb, signifying that we saw each as the other: “touristy,” “trashy,” “hicks,” “druggies.” In reality, many of us had not even ventured into

readers' notes

ON BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

the surrounding areas that made up our county by the time we were eighteen years old, but growing up, the sense of separation was astounding. Except in 1996, when a girl went missing from the university—that's when we all came together to claim her.

The male suspect was a local, the victim from another part of the state. Yet in all these years, “we” sided with her, not once applying the benefit of doubt to him. The disappearance loomed over us in the months before we split up for college, and the adults talked about “could never happen” and “in this town.” My classmates left or stayed, others left and then later came back for good, spending millions of dollars for homes in neighborhoods we couldn't wait to flee.

The trial of the suspect, arrested after twenty-five years, is about to start. When we plug in and follow the story, to see if justice will finally come to the past, our watching and waiting will be the only way to make things right.

We're sorry, we'll hope the trial says for us. *We're so, so sorry*.

LIZ LYDIC, LOS ANGELES, CA

When you're seventeen, you can't expect the person you'll be at twenty-two. You start college without the words to express

just what's wrong, without the words that help you understand just what happened to you. You start college unaware of the way it will end: triumphant, sad, guarded against pure hope, resilient in the face of your own self harm. You move into your first dorm room without any idea of what's to come, imagining the next four years filled with immediate lifelong friends and unadulterated joy, the pride that comes with hard work recognized and the exhaustion that comes with the pride.

You're proud when it's over, and sometimes for the work you've done, but you're leaving as a different person. You can't even comprehend the changes that are taking place because you're still trying to catch up to the changes of last year; it will take months in your new city for you to ever internalize that you are no longer a student, that you will have to find new ways to label yourself in this sprawling world laid out before you, both immensely limited and intensely limitless.

It's over. It's just starting. You know now is the time to find yourself, if college was not, but you've got no idea where to begin.

MIRANDA SCHNOOR, RICHMOND, VA

I wanted to draw a picture of horses to put in his casket. Uncle Scott loved his horses,

Spike and Rusty. I was six. “One shouldn’t put scratch paper in a casket,” I was told.

Uncle Scott was the first person I heard exclaim *horseshit*. The punchiest thing ever uttered in my young life. I remember him bouncing me on his knee, singing, “Hidey-didey, Christ Almighty, who the hell am I?”

Death, like contentment, is a mysterious operator—a trickster, a cruel joker—with an odd sense of proportionality and equity. My father, for decades a heavy smoker and toxic drinker, survived to eighty-four. Double the years allotted to Uncle Scott. Cancer, one of death’s most loyal foot soldiers, claimed the love of my life in her prime. She was the cleanest-living person I’ll ever know.

I have wondered what I would have wanted to sketch to put in my father’s casket, to be with him for eternity. Uncle Scott would have been fine with my stick-figure equines buried with him all these decades. *Hidey-didey*, I can hear him sing, a smile all over his face.

This notion of a dark, empty void in death is so much horseshit. At least for those left behind.

WILLIAM BURTCH, COLUMBUS, OH

I am holding him in the hospital. He is in my arms. Finally. I can’t stop looking at him, drinking in his every detail. He

is both a slice of my soul and a complete stranger. *Have we met before?* I want to ask.

I am holding him in my writing chair. It has become the nursing chair. No writing happens here anymore. I have stopped journaling, stopped putting thoughts in order. There is no order in my life. I don’t have the energy to write. If I did, I’m afraid of what I would say. I will be holding this child for the rest of my life, I think. His existence has swallowed me up. A panic rises in my belly as I realize there is someone else I forgot to be.

I am holding him while Jeremy pushes a stroller filled with groceries. I thought parenthood was something we could simply add to our lives, like a new car. As if Jeremy held out a wooden spoon and asked me to taste our lives as they were, one hand cupped underneath to catch the drip. *Mmmm*, I said, *Needs more spice*. And so, we added a baby.

I am holding him at my parents’ house and I realize I will not be holding this child forever. He will crawl out of my arms and I will spend the rest of my life remembering what it was like to hold the weight of his newness. Years from now, he will curl into my lap for

readers' notes

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the last time. And then my lap will be empty. I will hold the air around him, maybe even hug him, if he lets me. And his body will feel familiar. Like the roundness of an apple. Yet, not mine to hold anymore.

JAZMINE ALUMA, LOS ANGELES, CA

My childhood began at the Francis William Bird Park, named after the son of a local industrialist who died unexpectedly in 1918. Bird Park is a compact green oasis tucked inside a densely populated suburban neighborhood. As a kid, I walked along the park's terra-cotta pathways to the elementary school, also named after the Bird family. Roaming free among its mowed slopes and fields and shaded woods, Bird Park became my treasured boyhood playground. It ended when I was ten years old and my family moved several towns away.

Over a half century later, I am back at Bird Park, this time with my wife and our fifteen-month-old grandson in his stroller. The ending called "career" has given way to a delightful new beginning. Will our grandson be too young to retain any memories of his times at Bird Park?

Of the geese congregating at the silted-in water hole that used to be the park's swimming pool, or waving at the dogs on leashes, or the rush of the swing, or pushing or riding in the donated toy cars? Some beginnings and endings are like that; nothing conscious remains, but their hidden effect endures.

RICHARD LEHAN, PLAINVILLE, MA

"It's three miles there and back" was always the answer when someone asked how far it was to the pier. Mom and I never walked it for distance but for joy.

Every night after dinner, whenever we were at Mom's beach house, it was a rule that we had to walk to the pier and back to get dessert—usually my sister's homemade peach crisp with Carolina peaches and double topping so no one fought over it.

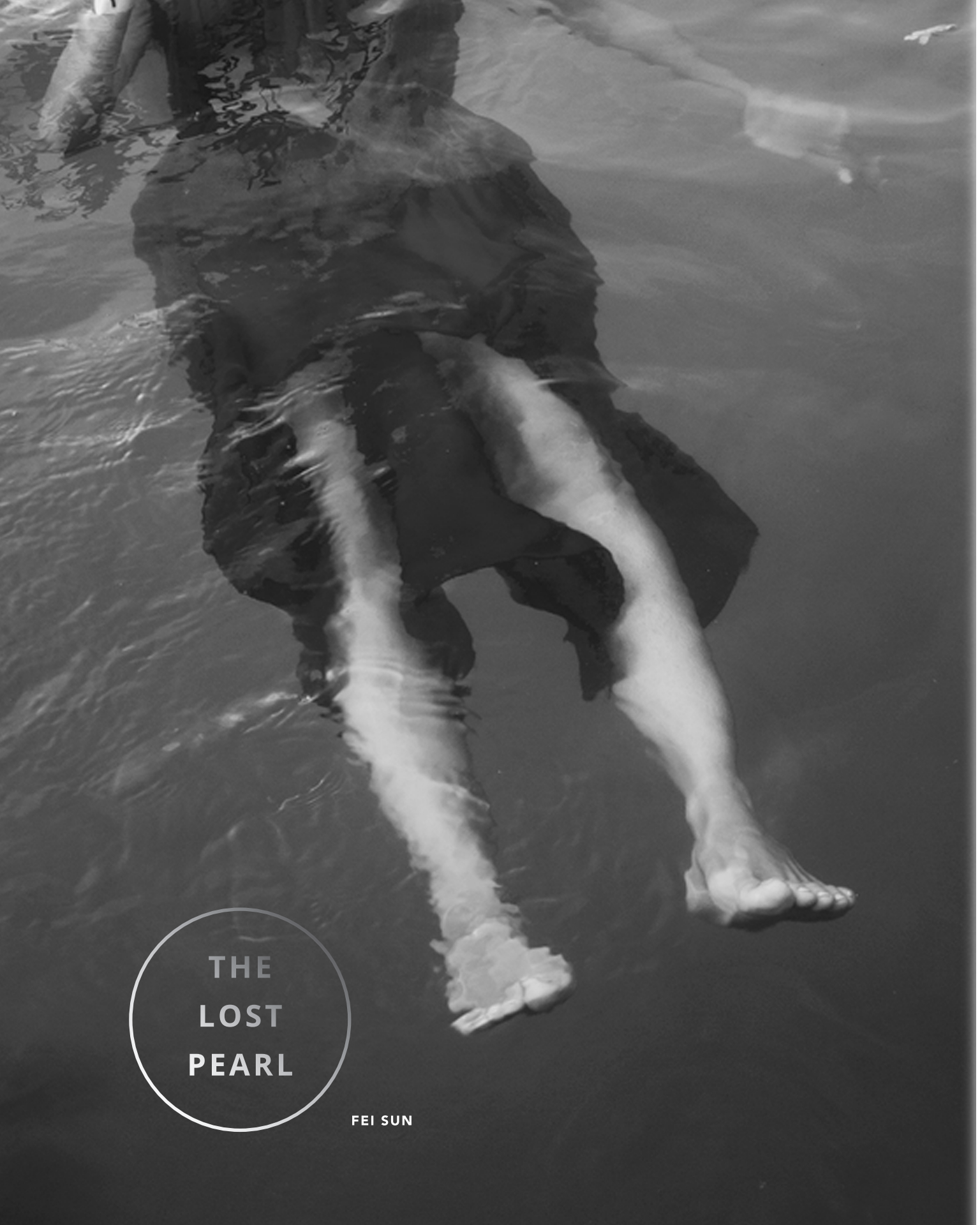
We didn't rush. We took our time looking at all the sandcastles and creatures along the way, made with love during hours of play, soon to be washed away by the tide. "Careful" came the warning just in time for us to duck under the fishing lines as the sun started its decadent decent. Mom stopped to pet all the passing dogs. During these

walks, there was always lots of chatting, singing, and hand-holding with Mom, our pace ebbing and our walking patterns flowing. There was also laughter and usually dancing.

Our final walk was different. We each walked alone, lost in our own thoughts

and memories. When we reached the pier, we held each other and cried. We knew she was where she would want to be—a part of her favorite three miles in all the world. A part of the beach, the castles, and the sea.

LAURA THOMA, GUILFORD, CT



THE
LOST
PEARL

FEI SUN

ONCE, IN A sea village of clay huts and mud roads, there lived a girl whose dreams followed one another in the same manner that her days did. At the end of each day, after she fell asleep, she woke up in a dream that was a continuation of the previous one. An unfinished drawing in her last dream would still be unfinished. If she had picked up a chipped flowerpot by a garbage bin, taken it home, and planted a seedling in it, even though the plant might one day bear ruby melons or jade berries, the next night it would still have grown only a day's worth.

The girl knew her dreams to be continuous and remembered them as well as we do our reality. She did not have a perfect recollection of everything, not what she'd eaten for dinner ten dreams ago, nor every single angry word her mother had yelled at her on a tough night, but then, do we remember such things in our real life? Sometimes we even forget the name of a friend who was once dear to us.

With such a peculiar way of dreaming and remembering, you might ask, would the girl not be confused into which world, the real one or the dream one, she had awakened? Would she not lose her grasp on reality?

The truth is, she knew better than we. We rarely know we are in dreams, and we take whichever world we open our eyes to as the real one. But as if heaven had worried about the girl mistaking dreams for reality, it marked them with one telling trait: all her dreams were in black and white.

The girl had once asked her mother why it was so, to which she'd said, "Ask your father if you can ever find him. He's the one who took away the colors of your dreams." Before the girl could have remembered him, her father had left in his fishing boat one morning, never to return.

ANYHOW, THE GIRL stood sure-footed in reality. Then, on the evening before her tenth birthday, while she was plowing the dirty and granular sand on the beach for white shells that were fit to make a necklace, a sudden wave washed onto the shore. When the water receded, a glisten between her toes caught her eyes.

It was a pearl; not just "a pearl," but one of many different hues. The girl had seen pearls twice before. A rich sister of her mother's had visited their hut twice, and both times the aunt had worn a strand of pearls. The first time, the necklace was white. The second time, golden. But the pearl the girl found was white as snow, golden as the sun, pink as a bride's cheeks, and green like a new sprout all at the same time. Holding it against the twilight, she could not decide if the different spots on the pearl's surface

were different colors, only the transition from one to another was so smooth that she could not tell where it happened, or if the whole pearl was one heavenly color, which, in certain light, held within it all the earthly shades.

The girl slept with the pearl under her pillow that night. She'd thought of holding it in her fist, but was afraid she'd open her hand during the night and her mother would find out. She did not want to share the pearl, not even the knowledge of its existence, with anybody. For the same reason, she suppressed her longing to make it into a pendant, to wear it in front of her friends, to be, for once, the object of jealousy. Besides, to make a pendant would require her to drill a hole, and she would never do that. In the end, she settled on the plan that she would sew a pouch for the pearl so that she could wear it on her chest under her shirt. For the fabric, she would use her best handkerchief, a yellow one with small red roses. Her rich aunt had given it to her, telling her it was all the fashion in the city, but she hadn't used it once. She cherished the handkerchief too much.

The girl carried out the plan the next morning. Then, she wore the pouch to school and found herself more eloquent before her teachers. She wore it back home and, at dinner, her mother tilted her head while staring at her face, as if wondering why she'd suddenly become prettier. She wore it to sleep and—this was the most magical—she had better dreams than ever before. In her dreams, her father returned. He told her that he had never meant to abandon her. He had chased after treasure buried on a faraway island and had found it. Now, he would build a two-story house, with a separate bedroom for her on the second floor, and the house would no longer share walls with others. It'd be tucked away from the sea, from the villages of simple huts. It'd be surrounded by gardens, and they would also have fishponds, chicken coops, and pigpens.

Even so, the girl knew dreams to be dreams. In them, her father built the house along with the gardens, ponds, and pens in a few days, and she thought that to believe that such things could happen in real life would be akin to say that she was stupid. Apart from that, her dreams were still in black and white. But she was more eager to sleep.

The girl never took off the pouch when she slept. Over time, she became so familiar with the weight that one morning, right after she woke up, she felt a change upon her chest. In a second, she'd turned her pouch inside out and found that it was empty. She didn't know how it could've happened. She was sure she had checked on the pearl before sleeping last night. Her home being only a room and a kitchen, it took her less than an hour to search it frantically, then systematically, then frantically again, yet she found the pearl nowhere.

At night, she prayed that she could at least have the pearl back in her dreams. "It is all right if the big house, the gardens, and even my father are gone," she said to her pillow. "Only let me hold the pearl again."

The girl opened her eyes in her dream bedroom, which alone was larger than the hut. Outside the wide windows, her mother was picking gray tulips in the front garden for the porcelain vase in the middle of their round dining table. On the stone pavement winding east from the garden, her father and his dog were taking a stroll. They were two dark shapes with glowing edges against the slanting rays. While her father moved forward elegantly, the handsome black shepherd dog, which the girl

*From that moment on, her dreams became her reality,
and, when she woke up in the real world again, she
thought she was only dreaming.*

thought could frighten away any thieves or robbers, was jumping here and there at some squirrel or perhaps a wildflower. Lost in the scene, she forgot about her pearl for a moment, but only a moment. She thrust her hand under her sleep shirt for the pouch.

It was there. She opened the pouch and, to her great relief, the pearl was there too. What was more, it was colorful. Sitting on her black-and-white bed, she marveled at the pearl as she had done the first time. She caressed it, at first fearfully, then as violently as she deemed tolerable. And as though her touch had loosened the color, it leaked from the pearl into everything else around her.

Her dreams turned colorful. From that moment on, her dreams became her reality, and, when she woke up in the real world again, she thought she was only dreaming.

ONE MORNING WHEN the girl, now thirteen, was on her way to school, a pale-yellow chick flew to her neck and seized the red-rose pouch with its beak. The chick pulled at the fabric until the hanging thread broke and the pouch shot into midair. When the pouch landed, the chick dug into it, found the pearl, and swallowed the treasure.

When the girl had snapped out of her shock, she threw off her schoolbag and chased after the chick. The bird no longer flew. Instead, it ran at such a speed that she could not catch up, though she never lost sight of it either. She ran and ran after the chick all the way back to her home, past her mother in the garden, who was once again picking tulips, now pink. She ran past the coop the chick had escaped from and past the pigs and fish that her parents happily tended to every day. When the chick was almost within her reach, her father returned from his morning stroll with the shepherd dog. It so happened that the black dog took a fancy to gulping down a chick that day.

The girl had meant to kill the chick and take the pearl out, but she could not kill her father's beloved pet. She took the dog to a tree with dense leaves and, sitting in the shadow as she held the leash in her hand, waited for the dog to shit the pearl out. She hoped against hope that the pearl would remain untainted through all this. But no

*With that remembrance, she woke up,
and she knew then that she had been dreaming.
She knew then which world was which.*

matter how much she cared—how anxious she was in that uncertainty—waiting for a dog to shit was boring. She fell asleep. She woke to the dog jerking the leash loose, and she ran again, this time after the dog.

But the dog ran farther than the chick. It ran through the village where she used to live all the way to the ocean and stupidly drowned itself. Before the girl could get ahold of the body, the waves carried it away from the shore. It floated on the surface for one second, then sank down the next, then resurfaced just when she thought she had lost it.

The girl had never swum far into the ocean, but she summoned her courage and swam after the dead dog.

When birds with a wingspan twice her height swooped over her head or when the shadow of a whale passed beneath her, she worried that the dog would be eaten. But as the land gradually fell behind the horizon, the sea became a barren blue as though it

had exhausted its imagination. And the sea seemed to carry her and the dog differently; no matter how hard she swam, the distance between them would not shorten. As the sun rose to its highest point and began to descend, the dog was always a black dot at the limit of her eyesight.

Then at dusk, just when she feared she would lose the dog in the approaching darkness, a volcanic island with bright lava emerged from behind the horizon. The lava flowed all the way to the sea and, where it met the water and new earth was created, red steam rose high into the sky. To the girl's horror, the waves bore the dog's body straight toward that new earth as if calling it home.

The girl grunted and charged at the dog. She'd thought she was swimming as fast as she could, but she swam faster now, and even faster. Finally, her efforts paid off. The lava touched the dog, but before it was swallowed completely, she got ahold of the tail. She pulled it away from the heat into the cooler water.

Floating on the sea before the fiery sunset, she found the pearl in what was left of the dog. Her fingertips recognized the solid, smooth surface among the entrails, and she washed the blood off the pearl in the sea water. But a dullness veiled the pearl now. She rubbed it again and again, but could not take that plain look away. Maybe the acid in the animal's guts had eaten away the sheen, or the salt in the sea and the heat of the molten rock had touched it too profoundly. Once a daughter of rainbows, the bead could hardly reflect the lava or the dying sunlight.

The girl swam away from the island. Soon, she was too tired to move and she did not know where home was. She let the sea carry her. As she lay unmoored between wakefulness and sleep in the unchanging darkness of the night, still holding the pearl in her fist, she thought it would've been better if she had lost it altogether. It would've been better if she had never set her eyes on its pitiful end.

That was when she remembered she had indeed lost her pearl when she was ten—to where or to what, she'd never found out. With that remembrance, she woke up, and she knew then that she had been dreaming. She knew then which world was which.

FROM THEN ON, the girl no longer dreamed continuously, though, for a long time, the two-story house, the flowering gardens, and the father still came back to her while she slept. But gradually, they all faded away, and she dreamed as everyone else did, her dreams broken, without logic, and not to be remembered most of the time. Many

of the dreams she had once remembered were lost. When she was a grown woman, she even forgot that, as a child, she had dreamed differently.

She remembered the pearl for a longer time, but that too had an end. In her thirties, she became a famous dyer in the province. People compared the products of her craft to the reflection of a rainbow in the evening sea, but that comparison did not bring back the memory of the pearl either.

Yet from time to time, when she was half asleep or when she struggled to wake up—when she lingered in that spacetime where she could not be sure which side of the wall between reality and dreams she was on—she felt a loss. She could not recall what she had lost, only that it was an impossibly beautiful color. A color left behind while she, or her life, kept marching forward, unrelentingly, toward an end that would bite into the tail of another beginning.

All her life she tried to bring back that color. She tried with her dyes, with her mind's eye, but, like a friend loyal and true, her want remained. . .

MARGARET WACK

To the Future Citizens of Ruin and Promise

You should know that I, too, had an amber heart and a bruised stomach. A shining wheat-gold heart and a stomach grey with rotten bounty. We were a people with a foot in the grave, we fermented everything that we could get our hands on. We clung to continents of loss

that slipped into the restless water, sank swan-tongued, whale-throated, hissing into black. We had all the finest instruments, caught on the edge of a new century like a colt on its raw legs in the first darkness. We loved strange music. We ate red fish slick from the sick sea and scoured

our cells down to the grain with weeping. We danced in dark rooms wild as whipped horses and spun away the cream silk of our best years. We loved animals. I had a cat named after a god I did not believe in and a loyal dog with a gold coat: surely that must still count for something

even after all these years. Each of us had a terrified lion's eyes and a honey-colored scorpion pressed to the sticky resin of our hearts and mouths the color of rust and gunmetal. We loved flowers. Do you still know all the old stories? You must. Here's one: when the son of the sun,

having flown too high, fell away from the wild bright fire of his life, his sisters burned up into poplar trees that leaked old gold, thick sap like weeping. If there are spring trees where you are, they might cry out still when you savage them, spill out amber tears. If there are still sisters.

If there are wild-limbed children plunged into white seafoam that they still sing about after a thousand years. If the sun still blinds. You should know that we, too, loved immoderately, like a struck match, like a rough sea, like a gold bee in a lit field that knows the cold is coming.



FRIENDSHIP

A HAIKU

CYNTHIA GRALLA

YUKO HAD THE face of a wronged woman in a Mizoguchi film, stoic and refined. The posture of a queen. I met her when I was just out of college, working as a technical writer at a Tokyo pharmaceutical company. She was a section chief's assistant, her desk located in the same wing as mine.

Her dignity discouraged questions at the start. I'd discovered that some Japanese people liked to use me as a confessor, an inconsequential outsider to whom they could divulge secrets they'd never dare reveal to someone from their culture. Not Yuko. Two decades older than me, she was warm and eager to find out about my life, but impenetrable early on.

Being a middle-aged, single woman marginalized her in Japanese society. Nonetheless, she didn't regret her situation. "I had a chance to marry," she once admitted, but explained no further. I guessed she hoarded her freedom like her privacy.

I only understood later that the English language was, for her, a means to both. She saw it as the innermost chamber at the heart of her shell, its roar a new world. That's why she was passionate about mastering it. And that's one reason why she was drawn to me.

Because she wasn't fluent in English, each of us would remain a bit mysterious to the other. Trying out new words, she told me she was a fan of the writer Yōko Ogawa and foreign films. We discussed books we loved and customs we hated. She liked the way I phrased things, and I admired her irreproachable taste. Our conversations spiraled, vaulted, pearled.

WE SPOKE IN English so she could practice it. But occasionally, she'd resort to a phrase in Japanese and ask me for its English equivalent. Sometimes I was able to give her one. Sometimes I couldn't because there was no equivalent. Sometimes I couldn't because I didn't know the Japanese phrase, didn't know what she longed to say.

We went to art exhibits together. Pored over hanging scrolls, their strokes of ink like love you knew how best to give.

She took me out to eat, dinners that taught me to slow down and pay attention. Yuko was good at pointing out what should be savored. The tiny ceramic plates became glazed dollhouses above which we played with words.

Over the course of several trips to Japan in my twenties, I switched from technical writing to working as a hostess and occasional model. Yuko didn't approve.

“I wish you could find a job that made use of your education.” But then she gifted me a tapered black evening blouse, perfect for work at a hostess club. “For your small waist.”

AFTER I'D KNOWN Yuko a few months, I began helping her edit some translations she was doing for fun, renderings of contemporary female authors from Japan. She would attempt to put their texts into English, and I'd clean up her prose.

“Why do you spend so much time on that?” a friend asked. By that point, I'd edited almost a whole book Yuko was translating.

Because, I didn't say, she needs me.

Because, I didn't admit, I need her to need me.

My life was rocked by instability. Every relationship was a lifeboat I sank as I tried not to drown. But my friendship with Yuko was different. It was based on shared interests and the English language—not desperation. With her, I stood on dry land.

Besides, Yuko helped me too. Once, when I worked as a hostess over the summer to support myself during graduate school, she paid for my cell phone, an essential tool of the trade, despite her wish that I would find more suitable employment. And she was pleased to send me the Japanese books and films I needed to write my dissertation.

The years passed, each one marked by a gorgeous New Year's card from Yuko at every new address. She was thrilled for me when I published a novel and, a few years later, received my doctorate. When I married my first husband, we stopped in Japan on our way back from a honeymoon in Southeast Asia. He told me that, while I was in the bathroom, Yuko had commented, “Cynthia's so happy now.”

But in fact, I was already drowning again. Up until then, Yuko had been good at reading my moods. I suspect she wished so much for my happiness that she stopped being able, or willing, to parse the subtext.

WHEN YUKO SENT a book we'd translated into English to a well-known Japanese author on a whim, asking if the woman would be interested in using Yuko as her translator, her offer was rejected. I hadn't known what she'd planned to do, but I still felt I'd failed her.

My failures were in their infancy. A decade after Yuko and I met, I returned to Japan for the first time in three years. I'd flown over with a good friend to celebrate her birthday in Tokyo, a week of decadence spoiled by the fact that I'd evolved into a full-blown drug addict. As I'd quickly learned, drugs, like love affairs, are only fun when you don't need them to survive the day.

Yuko and I had planned to meet for lunch, but I'd been up late the night before. Nothing but two lines of the purest coke got me out of bed. I felt terrible about meeting her in that condition. She looked tired; she'd been taking care of her elderly mother,

*Time flexed like a bow—then released its hold on me.
I shot through two years like a poisoned arrow.*

who was ailing fast. At one point in the conversation, she jolted me out of my gauzy static by talking about what it would be like once her mother died.

“Someday,” she said, “I will be all alone.”

It happened as it always happened. Something in our friendship—in her—made me stronger than usual. I tried to comfort her, all the while hiding the fact that I was half out of my mind.

TIME FLEXED LIKE a bow—then released its hold of me. I shot through two years like a poisoned arrow.

In that second year of flight, Yuko wrote to me and broke the news. Breast cancer. The prognosis wasn't good. She asked if I would come to Japan when it got bad. If I would be with her at the end.

“I promise.”

STIMULANTS LIKE METH and cocaine unhinge time. I remember being up at all-wrong hours. The second full day awake like a stretch of hot sand that a fleeing

ocean yanked free. By the third day: moving as carefully as if the world around me were edged with knives.

Sleep always broke the spell. One time, I woke from a 30-hour recovery nap to go watch *The Sleeping Beauty*, my favorite ballet—too burnt out by my habit to appreciate the joke.

I toed the slime of rock bottom and nearly died by suicide. Over the Christmas holidays of 2008, I asked my then husband to help me get clean. It stuck.

When I could finally think straight again, I realized no New Year's card from Yuko had arrived. I hadn't received an email from her for months, nor had I checked on her amidst my own chaos.

Eventually, I had no choice but to confirm what I already knew. I called her home phone number and spoke to her niece. In Japanese, the language of grief is formal, punishingly polite.

And that was it. There was no goodbye for me, her funeral having been tipped into my black hole. Yuko fell into death with as little ritual as a dress unfastened at the end of a night.

YUKO'S BODY KEPT its secret from her, its disease, for a time. But nowhere near as long as I kept from myself the secret of her tenderness for me. I still don't understand it fully. Yet it had nourished me, both before and after her death, until my own middle age set courage ablaze. Through its red maple leaves, I saw the truth. Saw that Yuko had loved me, and I had failed to honor her love, as well as her death.

I can't describe that love any further in my native language or any other. Love is an ancient act of translation, passing through dialects like friendship, shared work, and trust. Its syllables melt on the tongue.

One of my favorite Japanese words is *akogare*, or longing, whose kanji looks like a person holding a lantern. But it is time that lights the way.

RECENTLY, I READ Yōko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*. In its most unforgettable scene, rose petals blanket a town as its inhabitants are "disappeared." It made me think of Yuko. The novel was published in Japanese in 1994, a couple of years before we became friends. Had she read it? I can't remember.

But in thinking about her, her love reappeared, swelled, a wave of rose petals sweeping in like a tide of wisdom.

The difference between feeling a friend's love and understanding it is like the difference between quoting another language in a dream and dreaming in it. It's a question of how deep the knowledge runs.

I say to her spirit, *I didn't know you until my age reached yours when we first met.*
But now, I know you like a haiku.

And then, suddenly,
a crow alights on my breast.
A proud, refined crow. . .

ARAH KO

Fish Eye

We fought over them after dinner, my brother
and I. Two salty beads, milk-white,

floating in a wrinkled silver face,
spine of exposed splinters, chili

oil blood on the table before us. Clear
green tea running into my mother's

tiny cup. What couldn't be eaten at that table?
Scars on halmuni's bare feet from feathering

over shrapnel are like sour kimchi.
Sorrow, drunk heartily from translucent

soju bottles. Each tragedy made small
as short-grained rice, anything we couldn't

swallow pried like fish ribs from my bleeding
gums. The present has a way of ballooning

until the future and past touch, warping
at the edges of my vision. This moment:

a fish-eye lens, broken eulogy, dark medicine,
lunch. The world outside, bland as water

juk, noses wrinkling at our smell.
Within, a plate turned toward me, chop

-sticks pressed against my lips. My ancestors
asking, 여우 새끼, aren't you hungry?

SARAH DICKENSON SNYDER

The Stars Are There in Daylight

I see wing shadows
of two silent hawks gliding
above the open field
in widening circles.

I think I am letting go
of the fear of death.

Maybe it's the hospice care I do,
the woman I send a writing prompt
to every morning. How different are we?
Death's on her horizon—for me
it's more like a star brightening
in some darkneses.

Definitely not as close
as the butterfly flitting just beyond
the porch screen seeking nectar
from a flowering.

I feel each vertebra of want
along the inexorable arc
of the living.

Aren't we all in recovery
from the brilliance of the end,
sailing across the surface
with our palms open
in this small country
of bone, feather, & leaf?

BC HOLMES

For Admission Paperwork at the Eating Recovery Center

after Kaveh Akbar

—Describe present problems for which you are seeking treatment.

Imagine a field of crumpling bellflowers
lost tongues snapped stems screaming
without a sound The wasps whose nest I
used as a punching bag but stung my brother
don't speak to my salvation I'm an un-
remarkable speck a panting recluse a
relentless fleck of dandruff stuck on the shirts
of every day I give up too quickly

—What have you done to try to solve the problem?

Nosebleed into cracks of dirt listen to praying
mantises draw their knives through my hair off-key

When my scraggly fingernails beg to be
peeled back like warped planks I take a crowbar
to the car that I drove here the ridges of
the skin underneath thirsty for tobacco

—When did the problem start or when did you first notice it?

Lying on a Ford hood I threw my head back
to a new life I saw myself he it slithering
in bed The neck broke at the shoulders vertebra
vertebra down the spine head to navel
coiling in peace I don't deserve all the friends
I have abandoned

—*What do you believe is the main cause of the problem?*

A broken bell pretending to ring opens its mouth
for the devil No one realizes they are falling
until they've exhausted their air until their bones
are already clouds On the couch a man
sounds like my father He pulls off his motley
bandages offers his gouged skin *Look at
what they did to me* Besides him no one here
is actually suffering

—*Have you, presently or in the past, suffered from an eating disorder?*

I wait for women to bind my face in a napkin It will be a great
stain on my soul these hands rolled up this spine of unraveling
thread filthy onion skin Am I not glowing? I thought I had
my way in dreams they must be one of those sometimes things

PHILLIP WATTS BROWN

Genesis in a Laundromat

Every porthole window is a world
 seen from space, continents and seas
 soapy with clouds, my colorful Earth

turning end over end over end. The story spins
 backwards: stains erased, mistakes not made,
 an existence rinsed of the body.

No more sweat, no blood. Bird patterns blur.
 A sleeve of stars twists away.
 Forests and fields dissolve, lost

to the water. All awash, beauty softens
 into swashes of color. A spectrum of hues.
 Light and darkness without form.

The beginning of everything.

JANE MEDVED

He Who Names the Animals

And wasn't the serpent a sociopath, one of the early experiments, cunning without conscience. I've always liked clever, *smart is sexy* is my motto, but I never got in trouble—by that I mean, bodily harm with no way out. And wasn't I protected by not knowing, which could be called innocence. I never blinked, even in a strange city at night, no one would smell fear. But back to the serpent, who wasn't an animal and didn't get a name, from the earth or anyone else. And wasn't he jealous, and aren't we all drifting across a broken field, trying to break out of the same skin. What body will I wear. What will I tell the other spirits. In my mind I am always twenty-seven and unafraid. Once, I went to a Kabbalist, who told me to add a letter in the shape of God's name. I decided not to. My mother tried to label me in Hebrew, but it didn't stick. The name she chose means bitter, and I don't use it.

LONDEKA MDLULI

Blues

At your
funeral we
played
orchestras,
tears burnt to
steam and
fingers
hummed
tripping over
pianos.
We let the
mourners
come,
descending
like crippled
carriages,
hovering like
a hive of
honey bees
and returning
like angry
water into the
river.



LESLIE STONER. *Pushing Upstream*, 2020.
Archival ink on birch panel. 40 inches x 60 inches. Private collection.

LESLIE STONER: ARTIST STATEMENT

SCANNING THE RHYTHMIC grain on a birch wood panel, my eyes take in all the beautiful organic forms that nature has created. Allowing the wood itself to influence the work gives me a bit of comfort. I work primarily within the parameters of what this tree has spent years making through its long steady growth. The years of the tree, what it's been through and it's own journey. It all feels very fitting that I should then place my own representation of a journey, a pathway over the top of this beautiful grainy surface. Once I have drawn in the composition, then my favorite part begins, the meditative healing power of just drawing lines. Line after line that twist and curve their way along the edge of a slowly growing maze, spreading over the surface like a thin black veil. This process brings me peace; I crave it. It slows my thoughts and allows me to sink deeper into my mind. It is my bit of calm in a world filled with constant stimulus and an unrelenting rush to see more, do more, have more, be more. When I am mazing I just "am" and that feels amazing.



LESLIE STONER. *Wandering Waves*, 2021 (detail).

Archival ink on birch panel.

24 inches round. Private collection.



LESLIE STONER. *Smokey Thoughts*, 2019.

Archival ink on birch panel.

24 inches x 48 inches. Private collection.



VERONIKA MOOS. *Dancing Stones*, 2018.
Natural materials. Dimensions variable.

VERONIKA MOOS: ARTIST STATEMENT

AT THE “EDGE of the sea,” in the landscape—shaped and colored again and again by the tides—I have been looking for traces and dialogue for years. I carry formal concepts and minimalist interventions into nature, and work on sand, with feathers, flotsam, waves, foam—all fragile, fleeting things that are exposed to sea winds and tides, and which soon disappear. I take the land as an invitation to linger, to open up the senses—outwardly, inwardly—and to react. Interventions reveal what would have been meaningless in passing. This creates a temporary trace, and the surface of the earth becomes a reminder.

To work with my hands and be outside—to feel how the living touches, to take action, to respond to what I perceive, to take time for my movements on site, for the movement around me and for the interaction of both—is deep joy. To immerse oneself in the world (detached from conceptual analysis)—subjectively, imaginatively, intuitively—to immerse oneself in its uniqueness, in the moment and in its vitality,



VERONIKA MOOS. *Talking with the Sky, Before Sunset*, 2020.
Natural materials. Dimensions variable.

directs the senses towards a dialogue between inside and outside, intensity, source, and inspiration.

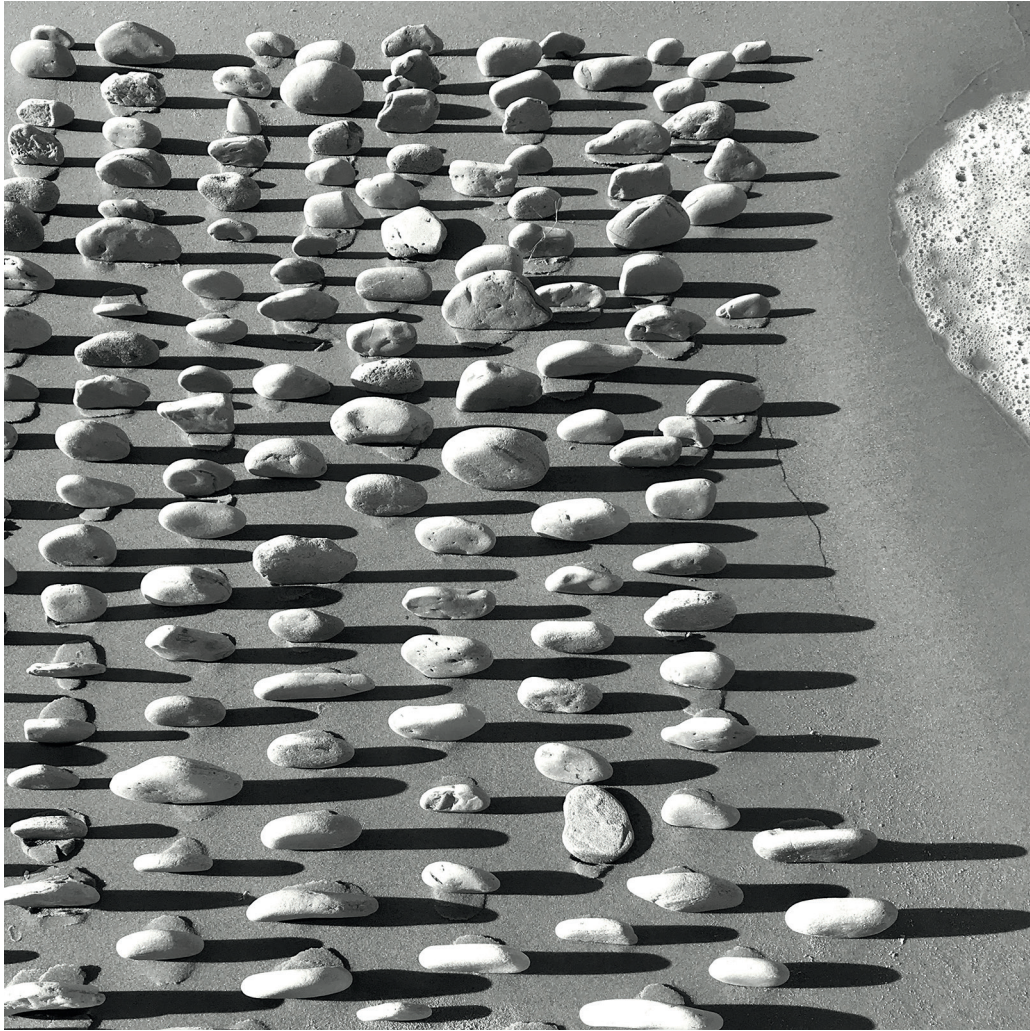
With my landart and environmental art, I also like to bring current social and cultural aspects to the forefront and appeal to preserving nature and its vitality.

So I also take part in a never-ending tissue: the body and the mind, the world and I, joining parts and materials (again) and—minutes later, fleetingly as in the face of the flood—the thread is not in my hand but only part of the eternal process of to and fro, of covering and uncovering for a moment.

My artistic world of ideas and gestures are permeated by creating aesthetic, sensual spaces, setting signatures, cautious lines, threads, envelopes—which form a connection between us and the world and allow feeling, ordering, and holding by touching, connecting, involving, rescuing, and honoring. This creates something new again and again, an interweaving between the organic, the imaginary, and the symbolic.



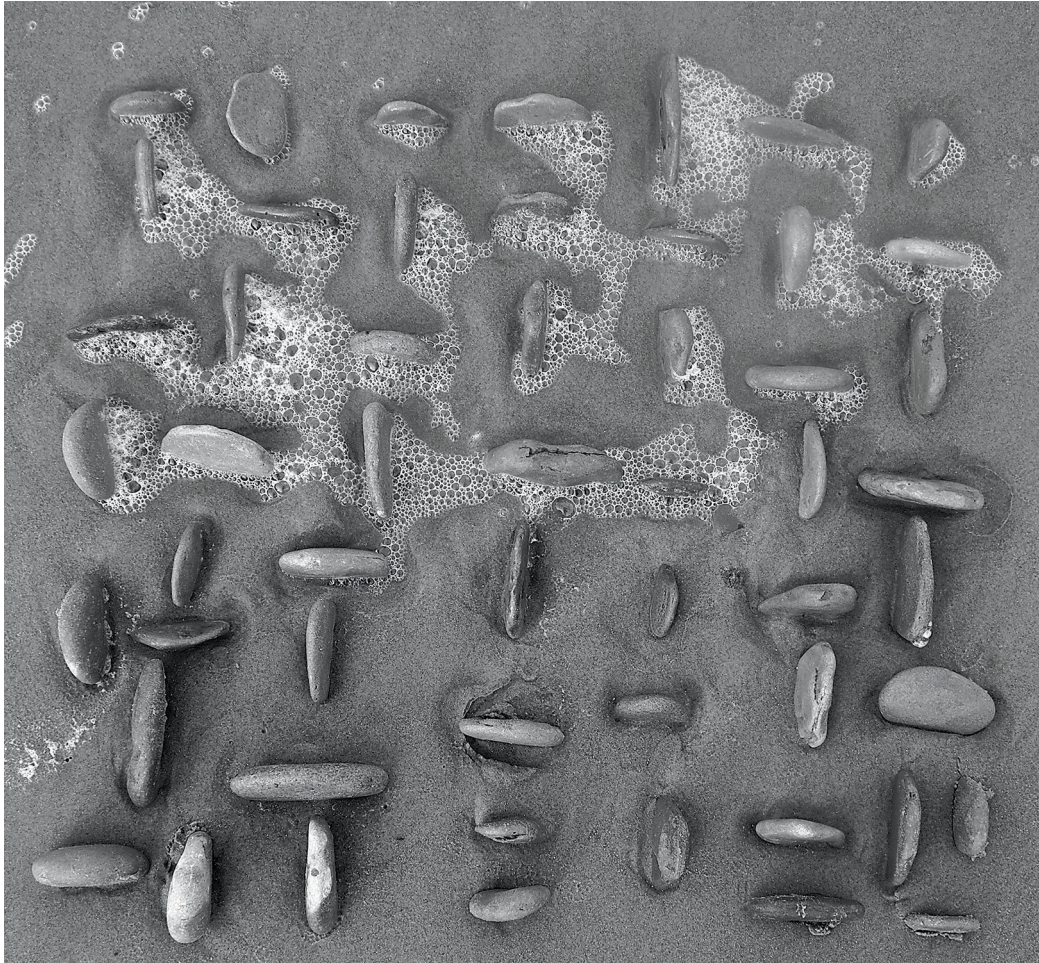
VERONIKA MOOS. *Stone and Shadow*, 2020.
Natural materials. Dimensions variable.



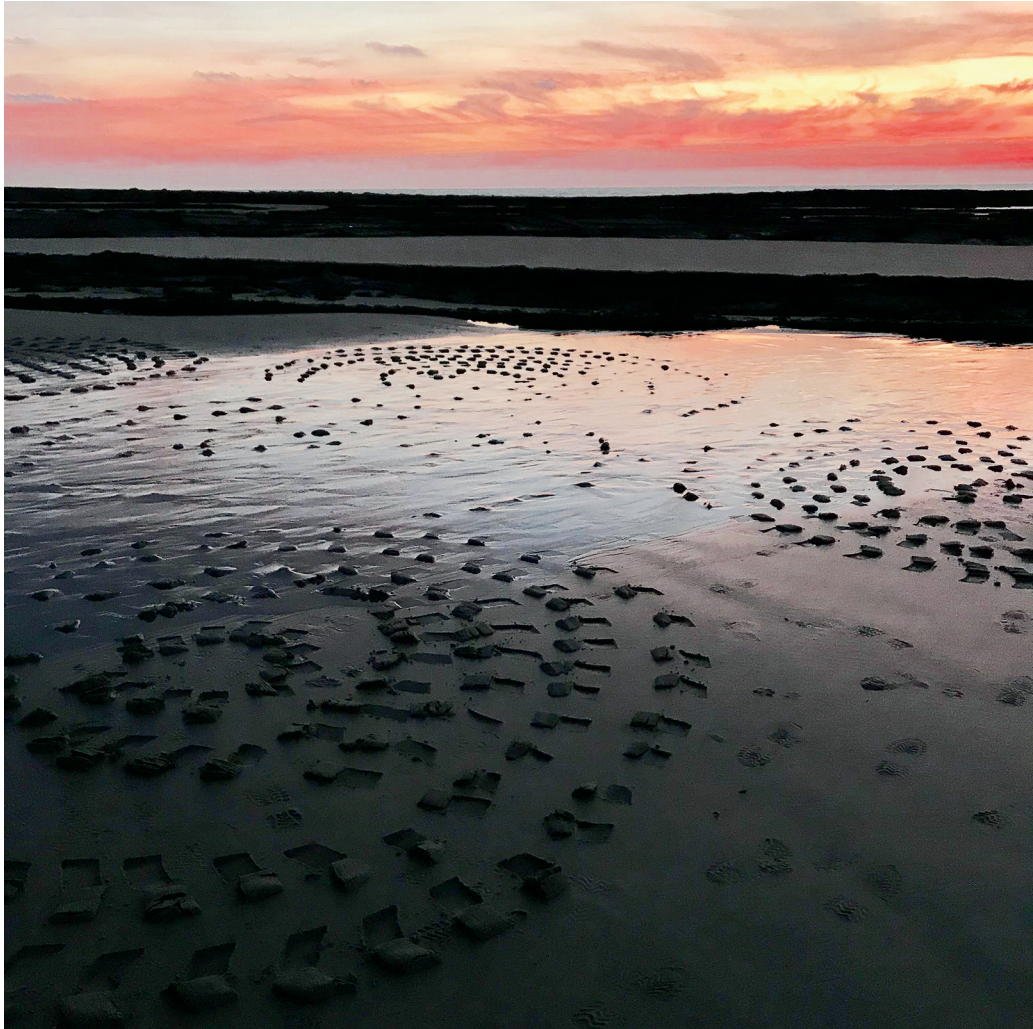
VERONIKA MOOS. *Klick Klack*, 2018.
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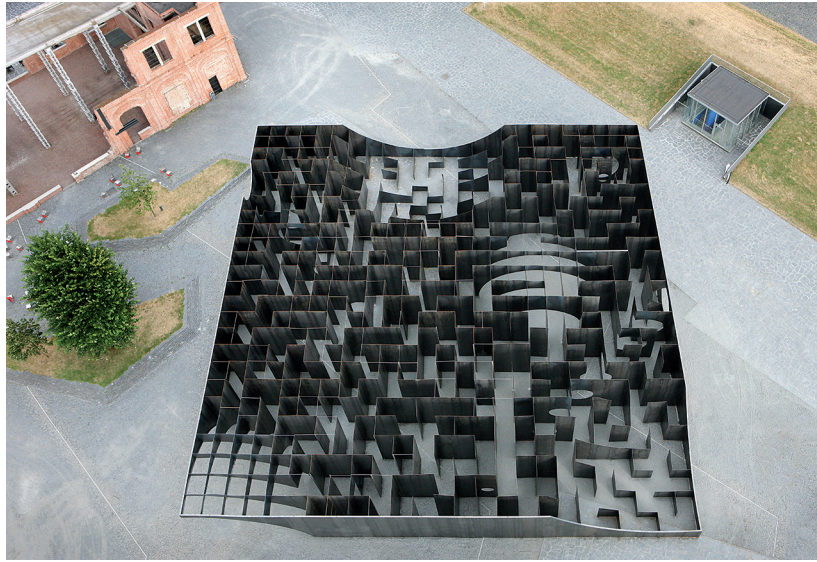
VERONIKA MOOS. *Ground & Sky—Near & Far*, 2020.
Natural materials. Dimensions variable.



VERONIKA MOOS. *Stone Tissue*, 2015.
Natural materials. Dimensions variable.



VERONIKA MOOS. *Catching Light*, 2019.
Natural materials. Dimensions variable.



GIJS VAN VAERENBERGH. *Labyrinth*, 2015. Steel.
123 feet x 123 feet. Photo credit: Philip Dujardin.

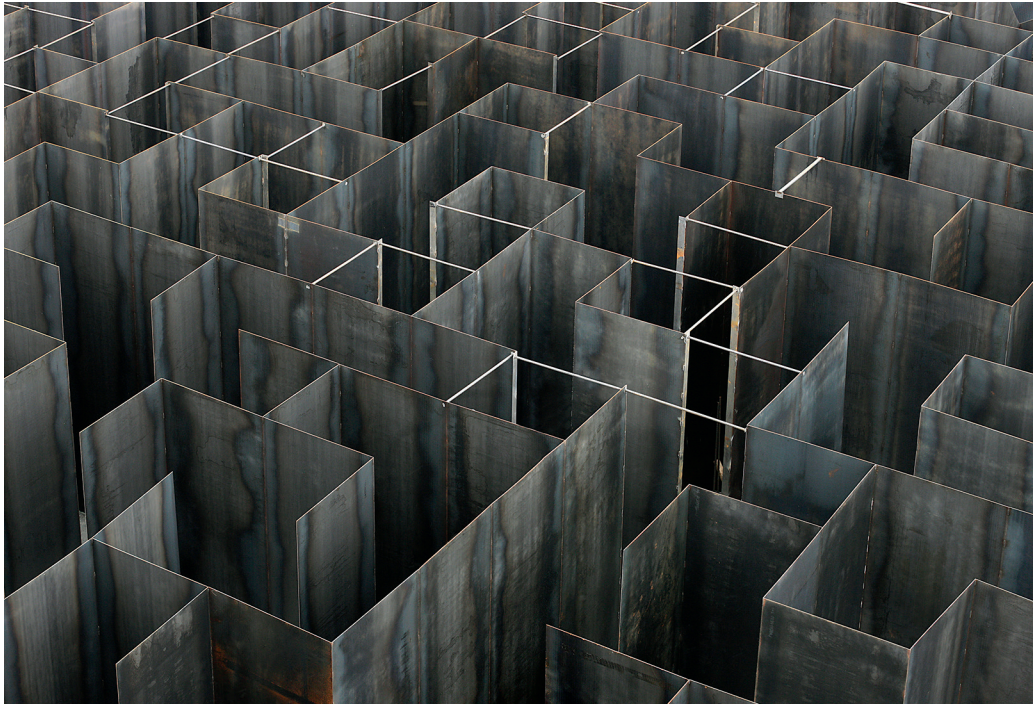
GIJS VAN VAERENBERGH: ARTIST STATEMENT

IN 2015, GIJS Van Vaerenbergh realized an experimental labyrinth to mark the tenth birthday of the C-mine Arts Centre in Genk, Belgium. The sculptural installation *Labyrinth* originated from Gijs Van Vaerenbergh's interest in fundamental architectural typologies; earlier installations were based on the city gate, bridge, wall, and dome. Gijs Van Vaerenbergh views the age-old form of the labyrinth as architecture in its essential form: a composition of walls that define spaces.

The installation measures 37.5 by 37.5 meters and consists of 1 kilometer of walls made out of steel plates that are 5 meters high. Out of this structure, large elementary shapes are cut—a sphere, a cylinder, a cone—to break down the logic of the labyrinth and create new spaces and unexpected perspectives. These Boolean transformations convert the walk through the labyrinth into a sequence of spatial and sculptural experiences.

Labyrinth not only generates a variety of spaces and visual perspectives; it also interacts with the context of C-mine in a different way. Ascending the old mine shafts, one can witness the structure from above and look down upon the wandering visitors—a point of view that is generally reserved for the creator of a labyrinth.

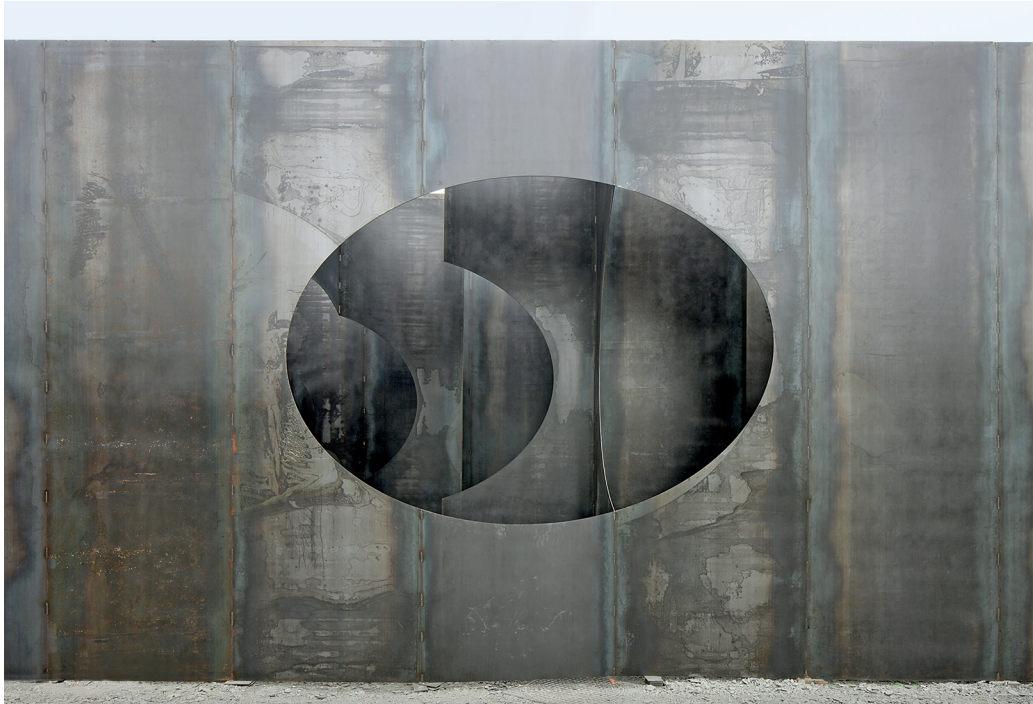
Combining these elements, the installation is illustrative to Gijs Van Vaerenbergh's practice: the duo incorporates tensions between part and whole, form and transparency, recognition and estrangement, design and result, drawing and execution. The goal is to create a layered work that is open to different meanings and experiences.



GIJS VAN VAERENBERGH. *Labyrinth*, 2015 (detail).
Steel. 123 feet x 123 feet. Photo credit: Philip Dujardin.



GIJS VAN VAERENBERGH. *Labyrinth*, 2015 (detail).
123 feet x 123 feet. Photo credit: Philip Dujardin.



GIJS VAN VAERENBERGH. *Labyrinth*, 2015 (detail).
Steel. 123 feet x 123 feet. Photo credit: Philip Dujardin.



GIJS VAN VAERENBERGH. *Labyrinth*, 2015 (detail).
Steel. 123 feet x 123 feet. Photo credit: Philip Dujardin.



GIJS VAN VAERENBERGH. *Labyrinth*, 2015 (detail). Steel.
123 feet x 123 feet. Photo credit: Philip Dujardin.

CHRISTINE SWINT

For the Forced Amaryllis in My Lockdown Living Room

I want to praise this potted bulb, goddess
On a window throne I've watered and fed
In time-lapsed devotion. I want to bless
Its becoming, its slow revelation of blossoms
Red as sirens even in winter's wan light.
Praise sunbeams reaching through a scrim of pines
Like missionaries from the Galaxy of Hope.
Praise petals scrolling from a dark throat
Their tongues giving voice to the quietude of soil.
Praise stems and sepals greening the blooms,
The filaments and anthers that beckon
Bees, butterflies, and moths still churning
In their midnight caves. Praise the parts
I can't detect. Praise being. Praise breath.

THE FIRE

TEGA OGHENECHOVWEN



YOU CAN'T MISS the chalk-white bungalow by the baobab tree. In front of it, seven women in stiff blouses and wrappers lean over seven other women sitting on low carved stools, turning their dense black hair into cornrows. There would have been quietness but for the chattering of children who have come from the street to draw water, a sifting machine breaking chaff off a heap of last year's melon, bleating goats and cackling poultry. At the back of the bungalow, a mute man hammers on firewood with an enormous axe.

A woman with a light moustache prances out of the house in a billowing mauve *doguwar riga*, barefoot. Her graying hair is long, wet, and tangled like spiderwebs. Her figure casts long shadows that freeze every sound. She is Mother Aaliyah. Everyone greets her but she just nods. She shoots her eyes to the sun, chanting with hands held high. "It's going to be a good day," she proclaims. She touches the children on their shoulders, calling each one by name, inviting them to breakfast.

"Mother, what food?"

"*Koko* and *kosai*," she replies to the bulbous-eyed girl with curly hair. The girls jump.

"Mother, what of *goro-goro*?" a boy who escaped polio asks.

"Yes, we want *goro-goro*," the boys chime aloud.

"Okay, there will be *goro-goro* for the boys." She turns to the mute man. "Open the well."

The boys jump. They drum on their pails. The older ones somersault. Their noise resurrects the other sounds. First, it is the sound of the fourteen women giggling under the baobab tree, then the mute man's axe, and then a roped iron pail falling into the well, smacking the surface of the water with an echoing *keplunk*.

Mother Aaliyah's husband, a former cab driver she met while she was making huge profits selling camels in Kano, is lounging on his bench at the mossy end of the compound.

"*Oga*, good morning," she calls out to him. He twists his vexed lips toward his snotty nose.

His name is Bako. He has been weaving cane chairs since a car crash claimed his left foot. Today, he will play draught with his friends. If they do not come, he will play with himself because he would not want the gatekeepers of Dadin Kowa to see him playing such a manly game with Mother Aaliyah.

THE CHILDREN RETURN to the street with pails of water steadied on their heads, only to rush back with gurgling stomachs. Those for *koko* and *kosai* clap and sing. Those for *goro-goro* drum and dance. Their music is an ode to the beast of hunger. They push each other when the food arrives in steaming enamel bowls, weapons for striking the beast.

“No struggling,” Mother Aaliyah yells. Their single-minded anticipation drowns her voice. Malik, a ruddy-cheeked boy with crescent eyes, blows a whistle. They listen up.

“There is enough.”

“*Toh.*” They nod. Their assent is as useless as pushing green flies from fresh dung. Life has wired them to be wolves at hunt. To them, enough is just not enough. They eat in advance.

A fistfight breaks out. Mother Aaliyah tears the two fighters apart. One points to the other. “Fatima has not washed her mouth. It smells like *kashi.*”

The children laugh.

“Janna, how dare you say your sister’s mouth smells like shit?”

Before Mother Aaliyah receives a reply, the boys smell one another’s mouths and point out those whose mouths stink. Malik blows his whistle again.

“Who has not washed their mouth?” Mother Aaliyah asks. Hands shoot into the air, all of them. Malik fetches a giant tube from the house and presses pea amounts of toothpaste on their fingers. The children gargle, and spit like gargoyles. Malik blows his whistle again, then they plunge their wet hands in the bowls.

A FEW MONTHS after Bako lost a foot, he came home with a ruddy-cheeked baby he had fathered elsewhere, and said to Mother Aaliyah, “Take.” With only a puzzled “oh?” she lifted the baby by the armpits and named him Malik.

Joy pulses through Mother Aaliyah when she is with Malik and the other children. She forgets her womb has never felt a baby’s kick. Instead of making her pot the smallest, she makes it the biggest, and opens her gate for the children to troop in, as if for an Olympic.

Mother Aaliyah cares for a different crop of children too—battered and broken, forcefully matured girls inside the house. They don’t jump in the air or dance with the other children or talk children talk. They don’t know if they are still children. Like ghosts, they come out only at moonlight to inhale the smell of freedom. Then, they gyrate and carol in the voices of polluted rivers and dispossessed queens.

Hajara, one of these girls, tiptoes into the front yard and shades her eyes. The pensiveness in her face twists into fascination when she sees the other children slurping as real children slurp, and playing as real children play. She turns her face away.

“Mother!”

Mother Aaliyah gapes at her. “Hajara,” she says in a hushed tone, “what are you doing out here?”

“Jeba is restless.”

HAJARA IS SUPPOSED to be wife to Baba Nonsense, a loose-limbed man with warm threads of saliva dangling from his mouth. He was fond of throwing himself on

Mother Aaliyah circled the trembling girl with her arms. Both of them cried into each other. Their tears lit the fire.

Dadin Kowa girls on their way home from school and squeezing their breasts. Ashamed of this, his family arranged Hajara for him.

On their first night together, Hajara whipped Baba Nonsense on the head with a bamboo stick and ran to Mother Aaliyah’s compound. To justify her action, she recalled in grisly detail how the man tried touching between her legs, his mouth frothing like sour melon soup.

Bako sent her back but Hajara returned some days later with three of her teeth missing. Mother Aaliyah circled the trembling girl with her arms. Both of them cried into each other. Their tears lit the fire.

MOTHER AALIYAH ENTERS the basement room, which has borne witness to countless passages of kindred girls. She moves to one curved like a question mark on a bed in the corner and places her palm on the girl’s hot neck. “Jeba.” The girl slowly raises her swollen eyelids.

Jeba was married to blind Baba Waziri at twelve, just after she saw her first menstrual blood. During that time, she slept all through the day under the baobab tree. When she walked, she pressed the sides of her head with both her hands, as if to keep it from exploding. On questioning, she told Mother Aaliyah that her nights were bereft of sleep. She played hide-and-seek with Baba Waziri who groped about, looking for the knot of her wrapper.

One day, sick of hide-and-seek, the blind man stirred rat poison into Jeba's pot of *miyan kuka*. In the dead of the night, she writhed her way to Mother Aaliyah's compound like an earthworm assaulted with salt, leaving a trail of blackish things she had vomited.

Hajara whispers to the other girls as Mother Aaliyah bends over Jeba. They all start a song. Mother Aaliyah lets out a long sigh. She shakes her body even though the song is nothing like the songs the daylight children sing.

From a chest, she takes out a white contraption she bought in Kano, after a nurse used one to check her temperature. She holds it like a gun to Jeba's forehead. *Ping. Ping.* The girls have never seen a thing like this. They express their astonishment in

*“They could have been my children.
In fact, Bako, they are my children.”*

bursts of loud cheers that, still, are nothing like those of the daylight children. Mother Aaliyah fumbles with the contraption, then flings it into the chest.

THE GATEKEEPERS OF Dadin Kowa summon Bako.

“In the form of a joke,” a man with shark jaws says to him, “fools are told proverbs.”

Bako flicks sweat off his forehead. He knows exactly what the man means, but hunches his back and says, “Ehm, brother, I don't understand this bit of wisdom.”

The demented laughter of the lot thunders in his ears. The man grunts and jets a greenish gob from his mouth. It lands on Bako's only foot.

“You should tell your wife something.” He points a dagger at Bako. “She has too many things on her table, things that don't concern her.”

Bako's eyes alternate between the sticky nuisance on his leg and the flies buzzing around it.

BAKO COMES HOME bellicose. "Get rid of those people you are hiding," he bawls at Mother Aaliyah, his trembling forefinger poking the air, "or else—"

"Or else what?" she rails in a broken voice. "They could have been my children. In fact, Bako, they are my children."

Bako twitches stormy eyes at her. He will remember her look—a picture of a lioness yelping before an antelope. He hobbles away with a frustrated droop to his shoulder.

MOTHER AALIYAH WOULD have been more circumspect after encountering Bako's fury, but just then Sankara appeared behind her gate with a Nikon slung round his neck. He asked for a room to rent in her house. She asked him about his journey. And what of his people? What had he done with his young life? What was he planning to do after the mandatory one-year youth service to Nigeria?

"You have come well. You will stay in that room without a fee." She pointed to a room near the outside kitchen. "But for now, you must eat ground maize and mashed beans prepared with cow milk—without a fee too. You must eat."

A sense of discomfort soured Bako's face when Mother Aaliyah informed him about the terms of Sankara's tenancy. "What do you mean no rent?"

"It is my house Bako and I decide what to do with it," Mother Aaliyah said.

THE NEXT NIGHT, she informed Sankara about the girls and led him into their room.

"Thirteen." Bilkisu said with labored precision when he asked of her age. He couldn't lift his eyes from the heavy belly jutting out of her small body.

"What are you expecting?"

She made a circular motion with her hands on her belly. "I don't know, maybe it will be a brother, maybe a small sister." A ghost smile flashed on her lips.

"This one is Farida." Mother Aaliyah's voice came from behind. She was beside a girl whose hands tightly tied her folded legs against her chest. "Farida is sixteen, and already widowed." She tutted. "Now, her late husband's brothers pursue her."

A long gasp escaped Sankara. He didn't know what to say to the sadness blazing in Farida's eyes.

"How—how are you, Farida?" he ventured inaudibly.

Farida heard him as she had heard others ask about her, even though they knew how crushing the weight of life must be on her body.

She fixed her eyes on the only window in the room, which now ferried in the *kreek-kreek* of crickets. "I am scared they will come for me," she motioned to the other girls, "for us." She took a deep breath, then motioned toward Mother Aaliyah. "For her."

BAKO GLOWERED NOISILY while Sankara and Mother Aaliyah had a conversation in the front yard. Mother Aaliyah knew her husband was smoldering, but it was too late. He could not put out their fire.

Mother Aaliyah waited for the women's meeting to come. When it came, she put the fire in her tongue.

"Our men deny us our daughters!" she said. "They snatch them from us even before they are able to crawl out of their cots. Then, they marry them. The act is like looking at heirlooms and saying, 'gather them and burn them.'" The women stared at her blankly.

"What do you have to say about this nonsense?" she thundered. "How many more shall we allow to slip away from us during their childbearing?"

They heaved loud breaths of sadness. Some of them felt she had been smoking her husband's *taba* because they couldn't believe that a woman could speak in that fiery way without some *taba*. She pressed her palms together and in a plaintive voice cried, "Women, please answer me." They looked away.

SOON MOTHER AALIYAH'S commitment to the fire became absolute. With her go-ahead, Sankara took pictures of the girls and brought the tip of his quill to touch the inks of their lives. He wrote little notes about their experiences and dispersed them like seeds. He sent emails to children-oriented organizations of pictures showing the girls in their bunker, imploring the recipients to stop the abuse. In one, he wrote:

"We need not be barren like Mother Aaliyah or brave like her to feel the way she does about this. We should only have blood flowing in us

to give a quick response to their consternation, wherever they are, wherever we are.”

His camera clicked and clicked. He wrote some more. Many editorials fed into his narratives. And like a virus, the fire engulfed many hearts. It spread across the country. Demonstrators marched through the streets of the capital and other cities carrying placards reading, “Say NO to kid-mothers!” “Underage Marriage Is Infanticide!” “Seventeen-Year-Old Divorcée? HELL NO!”

A BBC journalist interviewed a shaggy-haired pundit wearing a T-shirt that said, “Crush Corruption in Africa, Not Children’s Vulvas!” She said it was not a matter of faulty religious or cultural ethics, but a strain of pedophilia that had hit the crotch area of some African men and made them have a vile affection for children. Her statement ensured a dialogue between the mouths of Africa and the outside world. That, too, was the fire.

DADIN KOWA WOMEN closed their stalls for two weeks after watching Jeba’s body placed in a minute grave, and hearing that Mother Aaliyah narrowly escaped a cutlass wielded by an infuriated man whose child-bride-to-be had jumped in front of an oncoming truck.

Mother Aaliyah shrank into the darkest part of her house, tearing her hair, escaping food, rebuking an eerie dream she’d had—a dream where she fell and

*And like a virus, the fire engulfed many hearts.
It spread across the country.*

drowned in choppy water gushing from Jeba’s grave—thinking of the girls, wondering how they were able to wear flowery smiles in the pictures taken by Sankara despite their agony. She blessed and prayed for them in her parched voice. She also prayed for Sankara, who dashed into the dusk when bullets whizzed at him while taking his kind of pictures, somewhere else.

Malik and his friends would chirrup at her closed door:

“Mother, hooray! We heard that a van from Al Jazeera and a van from Amnesty International are coming with other NGO vans. Is this true?”

“Mother, hooray! They said you are protecting girlkind. What of boykind?”

“Mother, hooray! They say you may be collecting the Nobel Prize. What’s that?”

When she would not answer except with a doleful sigh, they would forsake their jubilant hoorays, and in quiet voices say, “Mother, please! Open and eat.”

NOW, THE SKY is a murky expanse thick with long-lost bats. Malik sees the bats while rearranging the crates the street children sat upon to eat that evening, all of whom have left now, bound for bed. The bats are like black leaves rioting in the sky.

He runs into the house and pounds on Mother Aaliyah’s door.

“Mother, the bats. The bats.”

Malik’s words remind her of the dream again, of Jeba in the water-filled grave. After it, she had awoken soaking wet.

She opens up and scampers out.

“How many are they?” Malik asks.

She lifts her eyes. “Infinite like worries,” she says, rubbing his head. “You should not think of counting them.” The boy trudges into the house to find his bed and go to sleep. Alone now, Mother Aaliyah spreads her prayer mat under the baobab tree, and says the A’uzu billahi, seeking protection against the dark forces, which she has told Malik turn into bats when something evil is about to happen.

Before too long, the rumblings of motorbikes die at her gate. Urgent knocks rattle her bones and loosen her headscarf. She gets up with her unfinished prayer.

“Kuzo ciki,” she says in a crumpled voice, asking the night callers in after she pushes back the latch of the gate. She knows why they have come. She has no regrets.

“Salaam Aleikum! Salaam Aleikum!” they say to her.

The most hateful thing about them is their *salaam*. It sends a sickening report down her bowel. “Why bring peace with a cudgel?” she says to their leader. He ignores her. He circles with the unhurried rhythm of a bobcat. He smiles and twiddles a twig between his teeth. He gazes at the well, prances toward it, and orders that the lock on its lid be broken.

Mother Aaliyah’s breath bites their ears as they huddle around her, some passing loaf-size stones to waiting hands. This whole time, the leader keeps donning his feral smile, his hands running over his bearded chin.

In the entombing darkness of their room, the night girls breathe in the evil boiling the air. Blows on the well and the rattling of its lid freeze their senses for unending seconds. They huddle together. "Sisters, the end has come," Hajara whispers. They don't cry. Even if they do, it will not sound like the cries of the daylight children. It will sound like a joke cracked in a funeral parlor. They wish they could choke themselves to death.

MOTHER AALIYAH RETURNS to her prayer mat, adjusts her scarf, and clutches her prayer beads so tightly the veins in her hands creak. She is no longer able to give sounds to the words of her prayer. Her heart is a horse in flight. She snaps the beads, baring her teeth in a growl.

The men stand two paces from her. They hold their fists high in the air. Hypnotic chants follow. Sticks and stones drum on her body. Strangely, her galloping heart stops racing. What she hears above the bashing is not the cracking of her bones or the squelching of her flesh. She hears only her husband's crutches thumping outside the compound.

After some minutes, the night quakes to a horrendous splashing from her good old well: *keplunk!* . . .

TYLER SMITH

Elegy for a Brother Told in Three Parts

I.

Some mornings I push past the Kinnickinnic River
in a bundle of clothing that would suffice to
push back a lifetime's worth of cold.

Thick with boxelder and honeysuckle,
I turn now with the tilt in the road,
hearing geese wintered

somewhere around a bend frayed in ice.
Down cut pavement, the kind in winter
that lets you know someone else has been this way,

I make my way through weary wood
until some small clearing leads dockside. Sitting there,
a startling sun crests over dusted pine.

Beyond, a little to the left, a silhouette of home,
bay windows hang out over the water.
With the distance come around this body,

a winter-ache wraps itself around my shoulders.
And in their own sense of faith, in another,
geese flock in from all over,

gathering beneath the dock's edge. They wait.
A steady breath of vapor haloes their heads.
Young birds, hardly larger than their season, swim farther out

pooling around each other,
white from their feathers clinging to the air.

II.

On a twisted July day, heat heavy in the throat,
my brother phoned, asking
if he might swing by to catch up

on another year gone. He arrived.
We shook hands, stiff in our greeting
and found our way indoors, out of the sun's glare.

In silence, we sat at the kitchen counter
preoccupied with our own hands,
beginning sentences only to begin them again,

trying to find our common ground.
Like all good Christians, we cracked open
a bottle and poured a measure of faith

into our glasses. In its harshness,
he turned to the window and said,
nice view.

He let the news rest
that he had been sober for over a year now,
not touching those things that in his youth had overcome him—

He mentioned a new job, one that would take him
cross country, climbing radio towers upwards two-hundred feet tall
to replace and repair parts broken

by whatever winds that had whipped through the heavens that week.
He was renewed in having a purpose, he said, even if that purpose
was just migrating from place to place, week to week.

III.

In a cruel act or perhaps an indifferent one,
I wait for the geese to tire in their waiting
and watch them turn back

towards crystalline channels
without anything to show for it.
But the sun rises higher through the pines,

and I take out a bread loaf tucked beneath my coat,
and pull apart a first offering,
throwing it just ahead of those withdrawing

from the clearing. It lands with a splash.
The geese turn to stare
at what they had been given,

and in the pause, they try to reconcile themselves
before darting towards that spot. At first they fail,
as the rise and splash of a brook trout

casts his luck just ahead of their own.
Another chunk cast to the shallows, though,
and those birds that once pushed away

return to get their fill along the hollowed banks.
The shy, not-quite-goslings make their way over, too.
Where once they had kept their distance,

now they faithfully dive for sinking crusts,
warmed by an expectant, muddy morning sun.

KIM GARCIA

Goose

Above the magnolia, scattered blush after a hard rain,
a lone Canadian goose, balancing on one flat foot
on a chimney pot, itself none too secure. A second
webbed spade limp on the air, honk steady
like a mother calling her children in, neither worried
nor angry, turning her head, as this goose does, listening.
The answers don't come. I'm walking. There are places
I need to be. I'm not going to wait for that homecoming,
or the moment when she gives up and goes after them.
Didn't you hear me calling you? How often we played this out
in yards all over childhood. And now, I can't remember
when I last heard a mother calling her child in, standing
in her doorway, call and response, with the evening noises,
getting louder with dark, view softening, lights going on.
Those mothers, not my mother perhaps, but others, are still
standing in their kitchens, and the other children are still
going into them, and I am for this moment—that call still
happening—less lonely, the honking itself so clearly my own.

Sunday School



CATEY MILLER

WE KNEW WE were saved.

We knew we were saved from the lake of fire, or the pit of darkness, depending on who was teaching the lesson that day. Saved from the Evil One who saw the pure white of our souls and wanted to stain them black. Saved by the red blood of the lamb. We strung beads in corresponding colors onto cheap cords in Vacation Bible School so that we'd remember.

We knew we were saved by grace through faith, and not of works. But that there were *some* works to do on our way to heaven, just to be safe.

WE KNEW EACH other from church: Sarah P., Sarah H., Mary, and me.

We went to the church where Sarah P.'s dad was the pastor. It was the second biggest church in town and the best because Sarah P.'s dad preached the truth, straight from the Bible. We competed in Bible drills and watched the boys play in the gym before youth group and sometimes stood at the doors on Sunday mornings, saying hello and handing out bulletins. When we were kids, we were in the children's musical every Christmas, and most of us got to play Mary at least once.

Our Mary was named after that Mary, the virgin. We were about her age, and we were humbled by her tenderness and mildness. We were ready to sing our obedience when God called us to some huge, holy purpose. The other biblical Mary, who we knew was a prostitute as soon as we were old enough to be told, made us grateful that Jesus had saved us *before* we were possessed by demons of lust.

The Sarahs were both named for grandmothers or aunts or mothers, who were named for *their* grandmothers or aunts or mothers, who at some point way back were named for Abraham's wife, the faithful. "Sarah" also means "princess," but we knew we were *all* princesses—daughters of the King.

We knew where to sit in the sanctuary on Sundays so that it would look like we were praying when we were really writing notes to each other. We passed the notes to make sure we were all updated on who was a slut and who was an atheist and who was gay (the one boy who was in all the school musicals; Ms. Cooper, the PE teacher with the army haircut). We wondered what that would be like, to feel that way about another girl in school, in church. We wondered if God would stop loving us. We destroyed the notes on our way to lunch.

WE KNEW ALL the verses you're supposed to know. The wages of sin is death. Obey your parents, for this is right. Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. When we

were kids, we memorized them and treasured them in our hearts and recited them in exchange for candy and toys and plastic jewels for our plastic crowns.

We knew all the stories about the other saved ones. Some of them we learned from songs. Some of them we learned from cartoons. Some of them we learned from coloring books that we colored in with flesh-colored Crayolas.

We knew what Jesus wanted from us.

WE KNEW WHAT Jesus did *not* want from us. We knew the pill was for girls who didn't know, or didn't care. We packed one-piece bathing suits for summer youth-group trips, and we checked each other's bra straps, and we nodded and tugged our shorts down and our shirt necks up when we were implored to help our brothers not be led astray—our Christian brothers, not our real brothers; Sarah P. had a younger brother, but he didn't have to worry about any of this yet.

Sarah H. was the prettiest one of us. Everyone knew it, and we mostly weren't jealous. We teased her when the boys at school called her hot and when the boys at

*We knew exactly what Paul meant about women
and how it applied to us here and now,
as it spoke to us across thousands of years.*

youth group called her beautiful. We didn't say anything when Sarah P.'s dad's associate pastor called her mature. We liked Patrick; we hated Justin. David had good hair but was kind of boring. Will was mean to her, but he came to church most Sundays while they were dating, so he lasted a while. Sarah H. broke up with each of the boys when she started to feel herself wanting to do more than kiss. In-between, she spent time on her relationship with Jesus, asking Him to guard her heart until He was ready to send her the right godly young man. We all wanted that, but we weren't as comfortable praying for it out loud.

Sarah P. never had a boyfriend. People talked about her—at school, mostly, but sometimes at youth group when they thought we couldn't hear, or when they knew we

could. People said she was like Ms. Cooper. Boys held their fingers to their mouths and wagged their tongues. Girls crossed their arms over their chests when she walked by them. We said it wouldn't matter, but I'm not sure that was true. We said we loved her, no matter what, which *was* true—the right way, as her sisters. Sarah P. didn't say anything. All the pastors' kids we knew from all the churches in town rebelled against their dads in one way or another.

Mary loved Matthew. For real. They were that couple, the one we knew would make it, and if they didn't, love was a lie. He wrote her a bunch of goofy songs and one really romantic song, and she wrote him the sweetest, sappiest notes, and she wasn't even embarrassed if we saw what she said. He got into her favorite reality show and she got into soccer—really into it, not fake into it. They dated from 8th grade until almost senior year. And then, one day, Matthew didn't go to our school anymore and we didn't see his family at church. People said he was at the private school, or boarding school, or home school. Mary said it was for the best that they had broken up, but we only saw her in tears for weeks after, and we didn't see him at all.

WE KNEW OUR role in the church and in the mission field. Encouragers. Supporters. Honorers. Nursery volunteers, sometimes, when they needed extra help.

We knew exactly what Paul meant about women and how it applied to us here and now, as it spoke to us across thousands of years. We knew because Sarah P.'s dad told us on Sundays, just the truth, no interpretation, no angle, straight from the Bible. And if we didn't know, we knew who to ask. And if an answer ever seemed harsh or confusing, we knew it was for our own good.

We knew that everything we needed to know was in the Bible.

WE KNEW WHAT it meant to be in the world but not of it, and we knew how important it was. We knew it would keep us safe.

We knew we shouldn't have been at that party, the one everyone else was at, with the sweet pink drinks in glass bottles and the bitter brown drinks in red cups. But it was after the breakup, and we knew Mary needed to have fun.

Mary told us it wasn't her idea, what she and Christian did at that party. But it wasn't like it was a big deal either. The way he kissed her when she came out of the bathroom, the places he put his hands. She didn't ask him to, but she didn't ask him not to either, not at first, and he left her alone pretty soon after she did.

There were lots of Christians—with lots of names—at lots of parties we weren't supposed to go to. We knew them from school and from church. We knew their dads, who worked with our dads.

We knew they were good guys.

WE KNEW WE were not safe if the world voted the wrong way and let unrighteous men without morals or biblical values become our leaders.

Mr. Edwards's wife gave her testimony every year in youth group. How much she loved her children—Rebekah, now in California, and Aaron, now playing bass guitar in the church band. How much she loved the baby who would have been their older sibling. How often she thought about the mistake she'd made when she was our age. How she trusted God had forgiven her, but she knew it was her fault that there would always be something missing from her life, a gift He'd tried to give her.

We knew there were so many like Mr. Edwards's wife—so many women carrying shame and regret. And that not every woman with a story like hers felt the same way about it, that some felt guiltless—even proud—and we knew how dangerous that was, how unholy. And that sometimes, other women lied about whose fault it was, that they felt like they needed to make the mistake, and if we heard something like that about one of the good guys, we couldn't believe it.

We knew people who stood outside the clinics with signs and hearts full of righteous anger. We knew what grieved the heart of God.

WE FOUND OUT what happened with Matthew.

They had sex. A couple of times. Mary said they made love.

They knew about being safe. They knew it was what they wanted. They knew they were what they wanted.

They stopped. Because they felt convicted. Because they knew it wasn't what God wanted for them, not yet. Not until they were Mr. and Mrs. Matthew and Mary, which they knew they would be someday. (They knew what song they were going to dance to.)

They stopped, but they stayed together. We had plans to go to prom.

Mary didn't know that her dad had her email password, or that he would use it, so she didn't know to delete the emails from Matthew.

We don't know exactly what the emails said, or what Mary's dad said to Matthew's dad, or if Mary and Matthew got to say anything at all. We don't know if Matthew still went to his prom. Mary didn't go to ours.

WE KNEW THAT Christian put his hand down Mary's pants a few weeks after the party. We weren't there when it happened.

Christian asked Mary to go to a movie with him, and we told her that she should because she had been so sad and Matthew hadn't texted. Mary wanted to sit up front and Christian wanted to sit in back, and since he bought her a large Diet Coke, she let him pick. She wanted to watch the movie, but she let him kiss her on the cheek because it was nice. Then she let him kiss her neck. Then he put his hand down her

We knew there were so many like Mr. Edwards's wife—so many women carrying shame and regret.

pants. She didn't like that and told him, and he did like it, so he didn't stop. Mary spilled the large Diet Coke on him and ran.

She hid in the bathroom until we came and picked her up. She didn't know, she said, when we asked her if it was a date. She didn't know, she said, when we asked her why she'd worn that shirt then.

Christian's dad told Mary's dad about the Coke, which ruined a jersey from the school that gave him a scholarship. He told Mary's dad about all of us. The way we were together. The way we picked on his son. The way we led his son on. Mary's dad called us all together with Christian and his dad. He asked Mary why she did this, asked us all what we had to say for ourselves, and we knew we shouldn't say anything. We knew if Mary said the wrong thing, it could cost Christian his scholarship, and he didn't deserve that. It wasn't that big a deal. Mary apologized and we left.

We had a sleepover at Sarah H's. We painted each other's nails and ordered pizza and watched our favorite hospital show until we all fell asleep on the couch. We knew we should stay away from parties and boys and dating for a while.

WE BELIEVED IN God the Father.

We believed in Christ the Son.

We believed in the Holy Spirit.

We didn't always believe it in church, where we sometimes rolled our eyes, or made faces at each other, or zoned out and thought about something else. We didn't always believe it in youth group. Maybe because playing dodgeball and foosball wasn't as holy

*And when the good guys touched us
and we said no, they mostly listened.*

as coloring and making bracelets, or maybe because we weren't as holy as those girls had been. But when we weren't at church?

When Sarah H. was a little girl, she was praying in her bedroom, kneeling with her eyes closed, and she felt a hand holding her hand. Her guardian angel, she said. After that, she always left her hand open beside her when she prayed.

When Sarah P. lay in the dark at night, tears on her pillow, whispering her thoughts and her fears and her desires and her apologies to God, He heard her. Her heart felt different. Better. She felt held.

When Mary asked if He was real, if He cared about her, Jesus answered. Sometimes in the verses of a Psalm she flipped to at random. Sometimes in the kindness of a stranger. Sometimes in the first snow of winter.

We saw Him in trees, and sunsets, and photos of beautiful places He'd made where we'd never been but would go to someday, maybe. We felt Him quiet our souls when everything was too loud. When we were still, we knew.

WE SAW MARY change. The Psalms were just sad. People were just mean. Snow was just cold. Her light dimmed.

We knew she was being punished, and we knew what we had to do to avoid being punished similarly. We made promises and stuck a little closer to the dress code, and when we had boyfriends, we tried not to enjoy kissing them too much. Sarah H. led us

in prayers about Jesus guarding our hearts and making our bodies temples. Sarah P. snuck a book about purity out of her dad's office and we read the first chapter together. We asked God to help us learn from Mary's example. The prostitute from the Bible. Not our Mary.

And when the good guys touched us and we said no, they mostly listened.

WE KNEW WE were not safe if we let our eyes and ears consume damaging shows and songs. We knew how easily we could be fooled.

We knew we were not safe if we forgot about Satan's greatest trick, which was making us believe the things he told us through other people—our teachers, our unchurched friends, our celebrity idols—instead of focusing on God's voice through our pastors, our dads, the good guys.

We knew we were not safe. . .

JED MYERS

Terrified Tremolo Hymn

The April morning slept on in the shade of rain, the light as if through
a tent's cloth. I remember, around noon, still yawning.

Then the clouds pulled stakes up in time for the wind, whose great body drove
in like a drunk evangelist in a finned Cadillac—wind

like a spiritual rant in the branches, the pale young leaves
and the plum blossoms shaking mad in their sudden devotion,

manic in the gospel of beams. I stood under an order of crows
who'd broken their vows to lift off and surf the fast curls of the air.

A dog chained to a post barked at a rustling bush. A girl on her lawn ran
in circles and screamed, her voice sailing off east

on her thrill's wings. The blow pressed tears from my eyes,
and in that blur something came clear. This twisting of arms, this ferocious

caress, its urgency grabbing all who stood in it hard by the shoulders,
by the boughs, wings—if time has a hand on us, it had me good

in that wind, like the mob's brutes showing up for a shakedown, and I knew
I was late paying off on breath's promise, way past the grace

period. This was the wake-up, time's fist in the gut, so I'd get
whose oxygen was it being knocked out of me. It's then the wind ripped

my hat off, sent it skidding the street—like a kid chasing a ball, I ran
after that beast on the asphalt and might've got hit

if a car had taken the corner. Wind wilding my hair, I panted
hard to catch up with my hat, and tugging it back on tight,

for more than an instant, I was sure in that low roar I heard
the calls of my dead warning me from where they swam near

in the wind-flood—no I'm not making this fit some religion, not one more
afterlife myth for pimping young fools to war—call it

delirium. Say I was lightheaded after that sprint. But look,
the plum petals were being torn loose and thrown out

on the air in broad waves. A great shimmer of sunlight and shadow,
a mass migration of weightless tumbling ghosts. I walked

into that wind, gripping my brim, shuddering like an old rocket
plane breaking the sound barrier, bolts seams and valves

threatening rupture under the siege of such speed. I felt all my small pieces
shiver inside my thin sheath—I was blown-through,

lit-through, and saw I was made of such tiny flaps as flashed
all around me. Wind, I thought—or did I sputter it out

loud—give me your old-time revival pollen-and-seed song. Awe me on back
to dust, to life, to form after form—I'll sing you my terrified tremolo hymn.

contributors

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SARAH DICKENSON SNYDER has written poetry since she knew there was a form with conscious line breaks. She has three poetry collections, *The Human Contract* (2017), *Notes from a Nomad* (nominated for the Massachusetts Book Awards 2018), and *With a Polaroid Camera* (2019). Recently, poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Lily Poetry Review*, and *RHINO*. She has been a 30/30 poet for Tupelo Press, nominated for Best of Net, the Poetry Prize Winner of Art on the Trails 2020, and a 2021 Finalist in the *Iron Horse Literary Review's* National Poetry Month contest. She lives in the hills of Vermont. sarahdickensonsnyder.com

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CYNTHIA GRALLA's books are *The Floating World* and *The Demimonde in Japanese Literature*. She has written for *Salon*, *Mississippi Review*, *storySouth*, *Electric Literature*, *Witness*, *SLICE*, and other publications. This essay is part of *Environmental Causes: Essays on Illness and Healing in a Dying World*, a collection she's currently writing. She lives on Vancouver Island and teaches at Royal Roads University and the University of Victoria.

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LONDEKA MDLULI is a dual nationality writer of Zimbabwean heritage born and raised in the Mpumalanga province in South Africa. Mdluli began writing poetry at age nine after falling in love with rhetoric and has written many of her pieces based on what she finds most charming: water.

JANE MEDVED is the author of *Deep Calls to Deep* and the chapbook *Olam, Shana, Nefesh*. Recent work can be seen in *North American Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *The Normal School*, and *Seneca Review*. A native of Chicago, Illinois, Jane

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CATEY MILLER received her MFA in creative writing from the University of North Carolina Wilmington in 2015 and is currently pursuing an MA in theology and ministry at Drew University. She is a professional copyeditor and her writing has appeared in *Slate*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Hunger Mountain*, and the *YA Review Network*. When not writing or editing, she is likely reading murder mysteries, getting too emotionally invested in TV shows, or spending time with her husband and their rescue dogs, Lily and Pax.

VERONIKA MOOS is a multimedia and environmental artist. She lives and works as an artist in Germany and France. In 1988, she received her diploma from the Mainz Academy of Arts and, in 2007, her PhD from the University of Cologne. In 2019, she won the State Prize Manufactum in North Rhine-Westphalia. She has had numerous exhibitions in Germany and abroad. She teaches landart and textile technology as an artistic strategy. www.veronika-moos.de

contributors

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TEGA OGHENECHOVWEN is based in Jos, Nigeria. Growing up in violent and wounded places has informed his interest in writing on psycho-trauma, grief, and the endless search for freedom and social justice. His work has appeared in *Longreads*, *The Rumpus*, *Black Sun Lit*, and elsewhere. He tweets @tega_chovwen.

TYLER SMITH grew up on an oxbow of the Mississippi in Maiden Rock, Wisconsin. His poems have appeared or are

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LESLIE STONER, a maze artist, grew up in northwest Montana on a farm tucked deep in the woods of the Rocky Mountains, and she currently resides on a remote island in the Pacific Northwest. Her imagery is a reflection of both environments and her ongoing engagement as an artist with what lies beneath and what floats above, with an emphasis on where the two meet. She earned a BA from Cornish College of the Arts, double majoring in painting and photography. www.lesliestoner.com

FEI SUN was born and raised in Shanghai, and first came to the U.S. for school. She studied physics at MIT and pursued a PhD in the same discipline at UIUC, but left the program in the third year to try writing. She then earned her MFA at Northwestern University. Since then, her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Pleiades* (winner of the Kinder-Crump Prize for Short Fiction), *Mississippi Review* (fiction prize winner), *Five Points*, *Wigleaf*, and elsewhere.

CHRISTINE SWINT's first poetry collection is *Swimming This* (2015) with FutureCycle Press. A former high school Spanish instructor and college writing instructor, she writes about pilgrimage, poetry, and art at *Balanced on the Edge* (<https://balancedonedge.blog>). She holds degrees in English and Spanish from the University of Georgia, a master's in Spanish from Middlebury College, and an MFA in creative writing from Georgia State University. Her current full-length manuscript is a travelogue in verse that chronicles a 500-mile pilgrimage she took from the Pyrenees Mountains in France to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, ending in Fisterra, in the region of Galicia.

MARGARET WACK is a poet and writer. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming

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last notes

My friend Dina ran out to get a haircut last week. “I want to look nice for my husband’s shiva,” she told the hairdresser, a complete stranger, who recoiled in shock. A few days later, her husband entered the hospice ward. The family held hands around the bed and sang. Then they took turns saying good-bye. As his soul left, they were all there.

“Can I book you for my death?” I asked. “That sounds amazing.”

When my own father was dying, my grandson was about to be born. “There are a lot of souls moving around,” I commented. The afterlife gets most of our attention, but what comes before the before?

When I grew up, we had a swinging door that separated the kitchen from the dining room. It opened wildly in both directions, as people popped up unexpectedly from either side. I loved the surprise of that passage, even though at one time or another, everyone got wacked in the face.

JANE MEDVED

I used to make my middle school students memorize and recite “A Crystal Moment,”

by Robert Peter Tristram Coffin, whose last lines still swim in my head: “Life and death upon one tether / And running beautiful together.”

SARAH DICKENSON SNYDER

Only after a full round of seasons could I let my father appear in my dreams, and then, it was another year before he’d visit when I was awake and in need of his quiet counsel.

The maple leaves are giving way to the wind. It’s going to be that loss-ache again, like every fall since I was the moody kid who’d sit on that long, low bough of the Japanese maple in Butchy’s yard, the hard sky coming down as the reddened foliage fell away. It’s going to be a while again, before I can let the cold blue expanse beyond the stripped branches be vast and exhilarating.

JED MYERS

In nature, mushrooms sprout from decaying wood, green shoots spring up after a wildfire, a field mouse snatched from the grass feeds the fledgling falcon. When friends lose a job or have to move out of a house they loved, we offer this wisdom as encouragement—endings can

be beginnings, the start of something new, a fresh chapter. It's an adventure, we say, the open window after a closed door.

We focus on life after death, fashion a heaven from the ashes of what was.

Less spoken is how a beginning can carry an ending inside, how sometimes sadness pearls the interior of joy like iridescence in a shell. Stars disappear at sunrise, each year passes away with every birthday, who you might have been fades as you live the life you've chosen. This loss is often elusive, unnamed. But then you taste a little salt. This, too, is a truth of our natural and emotional landscapes.

Even as I write this, I realize how slight the difference is between the two: Endings open to a beginning, beginnings enclose an ending. Looping like an ouroboros to make a circle. Bleeding together like watercolor. Two sides of a threshold—we take a step and cross over, always entering and exiting the world at the same time.

PHILLIP WATTS BROWN

There's a voicemail on my phone from my conservative Christian grandfather who died in 2015. In it, he congratulates me for winning a local writing award. He says

he's proud of me. I don't believe he would be proud of what I've written in this issue of *Ruminate*, but I now believe something I didn't always when I was younger: that my grandpa loved me.

And there's more: I also love the church. And I believe there is love in the church. Not in *all* churches, and not always for everyone, and not ever enough. But I see it when I look.

Loving my grandfather back sometimes looks like not deleting the voicemail that represents our best moments. Sometimes still loving my faith looks like writing my evangelical religious trauma into mainline-liturgically-flavored short fiction.

I can't identify a beginning of my relationship with either my grandfather or my faith. They were both there when I was born, already intrinsic by the time I began to form memories. But I have thought of both differently as I've gotten older, engaged them more seriously, more deeply considered what they mean to me. Considered ending things. Watched my friends end their own toxic relationships with people and institutions and wondered if that would be the healthy move for me, too.

last notes

But I'm bad at endings. I'll hate-read an entire book sooner than not finish it. I always rewatch Seasons 4-6 of *Community* even though I want to stop after Season 3. I've been known to offer second chances unprompted.

Maybe I'll get the hang of it someday; maybe I'll just keep reconfiguring. Maybe, despite everything, I still can't bring myself to believe in death without resurrection.

CATEY MILLER



LESLIE STONER. *Seeking Clarity*, 2019.
Archival ink on birch panel.
20 inches x 16 inches.