Drift

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Luisa A. Igloria

After many years, the river ran into the river, and the wilderness thickened beside it.

Body overgrown with moss, love made a hunted sound calling from the nether layers. Clouds of birds rose to pin themselves to branches. They looked as much like leaves.

Dirt rained down when I shook them loose and they pooled like dark pods in my hands.

Every time we looked for the moon, a different planet floated into view.

Follow those flashes of light and see where islands disappeared. It's said every lighthouse is visible underwater, a cake topper ringed with flickering candles.

Grown now out of their first abandonment, the children know only this shore: bare of vanished honeysuckle stenciled on a trellis, burns and coppered bullet shells.

Imagine a dreamlike air that used to live inside a gold balloon, and the string just out of reach of our hands. Imagine each day a new season, change after change knocking to be let in, and quickly—are those the same curtains that billowed over Hiroshima, Leyte, Manila Bay?

They still make the sunsets unbearably beautiful—gold-streaked indigo, mutinies of tamped-out fire where warships, rigs, and galleons once docked in navy shipyards and blue coves. Once, we smoothed the sands and painted stones.

Once, hundreds fell out of the sky and into the waters they hoped would save them.

Place a hand on a headstone and the other over your heart. When you feel a tremor, quietly pick up a stick and write in the loam the first name that comes into your mind. Remember the taste of fruit you know now only as a color: red perhaps, seed and heart, spikes encasing the smallest knob of tenderness. At night, someone calls for stories tales that begin in dread and finish with three or more tests that must be undertaken—Except we need them to be careful: it also means the business of undertakers.

Ventriloquists for the dead, somehow they know how to interpret last wishes. We should be so lucky to have, in our own time, a representative of the most internal.

Yeast bubbling in the wood, soft sponge pockets that open wherever we walk. Endless zooplankton: another name for wanderer; eternal jellyfish wrested from home, adrift in the universe.

Luisa A. Igloria is one of two co-winners of the 2019 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry open competition for her manuscript, Maps for Migrants and Ghosts (Southern Illinois University Press, fall 2020). In 2015 she was the inaugural winner of the Resurgence Poetry Prize. She teaches in the English Department at Old Dominion University.