



Labor of Love

She steps into each room of her barn home as if it were a shrine, feels herself in the walls, folds her hands over her heart and bows. *Merci*, she says. Each space—sacred—holds the weight of memories of her children, her marriage. Christmas lights. Pot au feu. Sunday crepes. Blanket forts under the table. First days of school. Splinters. Spider bites. Bees on the windows. Singing on the stairs. Nightmares on the pillow. Chances to mend. It's too late. She's alone. Her husband, insisted on selling, is closing the deal. Her kids are with friends. She sweeps, mops, and polishes the stone floors. She fills the picture holes with putty, paints over pencil marks, erasing years of grade-school growth. She sits down and weeps, walks outside, and listens. Frogs in the pond. Rustles of wisteria. The scent of her climbing roses, donkey dust, summer air. She stands under the Linden tree and strokes its trunk. *Merci*, she says. Then, she returns to her labor of love. One last look. Locks the doors. Leaves it all.

—Victoria Nagel Hauzy