

My Mother and I Visit the Place She Gave Birth

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We go into the forest that used to be a lawn. Alder trees, and a spring that still flows. There is a chicken house made from old wood, corrugated metal. It looks like a quilt standing on all fours. I can't believe it is still here, my mother says. I take her picture leaning inside. This is your father's handwriting, she says. There are some letters, and the number 43. There is salal. There is trillium and swordfern. We walk the trail to the ocean. By the creek where I was baptized, there are plants I don't know the names for, thick and green. There is a sand dollar with its top missing, so it is all cup and silt. There are clouds and then there are fewer clouds. There is less blue sky than gray sea. The horsetails come up to my knees, share the hillside with buttercups. My mother sits on the shore, studying stones. I tell her about the book I am reading, its cover of blue, a girl of indeterminate age. There are birds in her hair, a castle in her hand. Or binoculars—things to see from, live in. Is the world too big or too small? Because her dress is made of mud, she is unencumbered by the water filling the room. It is up to her thighs, or where her thighs would be if we could see them. When she gets cold she will peel a match from her necklace and burn the edges of the page. My mother says if you would lift me up in the rain I could grow leaves.

