

ESSAY

# The End of Endings

by Anneliz Marie Erese



"Novalis" by Milena Makani

1.

How many endings have happened to me after good lovemaking? I cannot count. I refuse to count. The lovemaking is only a culmination of other things that have been good, such as the last meal and the last first-glance we take of each other from across the street, before I cross over and come as close as possible to the scent of you, before I look up and get filled — no — enveloped by you and you compliment again the beauty that is my beauty. Of course, this is not the last. There will be a final one. But even that, even this, we do not know.

2.

Saturday night at the ramen shop. My uncontrollable laughter. With the steam rising in front of you, I remark that your food is untouched. It is still hot, you say. Then you pull the noodles with a pair of chopsticks, your wrist crossing the short width of the table between us, and ask me to blow on it. So I blow on it. I imagine my breath on your food and you swallowing it. I am inside you now, I am as deep inside you as I could ever be.

3.

A quirk of yours is copying someone else's mannerisms. This is performance. I tell you of my theory that whatever we pretend to be, we already are. You ask me what I mean. It is very hard, I say, to conjure something from within ourselves that does not already live inside us.

4.

At an Indonesian restaurant I read to you from Tim Kreider's essay in *The New York Times*. Objectively, we decide that to be known is a good thing. It is what follows that terrifies us, as in, what now, if you see me? Can I take it? Can I truly, without reproach, take it?

5.

Early winter over the bridge. The river is singing but we, side by side, are silent.

6.

I am leaving your apartment. I am leaving my house. I am leaving my job. I am leaving the country to return to my country. When you learn of this, we begin our story. Oh, to have love. To have security. To have a home. And when you leave home, to know that you can always come back.

7.

I write a poem for you, days after the first ending. It begins, “Despite it being short we were / good to each other.”

8.

We talk about the attempt to bridge the gap between vision and reality. You speak in the context of film. I speak in the context of writing. There is another context, but we do not touch it.

9.

I like watching you, by which I mean when I watch you or think of you, I step out of our common reality to gain distance. At your physiotherapy appointment I watch your naked back, hidden behind a curtain, from the mirror, while your voice surfaces occasionally from under the well where your face is buried in the plinth. You speak about your work, your routine; things I already know about. And yet, listening to this conversation you are having, you are a stranger again to me. There is a side (or many sides) to the other that we could never gain access to, could only watch from the sidelines, could only imagine directed at us.

10.

You ask me to slap you. I do. Harder, you say. Another strike. Your cheek red. I am averse to pain. You welcome it. I bite the fleshy part below your thumb once and leave the outline of my teeth on it that is gone by morning. You make a small bruise on my neck that I cover with my hair. This *want* to have markings, what does it mean but that we endured.

11.

If my character were written by a man, and in his story this woman goes to her ex-lover's house without warning, and she knocks at the door, and he is momentarily shocked at the sight of her, what kind of mad is she?

12.

If your character were written by a man, and in this story he goes to his ex-lover's house unannounced, and sits on her bed after she recovers from the surprise and complicated joy, and he tells her nothing of significance, then comes close to her, and takes her hand, how long will it take the woman to forgive? And isn't that also a form of madness?

13.

On my bedroom wall, in your handwriting, the kanji symbol for "path" (?) and "strength" (?). On your bedside table, nail clippings. On my wall, a cinema brochure. On your bedside table, a glass of stale water. On my bed, myself. On your bed, a pair of boxers still smelling of my detergent.

14.

There is a series of photographs of me on your bed. I am lying on my stomach with my laptop in front of me. Then, my face turned towards you. Then, a close-up shot, my eyes creased, two of my front teeth showing as I smiled. I am trying my hardest not to make my pleasure too evident. But there it is anyway. Unbridled. Spilling.

15.

You look at photographs of me blu-tacked on my wardrobe door. You do not say anything. I watch how you silently look and look. Your hands behind your back.

16.

We play a game on your living room rug. Hello —. This is Anne. I met a man and it is all going well but he wants me to swallow pills. Hello, Anne. This is —. I met a woman and she is great but she wants to talk about feelings. Hello —. This is Anne. There is a man and I like him but he tells me I wake his neighbours with my alarm clock. Hello, Anne. This is —.

There is a woman and I like her but it is not enough. It is never quite enough.

17.

I stay over at my friend's house and watch an old documentary about Bob Dylan with her and her partner. His ex-lover, Joan Baez, is interviewed. She tells of her disappointment when Dylan did not invite her to perform with him that one time long ago. In the subsequent clip, Dylan looks defeated. "You can't be wise and in love at the same time," he says.

18.

We sit at a bus stop where I scratch your beard. Your eyes closed. Back in your apartment, the same thing. I watch you feel me feeling you. Words are of no use here. Perhaps this is the final gesture of love. An effort to reach towards skin. Because when touch is gone, what, then, is left of love?

19.

*Lugaw* is the Filipino equivalent of Chinese congee. I cook it for the first time and bring it to your house in a large Tupperware. You hard-boil the eggs. I chop spring onions. Garnish the thick rice generously with fried garlic. In my culture, it is the staple food of the sick. You are unwell. We eat on separate ends of the couch. It is our last meal together.

20.

In an interview with poet Wendell Berry, he tells of his wife: "I am in a conversation with her that hasn't ended yet. It's either that or we kill each other."

21.

*I met someone and we just can't get enough of the...talking.* We joke that this is how we would describe the situation to our friends. I leave your apartment and do not realise that we were conversing for six hours. My phone records show our longest call was for two hours. Sitting on your couch, when I know it is the end, I tell you, I would have many things to say but you would not be there to hear them.

22.

While on a walk you tell me that you are prone to overstaying in conversations. You could be too polite, you say. It is easy, I counter. Just say, I would like to listen more, but I need to go. And then you go.

23.

In *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson quotes the artist Mary Oppen speaking about her relationship to the poet George Oppen. “We talked as I had never talked before, an outpouring.” In response I write on the margins: “Maybe, apart from wanting to talk endlessly, I also wish to have nothing to say, finally.”

24.

You tell me of a dream where you are following behind another biker until you get to a ramp that narrows and narrows until you are falling off the edge. I ask you what it feels like. You say, nothing. You wake up before you hit the ground.

25.

One time after having sex, you hover over me. You say, “I think I’ve just seen the real you.” In a way what you are telling me is that you have trespassed into me and taken something of mine that I was not ready to give away. I want her back. I want you to give her back.

26.

Weeks later, after the final meeting has happened, I am in bed and I am thinking about love. Specifically, of what Marina Tsvetaeva wrote: “There is no more I can lose. We have / reached the end of ending. / And so I simply stroke, and / stroke. And stroke your face.” But there is always something to lose. When I recall the memory, am I not repeating the experience of losing?

27.

There is a woman who is sitting at a long table whose hair looks like mine. In the course of her meal, a man looks in her direction, lingers. A ghost. Fleeting images of someone who

resembles me. This is not my memory, but I am present in it.