

★ **The Madeleine Project: Uncovering a Perisian Life****Clara Beaudoux****Alison Anderson, Translator**

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*Sketching out a cross-time search for a meaningful connection, The Madeleine Project is a sweet, respectful ode to an ordinary life.*

In a time when platforms like Twitter seem more dangerous than hopeful, Clara Beaudoux's magnificent *The Madeleine Project* offers respite.

When Beaudoux moved in to her new Paris flat, she wasn't aware that the space came with a storage unit. The previous tenant's heir had no interest in the bursting-full space, though, so Beaudoux took it upon herself to liquidate the remnants herself.

This book gathers the winsome tweets that she released as she sifted through the former resident's—Madeleine's—abandoned things. Character by character, the tweets capture a lifetime of yearning and growth. They teem with curiosity, longing, meaning—and ultimately, something like love.

The first portion of the book covers just a few days, in which Beaudoux became preliminarily acquainted with the mysterious Madeleine via her abandoned artifacts. Beaudoux catalogs her finds—suitcases full of photographs; boxes full of cutout stars; old shoes; a tooth. She moves with no real compass, and finds herself building stories around the objects. "I'm a bit overwhelmed," she admits, one faded photograph in hand; "is this Madeleine?"

After almost a year's hiatus, the project ramps up; audience interest grows, with people tweeting back support, or filling in the blanks related to places or personalities that Madeleine mentions in letters or photo captions. Beaudoux ventures out to meet those who have memories of Madeleine, with whom she has become enraptured. She records all revelations. Memories are recreated: "I found a postcard in the cellar ... should I go there?"

A community builds around a woman whose ordinary life might otherwise have faded from memory, all because of "tiny little details ... micro-memories, dried petals, worn pencils ... All the beauty of everyday things." And Beaudoux preserves it all for posterity.

Sketching out a cross-time search for a meaningful connection, *The Madeleine Project* is a sweet, respectful ode to an ordinary life. It stands as an antidote to pessimism around the social media age—which does not, as it turns out, prevent us from forming bonds, but in fact may enable us to build them across time and space.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September/October 2017)

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