

## The Museum of Human History

**Rebekah Bergman**

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An ensemble cast—their personalities aching, flawed, and vibrant—intersects across time in Rebekah Bergman's *The Museum of Human History*, a startling novel about memory, desire, and learning to age with grace.

Off the coast of Marks Island, a mysterious red algae blooms. Crystallized, it becomes a ruby rock that the ancient residents of the island treasured and feared. Manipulated, it becomes a powerful drug that can be used to control the aging process—or to subdue native populations. Those in the know are aware of, or suspect, its connection to a substance found in a troubled nation across the sea. But some in the know don't care about the algae's bloody history: power, they accept, comes at a cost.

Near Marks Island, those impacted by the algae include a brilliant, beautiful scientist who just wants to feel normal. An entomologist who hopes that his love is contagious. A museum curator who has never felt equal to his ancestors. A list-making woman facing a fatal diagnosis and the dismayed photographer husband at her side. A genocide survivor turned performance artist. Pharmaceutical company villains. Two people in a May-December romance, and an ever-sleeping twin.

Individually, these islanders face impossible choices and unprecedented challenges—disappearing memories; compound losses; shifting internal landscapes. They don't always make the right choices, and they don't always recognize how their choices tumble into other people's lives. As the implications of their blind spots bloom, they become, by turns, bold, mournful, besotted, ambitious, neglectful, passionate, and angry. At all times, they are a hope- and wariness-inducing bunch whose stories have lessons to teach, even when their best-laid plans risk being subsumed by the sea.

A cautionary tale about reckoning with the present, future, and the past, *The Museum of Human History* is a winsome allegorical novel.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2023)

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