

Vanishing Monuments

John Elizabeth Stintzi

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Life-changing moments lost, reimagined, and regained form the backbone of John Elizabeth Stintzi's meditative, lyrical *Vanishing Monuments*.

Alani is a nonbinary, Minneapolis-based art professor who is forced to return to their hometown, Winnipeg, when their ailing and disturbed mother Hedwig is hospitalized. Armed with an old-fashioned Leica camera, Alani documents the old, decrepit rooms of Hedwig's house, confronting childhood traumas in the process: memories of Alani's first love affair with a nonnormative partner, the decline of Hedwig's mental health and the dissolution of their relationship, and struggles with identity and acceptance, all of which led to Alani's eventual escape from Winnipeg.

Like the stray cat that wanders through Hedwig's house, Alani is adrift and searching for meaning, and Stintzi is sensitive in documenting their inward journey. Each room in the house comes to symbolize a different period of Alani's life. As the narrative floats back and forth in time, Alani's inner reflections run the gamut from piercing to affectionate, stretching beyond Winnipeg's wintry streets and foreboding rivers to other impactful events, most notably a sojourn to Hedwig's home country, Germany, and a friendship with a former Nazi soldier who's trying to rebuild his life by recreating an innocent photograph from his youth.

These fragments of the past merge with and color the present. Alani cares for their deteriorating mother and flirts with some sympathetic local artists, even as the love of their life awaits them back in Minneapolis. Throughout, a haunting question lingers: is it possible to both honor and move on from the past?

Foregoing straightforward plotting, *Vanishing Monuments* is mystifying and rhapsodic in equal terms, resisting easy summations. Through the power of John Elizabeth Stintzi's language, it leaves a bittersweet impression.

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