

The background is a detailed collage of vintage items. At the top, there are several pieces of handwritten paper with cursive text. One letter is headed "Correspondance" and another has "CARTZ" written on it. A large, detailed pocket watch with Roman numerals is positioned in the lower right. In the center, a sepia-toned photograph shows a man in a top hat and a woman in a long dress standing in a doorway. To the left, there's a sketch of a textured fabric or garment. The overall color palette is muted, featuring blues, greys, and sepia tones.

# Typehouse

**Volume 11, Issue 1, No. 28**

# Typehouse



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# Typehouse

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*Typehouse is a writer-run magazine based out of Portland, Oregon. We publish works seeks to capture an awareness of the human condition. To learn more visit our website at [www.typehousemagazine.com](http://www.typehousemagazine.com).*

Cover Detail and Front Page Artwork: *Memories* by Michelle St. James

*Michelle St. James is a published author and artist originally from New England. Her art has been recently published (or is forthcoming) on the covers of Factor Four Magazine, Pulp Literature, Spaceports & Spidersilk, ParSec, The Maul Magazine, Radon Journal, and Tree and Stone Magazine. Her short fiction has been published in over twenty online and print publications, including Shenandoah Literary Magazine and Epoch. View more of her art at [stjames-art.com](http://stjames-art.com), and read selected stories for free at [shellstjames.com](http://shellstjames.com)*

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*Heather Fox is a writer and reader from Melbourne who spends all of her free time consuming (books, films, television, food). She loves to write thoughtful book reviews and fiction that focuses on human connection and conflict. She has had work published with Aniko Press, Wellbeing Magazine, and Louder Magazine. She is working on her debut novel.*

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# The Dollhouse

## Heather Fox

We have sat on this shelf for eight years, and have only been disturbed a handful of times, when we were plucked from our comfortable spot and handled by children's fingers that were as chubby and sticky as one would expect from a child that has been gripping a lollipop. Hungry eyes devour us and lock onto the one of us stationed by the plastic window. Children are normally rough, and leave toys in disarray in their home, but no one is as gentle as a child who has seen a new toy they want. They can't believe their luck, and they must be careful and slow to lure their parents into purchasing it. But the parents usually place us down roughly and pull their child away with annoyance.

We don't really belong here. People don't come to a corner store to buy a small and dusty dollhouse. People wander in here droopy eyed at midnight, stumbling carelessly through the aisles in search of sustenance. They buy an obscene amount of chips in desperate attempts to soothe the rising nausea from the various alcohols swishing around their stomach. The early riser's jog in bleary eyed and make cheap cups of coffee from the machine in the back corner. Families stumble in on Sunday afternoons. Exhausted parents with hyperactive kids in tow, and they buy a bottle of milk and maybe a treat. But *only if you're a good boy.*

We don't know why we remain here. It's been so long. There are no other toys, save for the bin of teddy-bears that are sat next to the shelves where the toothbrushes live. We're not for sale, we never were, but we are amongst things that are. We don't think that James, the owner, would know what to say if a customer asked how much we cost. He hasn't looked at us directly since he put us here.

*The dollhouse?*

*Yes.*

*You want to buy the dollhouse?*

*Yes.*

*You want to know how much the dollhouse costs because you want to buy the dollhouse?*

*Yes.*

*Ridiculous. It's clearly not for sale.*

We just know the conversation would never happen. The question will never come, and an answer will never be needed. We will never be removed from this shelf, and we will never have someone other than James saluting us as he closes shop in the evening. We thought we would only be here temporarily, but time has stretched well past that point.

We are well loved. Scratches and scuff marks can be found if you look hard enough. The one of us who stands at the front window to the sitting room has knots in her hair because the little girl with bright red hair who used to play with us never brushed it.

It has been many days since we have seen that little girl with the striking red hair. One day she was playing with us in her room, and the next a woman wearing a suit took the little girl by the hand and apologised to James. Then they left. James stood in the young girl's doorway and looked at her now empty room. His jaw was strong and set. That evening James carried us down the dark stairwell at the back of the building into the shop. We've never been back upstairs after that.

We have decided that James is a sad man. He sighs a lot and takes swigs from a bottle wrapped in a paper bag once an hour, but he never looks like he enjoys it.

Today is a fine day. James is reading a newspaper behind the counter and shaking his head every now and then. Soft music is playing from the radio, and we are suspended in this moment like all others. We watch and are watched. There is a stillness that stretches over everything, even in the busiest times. We watch and hear and know that we can't contribute but we don't mind. This moment starts, ends, continues from now, and we know it will not change. Or rather, that we will not change but everything else will. James' hair is grey now. The shop has more dust than ever. The windows are thick with grime and let the sunlight in reluctantly. And we still sit here. And James sits there. He is mostly unmoving, like all the days before.

The front doorbell rings, like it does when anyone comes in, but this time it is different. It is a young woman with beautiful flowing red hair. I know her, but I don't. She is new and changed; her face older and worn in, but her hair is the same. We are unchanged.

James drops his newspaper onto the bench and blinks widely at her. There is a silence that normally only we'd exist in, but now it is for all of us. She is dipping her head, hair falling like a shield in front of her face, and James is stepping out from behind the bench. He slams shut the draw with his bottle and packet of cigarettes as he goes.

They seem to be in a standoff. James turns his palms outwards to face the young woman in offering. We think there's tears on the brink of falling

from his eyes. She doesn't take his hands but instead pushes her hair away from her face gently. We can see a shake in her fingers.

James drops his hands at the clear sight of her face.

There is dried blood on her bottom lip. It's red and ugly where the skin has split. Her lips are quivering, and everything looks out of place. Her right eye is partially swollen shut. Broken blood vessels have sprung up on the white of her eyes, branches of crimson jutting harshly around her iris. The beginning of vibrant purple bruising is blooming around the eye. The colours are quite beautiful, were they not so violent.

James moves towards her, but the woman flinches.

*OK.*

James nods and slowly gestures towards the door at the back corner of the shops. The one that leads to the dark stairwell that will take them upstairs.

She nods and James locks the shop door and flips over a sign, so it now reads 'closed' for any potential customers. She follows him slowly, down the aisle, past our shelf. All we can do is watch. James moves quietly, wary not to startle her. The woman takes no notice of us or anything else. The dust and time blankets us and keeps us shielded from view. Another day undisturbed and unnoticed.

Muffled voices emulate from the floor above, and darkness creeps across the shop floor until it reaches us. All the light leaves our house, and the rest of the shop joins us in stillness.

The young woman with the red hair hasn't come back downstairs in days. James opens the shop as he normally would, and when he closes in the early hours of the morning, he slowly drags his feet up the stairs. One day he closes over lunch and comes back with two bags filled to the brim with clothes. He starts going across the road to the baby blue coffee shop every morning before the sun has risen and coming back with two coffee cups. There is always a pink marshmallow resting on the lid of one of them. He takes that cup upstairs.

Time passes like time should for everyone else. James barely sleeps but looks brighter. He watches the front door with an intensity we haven't seen before. He still drinks from his bottle and replaces it when it's empty. He still smokes his cigarettes outside in the cool air, but now he normally waits until his morning coffee is finished.

One day, amongst the stuffy afternoon heat, a light set of footsteps descend the back stairs and the young woman with the red hair emerges into the shop. James wrings his hands and glances around the shop. She runs a finger along a windowsill at the front of the shop. Dust particles explode around her, and she raises an eyebrow at James. Her eye isn't swollen anymore, and the bruising is fading away into soft yellow patches.

James hands her a feather duster, and so the work begins. They silently exist in the shop with us. The silence is so loud and so comforting.

The next day the same. And the day after that and the day after that. The young woman starts humming along to the radio as she tidies. First, she dusts, but we are missed because we are hidden. James pushed us to the very back corner of our shelf this morning.

She scrubs at the windows until they glisten and splinter the sunlight into rainbow kaleidoscopes on the tiled floor. Then she climbs onto a ladder and removes all the spiderwebs from the ceiling. James holds the ladder steady while she swings a long brush above their heads.

One day her bruise was just gone. On that morning, she is the one to venture across the road to the baby blue café and retrieve two hot drinks. It's the first time she's left the shop since she arrived. Her red hair cascades down her back and whips around her face in the wind. She has two marshmallows on top of her cup when she returns.

They're drinking in our silence, and even though we are dusty and pushed into the corner and will never taste a marshmallow, we are comfortable. A shared silence is a gift. The front door swings open and the happy little bell jingles. The young woman is staring down at her cup with a smile. Before James can nod hello to the customer, she looks up and her face falls.

She stands and grips the cup tightly.

The man who has entered is tall and has gelled brown hair slicked back towards the nape of his neck. His shirt is buttoned smartly, and his shoes click-clack on the tiles loudly. He runs a hand over his jaw as he eyes up the young woman. She is frozen in place, and James watches her closely.

*Him?*

Silence.

*Is it him?*

She nods, red hair shimmering.

James barely clears the bench before the man swings the back of his hand across the young woman's cheek. Our perfect silence is broken with a *crack*, and her hot drink flies out of her hands and across the room. Creamy brown liquid is splattered across the floor. A drop even reaches us back in our corner. She crumples to the ground, cowering away from the man.

James is a quiet man, and he completes his next steps with no difference. He holds a baseball bat, and the tip of it drags across the floor briefly before he swings it upwards and into the man's jaw. The man lunges towards James but is met with a blow to the stomach. Then the back. Now the knees. He is collapsing, slowing, yelling. James is larger, stronger, angrier. James aims the bat at his head next, but the man crawls away and through the front door like an animal.

James crouches down in front of the young woman and reaches out for her face but stops just short of her skin. He searches her eyes, and she

nods. He tips her head to the side gently and inspects her cheek. It is red but we see no blood.

James speaks.

*He won't come here ever again.*

She stands with the help of James and retrieves a handful of tissues from behind the counter. She begins mopping up the spilled drink, bending down low. She cleans the little dots all along the floor and up onto the shelf with shaking hands. Bit by bit, until she reaches us. She wipes away the speck of liquid from us slowly and pulls us further out on the shelf. She looks at us and starts to cry. She knows us, and we know her. It is a beautiful thing.

The young woman tucks her red hair behind her ears and stands up to face James.

*This is my dollhouse.*

*Yes.*

*You kept my dollhouse.*

*Yes.*

*All these years.*

*Yes.*

*Why?*

Silence. James swallows and takes a moment. At first, his eyes dance all over the shop. He looks over his life's work and knows that he has done okay. He has tried. He looks at us and doesn't smile

His daughter takes his hands in hers and repeats herself.

*Why did you keep my dollhouse?*

*For this. For now.*

*Charity Everitt is retired following a career in technical writing and engineering software design and development. Her poems have appeared in Lyrical Iowa, River Heron Review, Comstock Review, Concho River Review, and Sky Island Journal, among others. They have also been finalists in contests at Common Ground Review and Rock, Paper, Poem; and been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her first chapbook, Translation from the Ordinary, was published in 2023 (Finishing Line Press.)*

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# Songs for Water, Songs for Wool

Charity Everitt

Burntwater, Wide Ruins, Storm – the names  
are warp and weft, bloodline and bone –  
umbilical cord buried deep in the sheep corral  
where grandmother horizon embraces you.

When a power over which you have no power covets  
your water, your earth; when it writes rules in a language  
where *home* and *land* are not the same and shape-shifts  
borders like loose strands in the wind;

when a power over which you have no power says  
wrench root from bone, brush out your footprints  
and move to new lands, how do you remember  
the names of the air that limn your horizons?

If you can't find the shapes that say  
*I am home; here is my sister, my mother,*  
your hands may forget their skills;  
the very seasons forget your names.

Even the children of Israel wept  
where they sat by strange waters, their harps  
mute in the willows because they could not sing  
their holy songs under foreign trees.

You have restrung your looms with thread redeemed  
from your painted sands; breathed songs for water, songs  
for wool, made beauty from the strange hues of new lands,  
a map of wandering hills, a weave without symmetry and  
two-sided like the open and closed faces you must always show.

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*\*Around 1988 many Navajo were forced to relocate to an area centered around Sanders, Arizona, as part of the settlement of the Navajo-Hopi land dispute. For most people, the prospect of moving meant a loss not only of economic stability but more deeply of spiritual connection and familial support. The Navajo Newlands style rugs get their name from this new environment. The style is a combination of three older styles and has a distinct front and back; the front has more vibrant raised outlines while the back is more subdued.*

*Jim Ross jumped into creative pursuits in 2015 after rewarding career in public health research. With graduate degree from Howard University, in ten years he's published nonfiction, fiction, poetry, photography, hybrid, interviews, and plays in 200+ journals on five continents. Best of the Net nominee in Nonfiction and Art, photo publications include Barnstorm, Blue Mesa, Invisible City, Orion, Phoebe, Stonecoast, with Normal School forthcoming. Photo-essays include Burningword, Kestrel, Litro, NWW, Sweet, Typehouse. His most recent interview, published by Terrain.org, was conducted with an artist. Jim's family splits time between city and mountains.*

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### **Maltese Cross**

*The pandemic invited many of us to gather at Brookside Gardens, a 50-acre public gardens. New friendships quickly formed. With most of us wearing masks, we learned to smile with our eyes. It became the refuge we all needed.*



**Flower Siam Splash as Flame**

*All four images were taken at Brookside. Siam Splash as Flame was taken indoors in the year-round conservatory. Bearded Iris and Maltese Cross were taken in the Perennial Garden. Rained Upon Rose #7 was taken in the Rose Garden.*



### **Bearded Iris**

*I have a particular fascination with rained upon roses and am known to rush to the gardens even during torrential rains. (I previously published four black-and-white images of rained upon roses in Typhouse.)*



### **Rained Upon Rose 7**

*My walks at Brookside became less frequent due to a back injury and slow healing from back surgery in early 2024. I managed to spend hours there every day through much of summer, but it became a struggle to keep that up. I've missed the hills, the flowers, and my fellow walkers.*

*Susan Azar Porterfield's (she/her/they) four books of poetry include In the Garden of Our Spines, Kibbe (Mayapple Press), Dirt, Root, Silk, which won the Cider Press Review Editor's Prize, and Voice/Poems (TrioHouse July 2025), in which these poems first appeared. Individual poems are in Michigan Quarterly Review, The Georgia Review, Barrow Street, EcoTheo, Painted Bride, Mid-American Review, North American Review, Nimrod, Rhino, Puerto del Sol, Poetry Ireland Review, Ambit, and Magma. She's the editor of Zen, Poetry, the Art of Lucien Stryk (Ohio UP).*

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# Andromeda Galaxy in Ultraviolet

Susan Azar Porterfield

The word *package* arrived when I was six,  
the squeegee  
sound of the last syllable like three Tootsie Rolls in the mouth,  
as if something  
brown-boxed-unknown beyond the white kitchen and cereal and  
milk  
of our flat had landed from outer space, a mysteriousness meant  
just for me.  
Likewise, when I read “Andromeda Galaxy in Ultraviolet”  
headlining  
an image of the heathery-lavendery-tanzanite swirl full of  
“hot, young, massive stars,”  
I had to get up and walk around. I had to swear. “Holy Hell!”

Not for the photo, let's be clear, but for naked, dreamt of Andromeda, her  
name unchained  
from the rocks, her name escaping into mist, into fire. For *galaxy*, as  
unthinkable, vast,  
as the tiniest negative number funneling from zero down. And of *ultraviolet*?  
What can be said?  
A violet somehow more than itself, the plumish, spring-born flower, Sappho's  
beloved,  
navel-blossom adorned, a light blooming, light all around, a light way too  
light for us to see.

# I Don't Know What I Mean by this Poem, but I Know it's True

Thus,  
an owl can hear a mouse's heart  
below twelve feet of snow.

It's like this: at light fail, she quiets  
to the muffled thrum.

No wind.  
No other rustle. The thrum under,  
steady drum of breath/breaths, hers,  
who is alone, bounded by white,

and hers, alone, bounded by white  
as well.

Sometimes, too:  
your own heart hums

in the white noise of a small day,  
like the scratch of tiny-boned feet,  
the soft-chuck of a slow-winking eye.

Listen,  
it says, as you wait  
for the kill,

this is something, you know you know.

*Alyssa Beatty lives and writes in Brooklyn New York. When she is not engaged in an endless and fruitless battle to keep her cats off the kitchen counter, she writes short speculative fiction. Her work has appeared in Jersey Devil Press, Penumbra Speculative Fiction, and Luna Station Quarterly. She is at work on her first novel. Find her at [alyssabeattywrites.com](http://alyssabeattywrites.com)*

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# The Memory of Salt

## Alyssa Beatty

Everything looks different here. I expected this, a side effect of revisiting childhood haunts, how everything that loomed so large in memory is laughably small, the magic evaporating before my eyes.

The seawater laps the doorstep of the Horseshoe Bar now. A narrow muddy strip, footprint pocked, is all that remains of the beach. I reach up and spin the rusty horseshoe hanging above the door. It can't be the same one, but the rhythmic squeak as it settles sounds identical.

Inside the smell hits me: musty spilled beer; cigarette smoke trapped in the fishing nets draped along the walls; a base note of ocean salt. It's the salt I remember most. I choose a stool at the end of the empty bar.

The bartender comes over, about my age but with skin weathered by the sea air. The faded embroidery on his shirt says Tim.

"Coke, please," I say.

"Anything in it?"

"No, just Coke. I don't drink."

"This is a bar, you know." He sets the glass down in front of me.

"Am I not allowed to be here if I don't drink, then?" It comes out more aggressive than I intended, my nerves spilling over.

Tim holds his hands up and backs away, and I'm immediately sorry.

"Do you mind?" I hold up the MemScape headset.

"I don't, but why you'd want memories of this place..."

"My mother used to come here. She's dead." I pull on the headset to cover the red flush creeping up my face.

It took most of the money my mother left me to afford the headset rental, to access MemScape's carefully hoarded store of memories of the world before. My father doesn't approve of this trip, but he knows it's my way of letting go, as if by scattering her ashes here I will release my mother's hold on me. And maybe give him a reason to stop monitoring my moods. She was twenty-five when the first symptoms started, three years younger than I am now.

The electrodes pinch at my temples, and I slide into the past.

The light grows gradually, illuminating the bar from twenty years ago. It's late on a Friday, the room packed with shadowy figures that don't register in my mother's memory. I am both within her space and seeing her from outside. A glitch they discovered when they started uploading memories as visual, auditory, tactile; we all remember from both within and without. We are always watching ourselves.

She's blurry at first, a figure in the middle of the room, moving to music I only begin to hear as her image resolves. I can't make out the song because she doesn't remember it, only the dancing, the feel of men's eyes on her, the weight of her skirt on her shifting hips. I feel all these things, too.

*I look down and see my hands moving in sensual circles, feel the wine rushing through my body, lifting me up, out of the incessant chattering of my brain. Out of the corner of my eye I see a small figure hunched in a chair pushed to the wall. I hold out my hand to her, wanting her to come dance, wanting her to feel like I do, like I'm flying, like I'm free, a sun about to explode. She turns her face away. I don't want this, the hurt and anger. I want her to be a part of me again, want to take her back into my body where I can feel her little feet kick, and she never looks at me like that, like I scare her. She meets my eyes, her face pinched with hate, and my anger burns up bright.*

I throw off the headset. It lands awkwardly on the bar, almost rolls over the edge. Tim catches it.

"Expensive." He puts it down in front of me.

My breath comes hard and fast. I still see my own small face in the corner of the bar, feel the mingled love and rage in my mother's racing mind. I down the soda and stumble away from the bar, clutching the headset.

Outside I try to steady my breath. I should have paid more attention to the agent who rented me the headset; he warned me the first time can be overwhelming, can suck you in.

"Be a tourist. Or a voyeur," he'd said with a wink. "Otherwise, you'll never come back."

I look out at the drowned beach, the straggly palms holding their crowns up like children saved from the flood.

No one seemed to notice, or care, when we reached the tipping point and barreled through to a world we would not recognize. The MemScape project started in the first years of the decline, a way to hold onto the world as it was before the seas rose and the land burned. Most people use it to walk through long dead forests and swim in gentle oceans.

I gulp air and slip on the headset again. The waters recede, the beach appears like a sheet pulled up over a bed. My mother stands at the door to the bar, scanning the sand, trying to pick me out of the crowd of happy families building sandcastles and venturing into the waves.

*The wind stirs my hair, the sun is hot on my face. I'm a good mother, to bring her here, where we can both be happy.*

A soft voice echoes through the memory. "It was nice here, before."

I pull down the headset. Tim stands next to the door, smoking a pinched cigarette. He must grow the tobacco himself; all the tobacco fields of the world are barren and burned. He offers it to me, a gesture of unbelievable generosity.

"Or don't you smoke either?" He smiles, softening the words.

I take a tiny, polite drag. The smoke clears my head.

"You lived here before, when it was..." I gesture out to the dirty water greedily lapping at the door. "Before?"

"Yeah, my whole life. My dad owned this place. Used to be packed every night."

I have a flash of his father; kind eyes and scarred knuckles as he slid a Shirley Temple across the bar to me.

"I remember him." I smile. "He was nice."

"He could be, I guess." Tim shifts his weight and looks out over the water.

I have another memory: those scarred hands on my mother's hips as she danced, her eyes half closed. I wish I hadn't come here. In my head it was a happy time, a break from the months of her lying in a dark room, unwashed, barely eating.

"Why did you come here?" Tim asks, reading my mind or my face.

I look at the water nipping my toes.

"She wanted her ashes scattered here."

"Here?" He snorts, flicks the dead cigarette into the water. "Why?"

I shrug. "She liked it, I guess." I hold out a clump of bills. "For the Coke."

He waves it away, pulls open the door. "It's not even real Coke." He disappears inside.

#

In the motel room I lie on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

Getting my father to talk about the time my mother and I spent here was a fight. He fiddled with his oxygen tank, wouldn't meet my eyes.

"She had a manic episode. Wasn't taking her meds," he said finally.

"She left in the middle of the night, took you with her. It was weeks before we found you in some run-down motel on that island. Filthy, skinny, she barely fed you. You don't remember?"

I shook my head. I remembered the beach, warm water, sunsets. But not being gone for weeks, being scared or dirty.

"Sometimes our memories are kind to us, I guess." He took a measured breath of oxygen. "Once we got you both home, I think maybe she saw how scared both of us were. She started taking the meds after that and they made her...well, you know."

I did. They made her a zombie.

“She hated them,” I said.

“She did,” he nodded. “I guess that’s why, well.” He waved his hand, encompassing my mother’s sudden disappearance, her flight from our lives. I didn’t see her again until she was in a hospice bed.

#

I turn over and stare at the wall. I toy with the idea of bringing Tim back to this cramped room, then shudder. I don’t know if this is my own thought or one of my mother’s, seeping in from the MemScape.

I pull on the headset. The wall shimmers for a moment, then explodes into color. By coincidence, or fate, I’ve ended up in the room we stayed in all those years ago. The wall is a chaotic mural, flowers and birds and little fairy faces peeking out from trees.

My mother sits on the floor, paint splattered. She reads from *The Stolen Child*, her voice rich and sad. I see my own small face gazing back at her, enraptured, and a wave of love swells up, for my daughter, for myself. *We’ll run away, we’ll live on sweet red berries and honey and rainwater and never go back...* I pull the headset off before I sink into the memory and get lost in it. The wall is blank and scuffed, unmagical once more.

I could choose to remember her this way, bright and alive in a way no one else was. Her love was so fierce it burned. But then I remember the rough hands on her hips, that flare of anger when she saw me cowering in the corner of a dirty bar.

#

The cardboard box of her ashes bangs against my hip as I sidle down the strip toward the Horseshoe. I should just dump them here in the water in front of the door and go home to my gentle dad and his labored breathing, to our cautious dance around each other, both of us watching me to see if I’ll end up inheriting her disease. There aren’t medications available anymore, not unless you’re rich. I’m not. If it descends on me, I’ll just have to ride it, the highs and lows, hoping I’ll survive both. The headset presses into my spine through my backpack. A flash of her overcomes me, the feeling of the wine lifting me up, the music moving through me as I dance. I feel drunk before I even open the door to the bar.

It’s more crowded tonight, although nothing like my mother’s memories. Tim raises his eyebrows when I ask for a red wine, wondering if I was lying before when I said I didn’t drink.

“It’s expensive.” He frowns.

“It’s fine.” I set money on the bar.

I drink it down in one go, not savoring it, just feeling the red heat of it.

“Again,” I gasp, pulling out more bills. Tim empties the bottle into my glass, watching my face to see if I understand how profligate I’m being. I flash him a smile, feeling the wine warm my stomach.

I've been warned my whole life not to drink. My father is terrified it will trigger the disorder, as if it is lying low in my broken brain, waiting for me to slip up. I stroke my fingers over the cardboard box on the chair next to me. I miss her suddenly, wanting her smell—cloying patchouli and smoke and wine—longing to hear her wild laugh, to press my face against her silky skirts.

The mural in the motel must have shaken loose some screw in my head. Or it's the MemScape, fucking with my equilibrium. I've heard rumors of people becoming addicted, going back and back to the same memory. Neglecting their lives, losing jobs and marriages. I imagine coming here every night, reliving that memory of my mother until I can change it; coax the scared little girl away from the wall, share my sharp addictive joy. Make her like me, brave and free.

The wine fuzzes my brain, smoothing the boundaries between past and present, myself and my mother. I push the glass away, lurch to my feet clutching the box to my chest, the headset balanced on top.

Outside, I pull on the headset. The water recedes, the beach appears. The rank smell of the water at my feet mellows, becomes sweet and fresh. My mother has come outside to look at the stars. I look up, gasp at the few bright lights shining through the cloud cover. There is so much smoke in the atmosphere now; stars are just fairy stories. The box is gone, replaced by my mothers' slim hands. When I was little I would play with them, entranced by her long fingers, her chunky rings. Depending on her mood she would swat me away, irritated, or envelope my small hands in hers. There's no safety I can conjure to match the feeling of her hands covering mine. I run my fingers across each other, savoring the smell of her expensive hand cream.

My mother steps out onto the beach. *The warm wind lifts the hair off my neck.* She slips off her shoes and I feel the dry sand between my toes. We take a few more steps. *I want to walk into the ocean at night, let the dark waves take me.* When I reach the water I'll scatter her ashes there, where she wanted to be, and we will both be free.

I take another step, only to feel arms pulling me backward. The headset slips off. Water pulls at my thighs. Tim slams me back against the door, making the horseshoe rock wildly.

"Are you crazy? There's an undertow, you'll die out there," he says.

I look down at the sodden box in my arms. The bottom has come off, soaked with dirty water. My shoes float away from us in the dark, next to the plastic bag holding my mother's ashes. I consider going after it, but it's oddly peaceful, the bag bobbing on the waves.

I realize that even when I hold her memories in my hands, I can't capture her in flight between madness and magic, can't hold her in the space between my anger and my love. I sigh the same deep sigh my father always heaves when we talk about her. It was hard to love her, but it was impossible

not to, even when she hurt us. I watch her ashes fade into the sea and let her go.

“Come inside. Drink your wine, it’s the last you’ll have for a while. Maybe ever.”

“I’m alright. Finish it for me. Or give it away. Thanks, Tim.” I pick my way, barefoot, along the muddy strip toward town.

“That’s not my name. It’s my father’s shirt,” he calls after me.

I don’t turn back. I don’t want to know who he is, really, don’t want to take on the burden of another person living out their parent’s life.

On the way back to the motel, I stop at a specialty store and spend the last of my inheritance. The owner is initially wary of the money I hand over, but I must have borrowed some of my mother’s crazy allure from the MemScape. Once he meets my eyes he smiles and hands me my paltry change.

In the motel room I carefully mix the paints, old and dried as they are, on the flimsy plastic palette. I slip on the headset and smile. I copy her careful lines, her meticulous detail, spending all night on the floor. The weak dawn light finds me paint splattered and laughing, headset flung across the room, the wall a perfect copy of my mother’s mural. They won’t have the money, or the desire, to paint over it this time. It will stay until the sea takes this place too. I smell her scent, hear her laugh. Maybe an echo of the MemScape, maybe the first hints of my brain breaking, but I don’t care. I hold tight to the feel of her near me.

After I sleep, I’ll go home, carrying the smell of salt in my clothes and hair. My father and I will wait, like the rest of the world, to see what terrible or beautiful thing will happen next.

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# Everyone is dying but you already knew that

Daniel Brennan

didn't you?

You sit on your rust-colored stoop  
and suck life from the wound of your last  
Marlboro Gold, eyes scratchy with  
hazel, flicking toward each moving  
body as if inside its warmth you'll  
find salvation, or perhaps just another orgasm.  
Maybe they're the same these days.

One night you were blitzed  
into a self-contained oblivion with the ketamine  
your ex-boyfriend passed you and you pulled your lips  
to my ear and whispered *I'd die tonight if it meant this is the last thing  
I feel.*

It's not enough to know that the end is  
inevitable, is it? That the machinery of our world  
is clogged and slowing, bad artery, bracing itself  
against our infinite wants, a cipher for *treachery*.  
We all know we're stumbling to a halt, don't we?  
How can we not, now when every set of eyes  
wears a chrome shroud of mourning  
as we gather in our chapels of midnight pleasure.

You sink into your navy couch  
and let out a sigh that transforms into  
a dirge before it even hits the ceiling. You  
pass me the blunt you've been nursing  
and ask if you can kiss me, one hand  
gripping my thigh before I can decide if  
I'd rather spend today's apocalypse alone.  
Would it be cruel to leave you waiting?  
I close my eyes. No promise left in these lungs  
when I at last exhale.

