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Ghost Triptych

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Nina Nyhart

GHOST TRIPTYCH

My mother's not dead yet, only wandering, not knowing if she's in one place or another. So she comes to sit beside me easily, more easily than in the past. And she disappears easily, as she often did. As I drive along, my mother's ghost flinches, shrinks from the savage traffic. What can you expect, I say, we're in Boston. Stoplight. She squirms impatiently. I remind her how lucky we are to be together, here, after so many years apart. She grows silent, and finally, as if love were the result of an algebraic equation she must work out, she agrees.

*

My father's ghost often visits my mother. He spends afternoons with her talking over the old days. He finds her no matter where she has wandered to—Philadelphia, the Gulf Coast—and today, on shipboard. Don't worry, she tells me over the phone, the ship is tied securely to the dock, and someone is cooking dinner. She's growing cold, though, the ship's in Alaska now—serious fishing—and so many men washed overboard. Such a harsh life, fishing.

*

I go to starlight as to a beautiful woman, my mother, wearing a long white silk jersey dress of the thirties, Hollywood style. She sits at the skirted dressing table before the triptych mirror combing her dark wavy hair. Three women open their lipsticks, apply crimson to their lips, dab Nuit de Noël on their throats. She puts on her diamond pin and earrings all shaped like stars. They sparkle in the dark room—starlight—and when I reach to touch it, it's gone, back into that darkness she shone from for a few minutes, long ago.