

Notting Hill

I am in a pub in London.
The pub is called The Castle.
It is on Portobello Road,
across the street from the famous blue door.

I think I'm in a daydream

because I must be sitting in the hospital room in Kentucky.
I must be holding my mother's hand and watching her heartbeat on a monitor.
She looks like her mother did before she died—
thin,
hunched,
a painful strain behind her smile.
She is cold to the touch.
She is shaking.
She is dying.

I don't want to be in the hospital.
I don't want my mother to be dying.
I don't want to be here.

I want to be having a Guinness far,
far away from here,
from there.
I want it so badly
that I create a tangential timeline,
one where I am in a pub in London.
The pub is called The Castle.
It is on Portobello Road,
across the street from the famous blue door.

But if this were a daydream,
Hugh Grant would invite me behind that blue door.
I would be Julia Roberts,
and I could hide from my reality in a rom-com.

Instead, I am alone in this pub on Portobello Road,
pretending that I'm fine;
I'm fine.
And since I'm not in a hospital
as my mother lay dying
no one has any reason to think I'm lying.

I'm lying.

What will I be doing when my mother dies?

A drop of rain fell in my peripheral
and I clocked its slow travel to my palm.
When the dropped landed,
sinking into my pores,
I heard it like a heart's last beat.
And I knew—
My mother is dead.

The sidewalk is uneven
and I kicked a rising crack.
*Step on a crack
and you break your mother's back.*
I stumbled forward
and caught my balance.
And I knew—
My mother is dead.
Thousands of miles away
she gasped her last breath of air,
her pain screamed into the silence
and she died.

My pen drags across the page
Forming the words of a dark premonition:
My mother is dead.
and because I wrote the words
they become true.

I laugh and
wonder if I'll be laughing the moment she dies.
I hug someone who isn't my mother and
wonder if she feels me loving someone else
wonder if it breaks her heart
wonder if it kills her.
I close my eyes to sleep and
wonder what it'll be like to open them in a world where my mother has died.
I wonder if I'll feel her death:

if—
the matrix will glitch.
the weight of gravity will shift.
the sky will tilt.

if when—
I cry.
I trip.
I write.
I laugh.

I love.

I sleep.

she dies.

Queen of Dying

My mother is dying.
We are all dying
but she has her foot on the gas.

My mother is dying
and I'm sad because I love her;
because I'll miss her being alive;
because we need more time to fix things.

But I'm bored of my mother dying.
She has been dying for so long.
Even when she wasn't dying—
wasn't really dying—
she told me,
“You'll regret this when I'm dead and gone.”

I believed her.
I tried not to regret anything.
I try to accept that I may regret everything.

She wears her dying like a crown
her pain and illness
the scepter and orb
of her coronation.
She is anointed
blessed
consecrated
in her dying.
All hail!
Bow before your queen.

The moral is that her dying is inevitable.
Even if the doctors help her not die today,
she will always be dying:
for what else does the Queen of Dying
have to live?

Dreamhouse

Three stories tall
next to an equally tall holly tree.
I use to climb that tree to the top,
the trunk swaying the farther up I climbed.
I never fell,
never jumped,
never hurt myself.
I was never afraid.

Three stories tall
with three bedrooms,
two and a half baths
a finished attic
a finished basement
a remodeled kitchen.
My mother cried when she first saw this house—
she hid in a closet and cried—
she wanted this house so badly she couldn't breathe.

Three stories tall
with decades of memories pressed into the molding.
I grew up within these walls—
from four to thirty-four;
from learning to read
to learning to bury my mother.
My parents grew up within these walls, too.
from their twenties to the fifties
from parents of toddlers
to parents of adults, not speaking.

Three stories tall
and empty.
Inside there is furniture, dishware, and stuff;
my books and diplomas and childhood toys;
my mother's clothes,
my mother's make-up,
my mother's dreams.
There are people here, too:
strangers that forgot how to be a family.

and I hide somewhere on the second story,
and cry.
She wanted this house so badly,
wanted the life that she thought came with this house,
but I was outside, climbing trees.