

My Mother's Jewelry Box

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Though she's been dead over a decade (walking pneumonia), the lacewood still smells of cheap perfume from the corner store. One of the little handles has broken off one of the dozen little drawers; it dangles there, the handle, waiting to be glued back into place. I like to open the little drawers where so many of my mother's earrings, bracelets, and necklaces have hidden, in velvet, from a decade of dust. Inside the right section of the jewelry box hangs a spindle for my mother's beloved necklaces; it is broken, the spindle, and hangs limply from its wooden ceiling. Behind the spindle rests a mirror, also broken. I imagine my mother, before her early death (forty-five years old),

her blonde hair freshly curled, sitting in front of the broken jewelry box mirror and trying on, in different combinations, her assortment of jewelry: the emerald class ring from Clay High School, the engagement ring from her first marriage to Brad (whom I've never met), the knockoff ivory pin of Queen Elizabeth from who-knows-where, the gold chain she stole from Sears, the pearl necklace she "found" while working as a housekeeper at the Econo Lodge, the bracelet of green beads I made for her in kindergarten. And so much more jewelry, the kind only the living can collect. Sitting in front of the broken jewelry box mirror, I place my mother's jewelry on my body, piece by delicate piece, and search for her youthful face in mine.