

Mama

by Tantra Bensko

I figure my mother is not really there, because she's dead. "No, I'm not," she says.

"Yes, you are."

"I'm not." Her head flies off in anger, zooming across the room, getting smaller optically as it goes. Then, it jolts back, flying onto her neck, but overshooting, not attached in alignment with it. Off-center. It hasn't regained its regular size.

"Yes, you are."

I leave her to believe what she wants, and I resurface the table some more, giving it an antique look by hitting it with chains, before I put on a new coat of color that makes it old.

"Do it to me," she says.

"What?"

"Do it."

So, I rough her up with sand paper, and hit her with chains, making dents. She examines her surfaces, tidily and efficiently, indicating the spots most in need of filling in with scratches and scrapes.

"You died too young. You were so beautiful."

"You're welcome," she says. She turns her head and blushes. I can tell she doesn't want to agree to her dead status, but can't turn down the gratitude.

“Do you want some cherry varnish?”

“That would be very pretty.”

She looks so natural in deep red. It makes it hard for her to move, but she's pretty stiff anyway. “I miss you,” she says.

I cry. She doesn't. She's blowing on her surfaces, and unfortunately, blows out her dentures, which stick in the varnish just as it's setting. Now, her teeth are stuck to her right shoulder. “You're still the best, Mama. The very best.”

