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Portrait Memories

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Portrait Memories

I had the strangest dream
last night,
while sleeping soundly
upon my bed.
It started with darkness—
a darkness that consumed me,
disoriented me,
until I felt like I was
spinning
horribly out of control.
When the world ceased
squirming,
I opened my eyes to the sight
of portraits—
thousands of portraits—
each a different memory.
There was strawberry
taffy
wrapped around
sticky
toddler fingers.
There were faux-fur
gloves—
once a pair,
but now one's
all alone.
There was a small
orange
tabby cat
buried
beneath a mound
of clothes—
stuffed,
of course—

with tiny hands
grasping
to it like it was
a superhero.
Part of me knew,
that I should pinch myself—
do something—
to wake myself up.
But the portraits kept
calling—
sweeping me up
in long forgotten,
yet still sweet,
memories.
My trembling hand
reached out,
caressing the still wet
pastel oils
on the nearest
mosaic
of my life.
Soon I was
absorbed—
unknowingly—
straight into
my future.
My hair was longer there.
My face was clear of
teenage
imperfections—
but full of the markings
of age.
How far ahead
had I gone?
Two steps forward,
and lights flickered
to life.
I was standing in a room—
a bedroom—
the faded scent of lavender
and vanilla
fogged the air.
Pictures of my future life

lined the walls—
beckoning me.
The smiling faces
of children—
wavy locks of
flaxen hair—
peach and rose
colored dresses—
and a man
I've never met before,
holding me in
his arms—
so tenderly.
But next to these
beautiful photographs
was a tray
filled with letters
from a war
I didn't know the reason for.
Thousands of
I love yous
and
I'm coming home
scattered throughout
the sea
of chicken scrawl—
so surprisingly
familiar—
surrounded by the
lasting marks
of tears.
My heart ached
as I took one in my hand,
sobbing as it crumbled
into unfeeling
dust.
And somehow
I knew
that he was gone—
the loving man
in the photograph.
I promised myself
once

that I wouldn't fall
into this life—
constantly worried
that my other half
would never return.
I glanced at his face
and I fell
desperately in love—
and soon...
the grief
of him being gone
overwhelmed me
and I collapsed to
the ground,
chest heaving
and angry
at myself
for falling into
the military
love trap.
Echoes of
"I love you"
and
"Where's Daddy?"
trumpeted
throughout my brain—
clouding my senses.
I lashed out,
breaking all I could touch—
but nothing shattered—
it merely crumbled
beneath my
discontent.
I saw his ghost
in my mind—
a smiling face
with bright blonde
curls
and shining
blue eyes—
and I wept.
But my anger
dissipated

and I was left empty—
broken—
by my grief.
I didn't even know his name,
yet I missed him.
It angered me—
but I was so tired.
I slipped
comfortably
into listlessness
and soon
I was being pulled—
back out of my
torturous future...
back through
the room of memories...
back to a level of
consciousness—
once again on my bed.
When I awoke,
I was silently sobbing—
and for while,
I couldn't remember
why.

— Laurie Cartwright