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## Redolence

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KATHERINE FALLON

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## REDOLENCE

I

At fifteen, grandmother  
gifted me Givenchy Amarige,  
ecstatic I had smelled it  
in a department store and found it  
pleasurable. Every woman needs

a signature scent, she told me  
(hers, Chanel No. 5), and it was  
mine for as long as she stayed alive:

smell so heavy it cowed the sulphur  
stink of well-water, led me to think  
I was already grown.

II

These days, I keep my perfumes  
on a pewter cake tray. They teeter

and fall with a crash when I am  
in too much of a hurry, which is

pointlessly often, and I wear  
primarily what came from the past:

Egyptian musk in a roller; drug  
store serums I can only find, half-

empty, on Ebay, because they are  
sickening; my dead father's cloud

of sandalwood; unisex colognes  
that precursed the fluidity of my

own attractions. Whatever I smelled  
on the wrist, the neck, the discarded

bras of those I loved, so long as  
they are now gone. I flat-out torture

myself this way: each day I decide  
exactly how, and on behalf of whom.

### III

When we emptied  
our parents' house of its cat  
piss ruins, shoveling

years-old meat from the freezer  
and pulling up carpet, I also stole  
a single perfume from her closet,

where bottles lined the walls  
in rows neat as candlepins.  
Glass art, dusty and oppressive,

she wouldn't miss  
most of them though neither  
could she let them go.

Incredibly, they were still living  
there then, like field mice  
in a protected, shrinking

thicket we pushed through,  
broke open, exposing all to light  
and to the air. There was so much

inside that one could hardly  
breathe, and at my elbow crook,  
the scent I took gives off

the flesh rot  
of the Bradford pear,  
that dark, carrion pull—