

## registry of memories

yes, it would run itself like clockwork--*even as you insisted on living*  
*the hours, and days, and weeks of your interminable life--*  
and it would find a place for everything,  
arrange it all just like an expert florist, making love to  
shiny stalks of greens gallantly framing buds-to-hold-your-breath-for--  
every so often you'd make time to get away  
to the rooftop hideaway, slipping through secret sliding doors,  
and up a broad shouldered, marble veined staircase  
with skylight glimpses of the infinite universe, leading  
to a vast, tidy, fireproof room within four walls,  
a raised tin ceiling miles and miles above your head,  
and no windows—*that would be distracting*—only  
strategically placed lamps that cast fire-glowing pools of light on  
a meadow clover, velvet covered chaise longue here,  
and a chalk blue, sink-into-a-cloud-on-earth bed-for-one there,  
and tiers and tiers of stacks of shelves that enfold you  
in a private, living testimony of all your days lived, including this very day,  
*your* memories, layers and layers of them,  
tightly wrapped, grainy, life size close-ups;  
rolls and rolls of faithful reproductions of life's originals,  
neatly spiraling downward, far below the terra firma

of facts, into the fragile recesses of holographic chambers,  
impartial keepers of all—*all that has been unwieldy,*  
*unkempt, impassioned, and thorny in your life—*  
and yet, at a glance, they are visible only as  
paper thin reductions, crisp, clean and clean-cut,  
each with a number pinned boldly and prominently for you  
alone to choose from when wanting to take refuge in your past  
in all of its sensory glory, because grieving alone is lonely,  
and sometimes, all that soothes the center of the storm is curling up among  
the billowy pillows, choosing a numbered relic out of all the rest of them,  
unfolding it gingerly, smoothing it carefully as it unfurls off the shelf  
at your command, and fading into the image of your former self;  
once again she stands on hand hewn wooden floors,  
hidden behind a tall display on the weathered  
counter in the back of a small town bookstore,  
in that far north land of mountains and light called alaska  
she fleshes out the details of a customer's special order,  
intently staring at the monitor as she types,  
at which exact moment, laura beckley, ever-vibrant and  
ever-young--though in her forties too—  
drifts in the door from main street, eddying up to the check out counter,  
her smile preceding her like a lantern spilling a shaft of sunlight  
through a quilt of darkly woven clouds,  
then, melts into her soothing lullaby voice as on tiptoe, she peers over the counter

with her frizzy dandelion hair wound into two thick braids,  
and her thin country summer dress gauzy above her tanned legs  
and sturdy, weathered boots, mud-caked from gardening,  
and asks for the bookseller so softly  
the woman in the back can barely hear her,  
and yet knows without seeing who it is and drops  
what she's doing to meet laura's milky blue eyes flashing,  
they're embracing now in peals of laughter, like two breathless children in an  
endless romp across cascading space expanding into single cavernous moments,  
like the folds of an accordion breathing in and out,  
swaying first one way, then the other, until the air is depleted  
and there are no more sights or sounds,  
and you—the once-upon a time bookseller—having carefully returned  
the memory roll to its reserved spot on the shelf, sit alone in the tidy room,  
and consider once more, with remorse, the things you could have done  
to prevent your friend from taking her own life.

By Justine Denny © 2010

