



Image: “Anonymous Was a Woman” by Natascha Graham. “Her Vanity” was written by Marc Alan Di Martino for *Rattle*’s Ekphrastic Challenge, March 2022, and selected as the Assistant Editor’s Choice.

# HER VANITY

poem by Marc Alan Di Martino

My mother used to sit like this before  
her vanity, her shoulders bathed  
in blue and pink light, her powdered skin  
dredged in a cloud of talc, breathing it in.  
Oblivious at seventeen, she wanted  
more than anything to look her best  
when Eddie Fisher offered her a Coke  
in his posh Manhattan hotel suite.  
I sat with her in a room off Times Square  
years later, our last outing together  
before the nursing homes enchained her.  
She told me the story—as she said,  
*for the umpteenth time*—of how she’d met  
the singer whose career nosedived the day  
Elvis broke the charts with “Heartbreak Hotel.”  
They shared a Coke, the story went: his lips  
kissing the weightless ‘O’ of the glass  
bottle which was furtively snatched up  
from where he’d set it down, forgotten it,  
by her swift hand. Later, she told us  
about the talcosis, how it affected  
her breathing. For the rest of her life  
she saw a pulmonologist. I sat there  
letting her regale me with the tale  
of Eddie Fisher *for the umpteenth time*  
in a cheap hotel room off Times Square,  
a crooked mirror fixed above the sink  
a painting of a woman on the wall  
which might have been her, poised  
at her vanity, poisoning herself for love.