THE LAST TIME I SAW IT I was seventeen, still made of helium and a catastrophe of high school horror stories. The interior of the living room is gentle with the muted glow of late August, the sunlight chasing the encroaching shadows away. All, but one.

*It s*till looks the same, even with all the years between us. Its fur juts out at acidic angles and resembles a twisted tangle of wires, as if it's been charged with static. This preoccupation shaped like a black cat, continues to occupy me for many years. Somewhere along the way, *it* stops being a preoccupation, starts being a fascination. I figured I'll be fine eventually.

Eventually it turns into a mantra.

"You're not gonna leave, are you?"

A beat of silence. A monumental void of nothingness, like the world is getting sucked out through the backdoor.

It smiles, or at least tries to. *It* looks like melted plastic, the way all of *it* looks like a carefully-crafted mirage in the summer heat.

It says, "Maybe one day." I think its eyes say *never*.