HELEN'S MANICURE

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Third Place, Poetry

Helen at the round oak table covered with a sticky ocher-colored oilcloth
Allows herself one of the hard candies from the green glass dish
careful not to bite it
wants to make it last
An afghan of odors hangs over the humid room
the steak she fried him for lunch the gas stove the cigarette
smoke so dense that particles of it rest on the surface of things
Massages Jergens into her hands with their ropey veins
Holds wrist to nose breathing in its fruit
careful not to exhale
wants to make it last
Clips nails grown long and yellow like talons
Drags the brush along the side of the bottle
Strokes Scarlet Fantasy to edges of cuticles
careful not to smear it
wants to make it last
Gingerly lights her Winston lays the match in the Harrah's ashtray
Tunes the radio and listens as the polish dries
the farm report the weather the afternoon news the dance
music so smooth she feels it against her skin
Feet up on the cracked vinyl seat of his chair
careful not to stir
wants to make it last
The side door slams her from a dream of dancing, or was it daisies
She marks his progress toward her against the objects in his path
His careless voice, his blind hands, his hot breath
careful not to answer
wants to fade away