

Haircut

by Lydia Copeland

She is cutting his hair. The wind is in her curls. She rises and falls like a sleeping animal. He has removed his shirt. There is a towel around his neck, the smell of spice and banana, the scent of vacations. You are reminded of the time in the beach house in Florida when you told your brother there was no Santa Claus and no Easter Bunny and no tooth fairy. These three blows in one sentence. The two of you were sharing a bed, supposed long asleep. Your brother ran crying into the living room. They asked, *how could you?* You said it was the truth, and, in truth, they couldn't deny it. The edge of her dress bells out in the breeze. She wears Baby's Breath all over. You see how his mustache needs trimming, how her fingers are fast with the shears. You see these things from above, on the roof outside your bedroom. The shingles are black with flecks of glitter in the light. You want to be higher than the house, want to float up, like in your flying dreams, over the tree limbs, the weather vanes, the seams of countryside. You want to slowly lift like a transparent body, like an outline of yourself, like you imagine your brother had lifted from his head and out of his bedroom and into the attic. In the attic there is old baby furniture and your mother's high school annuals, and in a wooden jewelry box—your father's baby teeth. You imagine your brother must have lingered there awhile and then floated out of the house and into the nimbus of space. That day he bled through the carpet and into the basement. Everyone had gone to the carnival to eat ice cream. He had come home to an empty house. You can hear the neighbor's fireworks, can see a trail of smoke, but there is no silver light ferning across the sky, no bloom of gun powder. It is not quite afternoon. She peels the burnt skin from his shoulders. Last week she peeled the plastic coating from the new microwave and the polish from her nails. For days you found red crescents mixed with dirt on the kitchen floor. She dips an edge of blue soap into a glass of water, and rubs it over the back of his neck. You know it is warm on his skin. You've seen her heat the

water to a simmer. She will shape his hairline with her leg razor, just as she used to shape yours when you had a pixie haircut, and she told you to sit still while she palmed the top of your head and bowed you and tickled you with water, ever so gentle. She shakes the towel. He thanks her. Then he stands, lifts the shirt over his head, smooths the wrinkles from his pants. You watch as the nests of hair are swept from the porch, as they drift into the yard. There are shapes of needles in the air. Everything is light as a thread.

