Winter 1992

Third-Degree Burns

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Rebecca Seiferle

Third-Degree Burns

For days, I felt the blister
growing, swelling until
my hand held only itself, fingers curled
around the globe of injury, and when
the doctor cut it open and the warm saltiness
ran down my wrist, I looked into
the peeled-back, naked face of my palm
and it seemed to wear
an anonymous expression. The yellow
lines of fat and the veins bluely
transecting the raw crimson
were maps without a country, and it took
a long time for my hand to remember
its address, to recollect its usages
of the steering wheel, the hammer, the ink pen,
to recompose its white tranquil face, and to forget
how a stranger had held it
like a bowl of milk, the skin souring
on the surface. For months afterward,
I woke to a burning inside
my arms, the nerves firing their way
back to the fingers, and the hand
at the end of my wrist
reaching for the light switch, measuring
its way back to the living
like one mistaken for dead.