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The woman smoothing her son's bangs

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THE WOMAN SMOOTHING HER SON'S BANGS

Looks young against the Dakota snow.
Her dad's a bird man, she tells me,
when a pheasant jumps a post.

She misses it—
the town where her father's mayor
and taxidermist,

where there's not much use
in whispering, the church secretary
leaving casseroles in your mailbox

with bad news.
The furrow where sky and field meet
is little more than a suggestion

like the nod that says
I'm listening
or the house without door

her son outlines on the train window.
Out there—her ex
feeds kindling to a needy wood stove,

warming a room for a new girl
who wears thermals and slippers most days.
So quiet when she enters a room

he doesn't even notice her.
His white-sided house
stands invisible in these plains

that give up only game tracks,
a thin vein of barbed wire.