Winter 1992

Third-Degree Burns

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Recommended Citation

Seiferle, Rebecca (1992) "Third-Degree Burns," CutBank: Vol. 1 : Iss. 37 , Article 15.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss37/15

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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.