



"Putting her hand to something..."

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Putting her hand to something. Another chore just around the bend from the one she is doing. And while she sprinkles the collar of a white shirt her mind is at the bottom of the bed where the leg, broken clean away from the frame, is too split to nail back. Sudsing the thin gray hair of her first customer, murmuring ha mercy at appropriate breaks in the old lady's stream of confidences, Violet is re-situating the cord that holds the oven door to its hinge and rehearsing this month's plea for three more days to the rent collector. She thinks she longs for rest, a carefree afternoon to decide suddenly to go to the pictures, or just to sit with the birds and listen to the children in the street below. This notion of rest, it's attractive to her, but I don't think she would like it. They are all like that, these women, waiting for the ease, the space that need not be filled with anything other than the drift of their own thoughts. But they wouldn't like it. They are busy and thinking of ways to be busier because such a space of nothing pressing to do would knock them down. No fields of cowslip will rush into that opening, nor mornings free of flies and heat when the light is shy. No. Not at all. They fill their mind and hands with soap and repair and dicey confrontations because what is waiting for them, in even a suddenly idle moment, is the weeping they have not done. The rage. Molten. Thick and slow moving. Mindful and particular about what in its path it chooses to bury.

Or else, into a beat of time, sideways, slips a sorrow they

don't know where from. A neighbor returns the spool of thread she borrowed, and not just the thread, but the extra large needle too, and the two of them stand in the door frame a moment while the borrower repeats for the lender a funny conversation she had with the woman on the floor below; it is funny and they laugh--one holding her forehead, the other hard enough to hurt her stomach. She closes the door, and later, still smiling, touches the lapel of her sweater to her eye to wipe traces of the laughter away, and suddenly she drops to the arm of the sofa in tears coming so fast she needs two hands to catch them.

So, sprinkle, Violet, the collars and cuffs. And suds with all your heart those three or four ounces of gray hair, soft and interesting as a baby's.

Not the kind of baby hair her grandmother had soaped and played with and remembered for forty years. The hair of the little boy who got his name from it: Golden. Maybe that is why Violet is a hairdresser--those years of listening to her rescuing Grandmother, True Belle, tell Baltimore stories. The years with Miss Vera Louise in the fine stone house on [tk] street where the linen was embroidered with blue thread and there was nothing to do but raise and love the blond boy who ran away from them to find his father. True had come to them after Violet's father had gone away, and maybe it was hearing about Golden Gray's determination that fascinated her along with his carefully loved hair.
