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Rose

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Ferda: Rose

ROSE

Mary Beth Ferda

I heard he left her and they found her trying to pull out all her hair. I told my mother and she didn't seem to care. Or she did, very much, and only wished that her daughter could forget the tales of such a woman, because what the hair-puller had was contagious. I was superstitious, too, so I tried to forget about the bald lady. But first I had to name her ailments, as naming is knowing and avoiding and luck, all at once. I called her Rose, though that wasn't her name, and my eight-year-old brain saw her biting the wings of live geese. She rubbed the gravel skin of her driveway with her palms; she knew it was alive. She sang to it in her beehive voice, and saved her wolf call for her neighbors, who made her pies. With the fillings of their pastries, Rose washed her face then rinsed her peachy cheeks against the bark of her magnolia. This is how it thrived. When I couldn't forget Rose, I decided she was beautiful. And that if I came down with her sickness, I would become a great singer in many languages and take to wearing silk. I knew the truth: all the women were just jealous of the blooms in her yard. They wanted to be the talk of the town, to drop their mops and establish a gross uniqueness. I was beyond all that longing. I felt it sucking on my fingertips and reaching for my eyes—whatever desire it was that doomed her to tears, naked scalp, free pie.