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## Tender-Headed

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## tender-headed

Taylor Byas

I resume  
my Saturday night post  
between stretchmarks,  
shoulders caught  
between chestnut thighs  
as grandma greases my scalp.  
She carmines the nape of my  
neck with her rat-tail comb,  
the one with gaps where  
my naps wrestled and won.

The coffee table muddles  
with jars of gel and  
rubber bands that welted  
her thumbs when they  
snapped, my backside numb  
on the living room  
carpet, dahlia fibers  
honeycombing my skin  
through my oversized tee.

Be still now, and I strain  
against her grip on my roots,  
chewing tongue to check my  
mewls, focusing  
on the click of her short  
nails colliding as she plaits  
piece over piece.

She hums For Your Glory,  
parts my hair into sections  
gridding out old city streets  
and rows of cotton;  
I wonder if she braids my hair  
for the pastor's approval  
or God's – they'd never say.