

Burn

by Jennifer Wilson

The mug of instant coffee had just been made with boiling water and set down on the carpet beside my father who in a rare moment of kindness had decided to lay on the floor and read us a book which was Yertle the Turtle by Dr Seuss

and i remember the book and its beleaguered hero who sat with a stack of fellow reptiles piled upon his back and i'm sure there was a moral but i didn't know what it was because

i was three

and i was just learning how to do a somersault and so i was balancing on my head saying look daddy, look but he wasn't looking, he was reading to us better than any father ever had before because he did all things with excellence

look daddy, look

i flipped over straight onto the mug of coffee and i was wearing a heavy sweater because it was winter in Alaska and the trailer was chilly. The thick fibers sucked the liquid hungrily up like a wick and held it to my small white back in a caress like a lion's tongue which, i have heard, can remove skin

i screamed and leapt up

my father leapt up, shouting at my mother to bring a towel to save the carpet and she came and they mopped up the mess while i stood screaming and screaming until she put a hand to my back and realized the truth too late to save my flesh so i was held beneath the tap of that Anchorage kitchen sink and bathed in frigid water and my sister and brother ran outside in the snow to escape the noise of my terror and pain

i was bundled to the hospital

where i was mummified in ointment and gauze and sent home to heal. In the weeks to come i would sit on the dryer weekly while my mother unwound me to change the bandages and the smell of humid detergent and sterile wrappings still comfort me to this day.

My father apologized lately for the whole fiasco, though i am fifty now, and i could only laugh at the irony of saying sorry for an accident when so many other things were on purpose.