

Nanny

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Her face gets softer when she takes out her teeth: like a woebegone puppy, all the sharpness left to her collapses with cheek and lips, and how ugly and dead she felt, with a mouth full of loss and poverty. She sits on the chair in the tub, heavily, because she hasn't owned a piano since she was twenty.

Tonight I help her into the shower, peel off her nightgown, and she is so very raw and still pretty, dark eyes that glint out at me sadly, full and freckled and mottled and thick breasts, stumbling little fingers. "The piano took up the whole room," she tells me.

When she turned twenty, the dentist took out all of her teeth. She remembers how cruel the dentist was, how his face loomed big with a lack of compassion; she was very poor and in those days, it was easier to just take them all out and give false ones, rather than try to remove the real plaque, find the real enamel.

"Why won't he come home?" she asks me.

"Why won't he play the piano? He used to play so beautifully."