1981

Abishag

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. . . and let her lie in thy bosom that the lord my king may get heat.

—1 Kings 1:2

That's what they ordered for the old man to dangle around his neck, send currents of fever through his phlegmatic nerves, something like rabbit fur, silky, or maybe a goat-hair blanket to tickle his chin. He can do nothing else but wear her, pluck at her body like a lost bird pecking in winter. He spreads her out like a road map, trying to find his way from one point to another, unable. She thinks if she pinches his hand it will turn to powder. She feels his thin claws, his wings spread over her like arms, not bones but feathers ready to fall. She suffers the jerk of his feeble legs. Take it easy, she tells him, cruelly
submissive in her bright flesh.
He's cold from the fear of death, the sorrow of failure, night after night
he shivers with her breasts against him like an accusation,
her mouth slightly open,
her hair spilling everywhere.