

# By Extension

*Michael J. Noble*

He blisters his hand on the iron she forgot to unplug,  
investigates every outlet, detects exactly three more  
potential fire hazards, bandages himself  
in the prescribed method. She is not a cautious woman.  
He knows when she bathes, she gambles with the extension.  
As the stereo slides into the suds, the blue sparks char  
her bones black. "They coat such wires to prevent  
electrocution," she says. It makes him squeamish  
and he smells the smoking nerves, the odor  
of burning rubber. He grits his teeth,  
lifts the left corner of his mouth, squints his right eye,  
the customary wince she calls a tic.  
He does this as he watches her cover the patches  
of burst capillaries under her eyes, the blood  
fraying, wiring across her cheeks in purple threads,  
as though the skin were scratched from the inside.  
She sees him twitch when she asks for the phone  
and consciously stretches the cord so its doesn't rub  
the wall, short his corroded nerves.  
Beneath the bed, he stores the extra TV cable  
and stereo wire, saves over fourteen feet,  
winds it in loops like rope.  
Scraping off the rubber,  
he divides the strands by color.