

Tying Flies

by James Claffey

His thick fingers know their way around a fishing fly. The narrow metal box with hooks, twine and feathers lives in the dark space under the stairs. He brings it out in the springtime, readying for the freshwater season, the bamboo rods with cork handles dusted and polished, the reel oiled and ready to cast. A surgeon, he lays out his instruments: bodkins, hackle guards and pliers, hair stackers, and fly vise. The cluster of feathers on the table, ringed about a silver hook, its slanted barb sharp and true. He plucks the feathers and winds thread to simulate an insect's torso. Those nights at the table, his glasses smeared with thumbprints, I kneel on the chair like at Sunday Mass. His mutterings and twitching eyelid seem to me the stuff of legend; all part of the magical arts he practices in the fluorescent glare. In the background mammy wipes the counters, her apron tied tight, her cigarette flares red as she breathes. Now and then she reminds him, don't mark the bloody table with your tools. He replies, often with a hook in his teeth, and tells her to attend to her duties and he'll attend to his. I push my knees harder into the chair's cushioned surface and witness her thump and blister around the kitchen, her anger, the crackle of the poorly anchored light bulb. He sucks his teeth and curses.

