

Vivian

by John Riley

She had earned her life with piece work, sealing the toes of fine socks by the dozen, her long fingers sliding each one beneath a machine's relentless needle, and it seemed fitting that death worked to earn her trust with the same industry. When her husband left she was not yet thirty, and she moved to a small house a block shy of the leisurely side of town. In the big homes she seldom walked by women sat before mirrors with mahogany frames and brushed their hair each morning. Her bus ran in the other direction, over a long hill and down to the mill beside a railroad spur. As she grew weaker she turned off her lights each night and before slipping into bed took off her night clothes. The headboard of her bed was made of hollow metal tubes, like a bed in a Western movie, and the veneer peeled from the bureau. Her mirror was a hand-held square without a frame and in the blue streetlight glowing through the curtains she held her reflection at arm's length and stared at her breasts, her legs, her face, her fingers cupping the tiny images, until the night her body no longer belonged to her, and she placed the mirror inside the bureau drawer and turned toward the bed.

