

## *Beauty Parlor*

One of the regulars had cancer  
in those days before chemo,  
and even after the beautician lowered  
the hair dryer canister over the woman's head,

she talked nonstop about the intense heat  
of cobalt treatments, the way her body burned  
in places she'd rather not name,  
how her skin there felt more like leather.

When she paused, the beauty parlor grew  
strangely quiet: only the hum of the dryers,  
the occasional whoosh of water at the sinks.  
Until she spoke again, no one looked at her.

Then she droned on, but this time  
about her son, who'd stopped coming by  
now he had a wife who had him  
wound around her little finger.

I didn't understand yet  
it wasn't his wife that kept the son away.  
I was seventeen and only a guest  
in this world

where my mother was a regular  
on Wednesdays. That day she sat up front  
among the women's magazines.  
After I was done, we'd go to lunch.

And in a few days she'd tell me  
her own bad news. She'd say she didn't want  
to spoil my senior prom. But that afternoon  
as the woman carried on and on and on,

she already knew what she knew.