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Cousin Maude

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Cousin Maude

— by Lu Spurlock

I was four years old that summer day
We visited Mamma's cousin
her hair was skinned back into a gray knot
and all she wore that I could see
was a blue cotton slip
go play while I talk to your mother
she said
on the back porch I found
new squares of soft lye soap
spread out to dry
squatting on my heels
I poked my middle finger
into the center of each piece
spiderleg cracks wrinkled squares
visiting Cousin Maude was fun
until she yanked me up by the neck
said I was so rotten
salt wouldn't save me
I oughta be whipped
whimpering
I hid behind Mamma's skirt
afraid to look at Cousin Maude
didn't know 'til later
that big person
chopped the heads off
baby kittens