

**Bait**

She sends her ten-year-old  
boy into the bar to fish out  
his father—a pool shark chalking  
up his cue stick, wetting his lips  
on dark bottles of beer, burning  
the tips of his fingers from a dying  
scroll of brown & crimson leaves.

She waits while her boy swims  
past stools of pants & skirts, the blaring  
of trumpets & tubas from a jukebox  
glowing under a cursive neon sign  
towards the open collar in the back,  
the mustached man laying dollars down  
for the next game, the next beer for  
the brunette sharing his cigarette.

He sees the boy & exhales  
a drag of smoke into the ceiling fan,  
slams down the bitterness of beer & being  
called out by a boy motioning to the door.

He follows the boy like a fish  
he wishes to swallow, to wipe  
his name off the food chain—a mouth  
to throw chum bits of a paycheck to.

Outside the bar the boy listens  
to their charged words, the slurring  
& blurring of Spanish & English,  
the splitting open of a wallet  
& his guts of bills spilling out

for her pile of bills at home. He dives  
back into the bar, his cue stick      needing  
more chalk, his tongue thirsting  
for more bitter hops. She reels  
her boy to her hand & they go back  
home, hard & silent as a shell.

## Doing Your Dead Father's Dishes

*for Fred Sasaki*

As I washed away the backwash  
of your father's glass, the offering  
plate for your grandmother's ashes  
which held fruit so old & moldy  
the apple & orange hardened  
into a plastic feel & the last bits  
of his spit clinging to a cold  
metal spoon tongued smooth  
of the ice cream it once scooped,  
I thought I was cleaning my hands  
w/his spittle & spirit, lathering  
my skin w/the dust of his dead cells.

I know that's lurid & morbid to say,  
maybe more than you care to bear  
but my mother is still alive & my father  
is unknown to me & could be a ghost  
as well. Still I haven't had to clean  
the kitchen of a lost loved one, to scrub  
away the grime of leftovers, to strip  
the bed of its sheets & pillows only  
to see the yellow outline of what was  
your father's sweat, the nights he turned  
& twisted under the blanket feeling  
the heat of dreams press onto his skull.

I imagine him waking from a hot sleep  
& drinking a full glass of water in one  
gulp for luck & constitution purposes.

I imagine him pulling back the curtains  
to look onto the lake while stretching  
the bones of his skeleton, his arms  
reaching for ceiling, straining to gain  
back the inches shed & lost, the light  
of the sun flooding into his room  
as it slowly rises over an expanse  
of water blue & seemingly endless.