

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.