

1993

Donna

Beth Bradley

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Donna

She had finished her shift.
Now thinking of afternoon sleep,
she rubbed vanilla on her arms and palms
to cover the smell of fish.
She wanted to paint her nipples
with the sweet brown liquid
and watch them rise through the white cotton
of her blouse.
Instead, she swept fish scales
and fingered her locket when the cook whispered,
as he always did, that he could show her a good time.

Her husband, the Sam of Sam's Seafood,
had been sawing pine this morning for a new booth
when she had screamed for him to open the bathroom door,
hopelessly stuck from inside.
What if he hadn't heard her over the din of his saw?
Would she finally lie down against the cool tile,
hands slippery with sweat?

When he broke the door down
she had laughed and laughed and for a moment
forgotten that he disgusted her
with his dirty nails and fish breath.
She had remembered something soft about his ears.
But that had passed.

Yesterday she bought new hair rollers at Walgreen's.
Tonight she'll sit in Poor Red's bar,
freshly powdered, with a smile that will buy
two bourbons with a twist
and enough quarters in her jeans
for a whole night at the jukebox.

Beth Bradley