

Kitchen, circa 1976

You go there every time you scrape your cart
past the supermarket's green-black stacks.
Pounds of avocados—this monster's skin,
a reptile crouched beneath fluorescent light.

You go back to the breeze that lifted
hand-stitched curtains, to ugly appliances
and packs of bottled Pepsi. Macrame
owls, ceramic mushroom shakers.

You go back to picking raisins from your oatmeal,
watching your mother rinse the dishes or jab
avocado pits with toothpicks. She suspended them
over coffee mugs of water, but forgot

each time to plant the seeds
once they'd produced pale limbs.
The water turned opaque and later:
wet pits in the trash, small abortions.

You go back to the way morning happened
in that kitchen, early light skimming past
the murky mugs and glasses near the sink,
the ashtray a nest of Camel ashes, your mother's
cigarette-stung hands dabbing the spot
where her smile ended in a fresh stitch of blood.

This is how you learned the trickery of light,
how small horrors could be burnished
into things of beauty. You go back
to how she stood at the stainless sink,
rinsing residue from her latest botched attempt,
and from where you stand, an indifferent shaft of sun
drizzles stars across her moving hands.

Originally published in Tar River Poetry