

BEANS AND RICE

In the snap and sizzle
of hot oil, onions
frying, babies
crawling on the floor, I
see her only, seven-
teen, skin dark
as caramel, moving
between the kitchen
stove and table,
brown hand riding on
the jut of her hip,
black hair loosened,
bending as she stirs
beans in a blackened pot
over the blue blossom
of gas-fire, wearing
Pablo's stretched sweat-
shirt that falls loosely
over her snug jeans.
All summer I have seen
her at the window staring
at the boys pitching
quarters on Franklin Street.
When she serves my beans
on a bed of yellow
rice the hairs on her arm
brush my cheek with
the scent of olive oil and
I notice her mouth is red,
lips thick like my own
sister's after sleep.

OGDEN AVENUE

After dark
they'd come
for Toby's mom.
Wedge
their wide
white-walled
Eldorados
and Lincolns
between the rusted
Chevys and Fords.
Uptown men,
red-nosed and
puffy cheeked,
soft bellies pressed
against chromed
steering wheels,
flat asses sinking
deeper into
their plush
leather seats,
waiting for Rita
to pull back
the curtains,
lean her pocked
face out
into the yellow
streetlight,
and one by
one, wave them
upstairs.

— John D. Bargowski Sr.

Phillipsburg NJ

TWO LABORERS AND MRS. GRANDMA AND
THE MYSTERIOUS LEVITATING MACHINE

I used to install carpet to make an
honest dollar. It was back-breaking
work and I always came home from a
job tired and sore. But I'd get up
the next day to go through it all
again not because I enjoyed it but
because it put food in my gut and
a roof over my head. I did this for
four years before escaping into a

clerk/typist job with the federal government. As I now sit here at work typing this out on government time and on this government machine I'll never forget the most memorable customer I ever had as a carpet installer. The job was in a really nice apartment where lived an ancient widow whose hands & head shook slightly all of the time. After my partner, John, and I started to move the furniture from the living room to an outside patio area she begged us to stop. "Do you have to move it all out?" she said. "I'll never be able to remember how all of it goes back." John explained it to her. "Ma'am, we gotta move it all out so we can pull up the old carpet and padding and replace it with the new carpet and padding." She seemed puzzled. Her hands and head shook a little more. "You mean to tell me," she said, "that you don't have a machine that'll raise the furniture up into the air while you work underneath it?" John and I looked at each other in disbelief and rolled our eyes. Before going on with the job we decided to diagram her apartment on a sheet of paper and indicate with abbreviations (CT for coffee table, C for couch, etc. ...) where every piece of furniture sat so we could put her world back together the way it was before we took it apart.

PUSSY-WHIPPED

The cat came over to me and rubbed the side of his head against my leg. He purred. I paid Maxx no mind at all. I kept my eye on the hockey game.

But the small monster had another plan of attack. He started talking trash.

"Meow, meow. Meoow. Meeow. Meeooww. Mee-
eooow. Meeoow."

I looked down at him & said, "Shut the fuck up you little bastard."

He hissed and swiped at me with his paw.