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Gilbert

Arthur Russell

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Arthur Russell

Gilbert

I worked for a dirty little cook who
honed one knife against another, and
talked about women.

When he was satisfied with a knife's edge,
he shaved his arm for proof, and
cleaned the blade on his pant leg.

His name was Gilbert. He had a chipped tooth
and knuckles like walnuts. He dressed the prime rib
with dry rub and put it in a low oven.

I imagined the room where he lived had
cockroaches and a limp shirt on a chair back.
More than once, he told me about whores.

Drinking beer outside the kitchen door one night,
he recited a Spanish poem in an affected lisp:
how life was like a bird flying through a room.

I knew him by his pony tail, his hands and teeth,
his cigarette wince and his Bondo-bodied Chevy.
He stole my last paycheck.

Most things then scared me, but I needed fear
to shear myself from the glassblower and
become this elaborate thing.