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.