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Category: Poetry

Prescribed Homestay

At the fish market, my father bargains with the man
at the stall until they are both sweating, both stinking

of meat. In the stall next to us a woman in cowskin
boots is playing jazz on a saxophone. I think it's Coltrane,

maybe. Early fall rain slides off the makeshift roofs
and into the cardboard-covered floors of the market.

In the spring, I read a Richard Siken poem in which
he wrote *Tell me about the dream where we pull the bodies out*

of the lake. I didn't have an answer for him then,
the same way I don't have one when the man my father

is arguing with demands my opinion on the matter,
the same way I am silent when the woman playing

John Coltrane tells me, with a tilt to her head, to take
my father's money and drop coins into her hat.

I don't dream at night any longer. My father
takes his arm and plunges it into the fishtank,

saying, *Tell me about the fish, tell me about my daughter*.
Water spills over the sides of the tank and coats

the nearby stalls in a thin sheen of fish bodies,
all of them scattering and vanishing mid-flight,

the patterns of their scales all I'll see in my dreams
for the next few months. When we leave the market,

my hair is falling apart into split-ends and clumps.
In front of the lake near my house, my father peels back

the scales of his prize and laughs, stops me when I try
to keep playing my saxophone. At night I take

the fish carcass and place it on the surface of a lake
for someone else to discover in the morning.