

Occupational Lies About My Father

Day after day, house after house,
you knocked on the doors of hostile
widows and lonely retirees, brandishing
a suitcase of shining silver knives,

gleaming edges sharp as the cutlasses
you cut cane with in the islands. What
made you think anyone wanted to buy
kitchen knives from a boy in a threadbare

suit and spit-shined shoes, stutter so thick
no one could understand you, so nervous
the few people home in midday silence
slammed doors in your eager face,

smooth hairless face so new to America
you don't have a driver's license yet.
You'd board the bus, ride it to the train,
take trains with letters for names until

you got to Brooklyn, haven for so many
like you—so many with steamer trunks
in their basements, ancient relatives
back home, late night dominoes fierce

as fire, as spicy curried chicken, as the knives
you assure these widows they'll need
to slice meat from bone for the stew pot.
So many ran you off their front steps

with a clang of pots or a shove,
fists high in the air if you dared
set foot on their property again.
You expected so much from these people

who looked like you, talked like you,
were you—that you never stopped
to think how ridiculous a suitcase
full of knives could be, how

blades make strangers of
the closest of countrymen, how doors,
once slammed, do not mean
they'll open anywhere else.