

## Diagnosis

That first night  
we sleep side by side  
on a soft grey couch  
television on  
background noise  
to distract us

Sweating, I wake  
midway through a  
dark night  
to static and panic  
press bare knees  
to chest then

tiptoe to the kitchen  
grab a bottle  
uncork and sniff  
search for a glass  
and pour,  
hands shaking

dry floral hues tickle  
my throat as I lean  
on the cluttered counter  
and try to ignore  
he suffers  
in the next room

Aimless, I saunter  
barefoot on linoleum  
reading recipe cards  
yank open  
a drawer and stack  
pens in piles,

alphabetize  
the spice rack,  
Anise, Basil, Cloves  
scrub a burnt pot  
until my fingers are raw  
take another gulp

The rooms are  
hazy and quiet  
But for a fizzle of  
late night talking heads  
saying nothing

## Working Women

The jar says *tips for girls*  
but all I see are women  
old, round and Russian with  
sexy, thick accents  
like Borscht with sour cream

they dress in jeans, gems  
etched on back pockets  
hunched over worn countertops  
they spread butter on bagels

and wipe beads of sweat  
with their sleeves  
August in New Jersey,  
both ovens are on

Blushing, I drop in a dollar  
she thanks me with a nod as  
the other hands me a gift  
wrapped in parchment

Slim

*For Mark*

when I first saw him  
in faded Levis  
and leather brogues  
Camel Light dangling  
from his lip  
I noticed  
his height  
and weight  
tall and spindly  
like Steinbeck's Slim  
no other boys at school  
were as cool as him

that October evening  
in an alcove in the  
college theater  
my anglophile leanings  
emerged, I fell hard  
driving in his \$300 Honda  
gaping holes rusted  
through old floorboards  
slouched into  
seats, we laughed and  
listened to *Madness*  
as I watched the

whiz of a freeway  
below our feet



