

My Uncles, The Italians

They were your masons, carpenters, landscapers, pagers
With physiques like bests: the ox, the horse, the bull,

Who did your dummy work, graunt-work, shit-work,
Sweated like pigs, slaved like chain-gang guineas,

Drove your load on trailers, semis, dozers and backhoes
With eighteen wheels, two stick-shifts, double-clutched,

Or sucked it up and hauled it on a wheelbarrow,
On shoulders, backs, whatever it took, and then some,

Alone plowing roads in the spit-blass of a night's ice storm,
Or a crew tarring in the black heat of a July noon.

The hands of their clock always tied to a rawhide-gloved wage:
The muscled over-time, the wallets that never grew fat.

And when their boss gave them Saturday night off, or Sunday,
When even their Catholic God rested, God bless him,

V-8 engines of Fords and Buicks revved in our driveway,
My uncles arrived, their bodies showered, sweet reek

Of cheap colognes, Old Spice and Brut, their black olive,
Curly hair combed back in oily waves, my uncles

Decked out in white chinos and black Banlon shirts,
And around the girth of their necks the fake gold chains

Weighted with medallions of St. Christopher and the Virgin,
Like coins purchased for use in a promised world,

Arrived to drink Chianti, smoke Lucky Strikes, swear-
Laugh the pain off with loud hands of penny-ante poker,

With brothers and their bee-hive haired wives, who bitched
To be heard; but before all that, their greeting lifted me

In the high chair of their arms, sanded my cheek with a kiss,
Landed me with one hand as the other gifted dollars

And coins, shiny chimes, from their pockets, insisted that I,
Their brother's son, take, insulted if I should hesitate,

Jumpy exclamation point of a cigarette on a lower lip
As they protested, *for the love of Christ*, with their hands

Hammering the air, as if, a working class sacrament,
They tried to change the money back into blood, family, love,

Before their tires tore rubber out of midnight's driveway,
Home to sleep it off, rise into the decking's, the trench's, the highway's

Armor, hard-hat and steel-toed, the blue, union-issued, over-alls,
And grab a thermos of coffee's extra gears for the day-breaking load.

by Glen Morazzini