

My Mother Cleans and Starts the Gumbo

Wet shirts flapped on the line like a choir
recalling a fleshy home. She could do nothing
to break the prison bars holding her son,
but she could scour the cheap linoleum.
She could press the sheets, fabric to soothe
our dreams. What does it mean to have
a child in prison? For which sin do you ask
absolution, forgiving yourself over and over?
Which sin do you keep for comfort or for rage
in case the bars come close enough to bend
aside with your bare hands? My mother's long
spoon banged the edge of the heavy pot,
loosening roux from the spoon's pitted bowl.
My mother's industry swelled like song.