Elegy for Johnny behind the bar  
  
4:15. You polish sunlight  
through the bottom of a glass  
while I fold napkins  
and tell me about the mountains  
scrapping across Telluride blue,  
the girls you dated in college,  
that dream you had last night.   
  
The usuals come in before rush,  
mudflats and seventy Julys   
caked beneath their nails.   
The sauvignon-blanc ladies get your dimples,  
but Jean and Mike get the brine-soaked grin.  
I float, buoyed by the salt of belonging.  
  
Scared, sixteen. On the first day   
you took the seat next to mine.   
Can’t let you monopolize all that space.  
During the worst shifts, you gave me  
maraschino cherries. Cancer  
Pills, you called them.  
  
You told us not to plaster   
this page with sappy quotes  
under pictures of sunsets and birds.  
I read them all anyways,  
looking for one that means  
dancing around a mop   
at close, singing Sam Cooke.  
  
Now, when I pour  
Jean’s usual, your voice   
counts in my head.  
1 Mississippi 2 Mississippi  
3 Mississippi. 4