

# *Cadillac Men*

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# Bobby Balls-In-Hand

## I.

By six, Bobby Balls-In-Hand is down grocery money.

By seven, a month without gas and cigarettes.

He chalks his stick between each shot,  
uses a plethora of tissues to wipe  
sweat and chalk dust from his hands.

By ten, he's down rent.

By eleven, he's writing an IOU.

## II.

The men say he got his moniker  
because he can't keep Whitey on the table,  
but during a lull between songs,  
he kneels in front of the ball return  
to pick up an abandoned nickel.  
As if in confession, he speaks hesitantly:

*Once I was married to a beautiful woman.  
We had a beautiful little girl.*

*But you know I can't resist a money game  
even if I know I'll lose.*

*When she couldn't wait up anymore, she left,  
no note,  
no forwarding address,  
no further contact.*

*So, that's how I really got my name,  
my wife left me  
with my fucking balls in my hand.*

## Something Better

All day I search for words;  
I want to write a beautiful poem.

The Butcher, alone at the front table,  
slices all the balls in without blinking.

Because I understand this,  
I want to sculpt him into syllables.

I study his form,  
the contours of his experiences,  
painfully elegant.

As he draws back the seven ball,  
I consider him cast in bronze,  
balancing the bulkiness of his decisions.

Pensive like a ballerina  
grappling with gravity, a Degas.

Once he sacrificed his marriage  
for one dance with a lovely lady.

He told me that those are risks you take  
when you believe there's something better.

# Stretching Felt Over the Edges

*for Mark*

For decades, Wally caromed  
from one one-night stand to the next  
while his wife waited out the years,  
faithful like a porch light,  
fifty-five years and counting  
burnt-out bulbs. Their love  
pulled tight like felt  
stretched over a billiard table.

Lately our conversations are  
punctuated with doubt and suspicion.  
Over 9-ball, we discuss divorce,  
how three couples we know  
are separating. Our failures, illness,  
and miscues are disruptions,  
slight wrinkles in the felt  
altering the course balls travel.

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty,  
years from now, will I wake up  
beside you, the faint smell  
of gamble lingering on your  
pillowcase? Or will each crease  
be a disappointment, changing the way  
we travel toward one another?

## Going Out for Ice Cream

Dee has eighty-nine dollars  
until next Friday  
and is playing Mikey Meatballs for a hundred.  
Dee's wife's been calling him all night;  
she's waiting for the ice cream  
she sent him out for.  
She's eight-and-a-half months pregnant  
and bursting with expectations.

But tonight, Dee's happy  
because he's schooling  
one of the Cadillac Men  
and he's cocky, really cocky,  
telling Mikey he's washed up.

What Dee doesn't know  
is that Mikey's just reeling him in;  
that the night his wife's water breaks,  
he'll be down three hundred more  
than he has in his wallet;  
that in twenty years  
he'll be a Cadillac Man too,  
with his own moniker:  
Dee-vorced  
because his wife will have long since  
melted out of his life  
like the mint chocolate chip ice cream  
that never found its way home.