

TARISA MATSUMOTO

sleight

they come here

he said

to learn how to make

goddamn washing machines

georgians

mexicans

even arabs

so their backward slum countries

feeding off our government loans

can finally clean

the shit off their clothes

we get 'em every month

he said

guests on a year or two position

ambassador of their country's dirty clothes

we teach 'em how to do it right

he said

and that amber breath

choking him on its way to his mouth

spilled out raw and sewaged

stumbling over

goddamn sheiks

pinkos

greasers

to mix with an ozone of

greased fingerprinted mugs

stains on the bar

sapping on hands

lulled gurgles of beer in throats

at midnight

a jap

he said

a jap in newton, iowa

visiting friends

friendly midwestern friends

hell, we got a jap here, too

he said

learning how to make

goddamn washing machines

a real sweetheart

got the longest goddamn hair

i ever did see

hey, let me call her

he said

i'll tell her come on over

and you two can talk

maybe speak some japanese

stuttering over words

lips unable to fully meet

it'll be fun

he said

two japs in newton, iowa

and he called

while i sat and tapped my foot

in amber puddles on the floor

wondering where my

friendly midwestern friends

had gone

we'll just see if she comes

he said

another goddamn person

trying to learn how to make

washing machines

yelling over waylon jennings
 randy travis
tracing each breath that bar took
i didn't know how to tell him
 if that other jap ever arrived
that my grandparents
 never taught me how to speak
 their second language