This Might Be Home
By Bismarck Martinez

Mother came home late again tonight,
hauling two big bags of rice over her shoulders—
twenty-five pounds for twenty dollars.
Two jobs to feed three mouths
on three children that wait at home
during the daytime, diamond-eyed and hungry.

We live in a cold-water flat in Flushing
with a balcony that looks over an empty lot
with weeds growing from the cracks
and wispy vines swallowing the wire fence.
We are no longer in San Pedro anymore, but
a quarter acre of it has followed us here
and spread itself under our balcony.

Mother is starting to speak in jumbled English.
She stays up late some nights listening
to talk radio hosts tell jokes
that she can't quite understand.
Some days she tries to make small talk
with the mailman who gives her
a confused stare, then muffles his
Whatever you say.

Mother likes to sing songs in the kitchen
and she spins, soulfully, a dance
I once saw her dance on a weekend
back in San Pedro. Sometimes I wonder
if I will ever see her happy here,
the way she was happy there.

Mother came home late again tonight,
with a voter registration card
clasped tightly between her thumbs
and the sides of her index fingers.
I see a smile I hadn't seen since San Pedro
and think this might be home.