



PROJECT MUSE®

The Family Business: Iris Cleaners

Arhm Choi Wild

Pleiades: Literature in Context, Volume 40, Issue 2, Summer 2020, pp.
121-123 (Article)

Published by University of Central Missouri, Department of English
and Philosophy

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/plc.2020.0075>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/759314>

Arhm Choi Wild

The Family Business: Iris Cleaners

Some people have problems
distinguishing a dry cleaner
from a laundromat

but Mother wasn't meant
to make her mouth a seam,
wash blood out of sheets
or the piss of an aging man every week
and my belly is too full and my car is too new
for us to forget, so I will tell you

a laundromat is the one with the quarters
and the dry cleaner is where workers
finger spots of wine like bruises.

Mr. Washington never fails
to ask for a discount
no matter how hard it is
to get his chocolate stains out.

Mr. Francis always brings clothes
with foundation and eye shadow
in the fabric of his collar,
tells me of drunken nights;
it's not hard to figure out
why he winks.

Ms. Miller walks in with one ear
punched by a steel rod,
other lobe, four rings.

One day I ask her
what it symbolized and she replies
It's a statement I make



*so people will realize that a woman
can decorate her body
without being flooded with questions.*

She quizzes me on what I unlearned about the patriarchy
in the past week and loves when Mom has her clothes ready
before she's in the door.

Lately in these summer days
Mom comes home braised with heat rash
because if lucky, it's only twenty degrees hotter inside than out.

We could make a separate fortune
if she chose not to play good Samaritan
but she returns every quarter found in pockets.

Chemical scents follow her like a conscience
and her hands stay constant with cracks
no lotion can recover. She used to count on fingers
the shirts and sweaters soaked with sweat and blood
she washed to pay my cell phone bill.

I thought she was just imposing guilt
till when working one day
a man with a snarl slick with spit
full of English words Mom didn't know,
but felt, threatened to sue for the stubborn
spot of wine he let sit for weeks,
the jacket he left at a hotel but blamed us
for losing, surely unable to defend
ourselves, Mom barely
five feet tall, too polite
to wipe his spit off her chin.

Two weeks later, a brick without a head
to fly toward breaks the window in the middle
of the night and we can no longer
be proud without looking
out of place. Mom doesn't call
the cops and pays extra
to fix the window by Monday.

If I save myself in time
I won't be lost in this business
of erasing everything

so I need you to remember
a laundromat is the one with the quarters
and the dry cleaner
is where my mother
will give them back to you
if you leave them
in your pockets.

