

Character Sketch: Bartender

Kristen Roberts

It's not a rowdy pub we're in,
not full of men whose jokes are leering
or lacking finesse,
whose weariness is forgotten
with a couple of beers,
but he draws our eye nonetheless.

When he wipes our bench clean
he holds its cleaved end gently
as though it might oppose his ministrations and flee,
and when he collects the glasses
he nestles them in the crook of his arm
like fledgling birds,
his worn shirt soothing their cries when they jostle,
as though startled from sleep.

I want to say he's incongruous
but I've never liked that word
(too sinuous to mean jarring,
curving the mouth like some mercurial liqueur).
He's too thoughtful for a place we use
to escape precision, incompatible
with the wear and carelessness of your average bar
and yet he's compelling,
so we stay longer in order to observe.