Black Blizzards

Dust bowl – hell,

we thought it was the end of the world–

wind riled and blindin’.

Storm would douse the sun

like a kerosene lamp knocked out.

All us kids crammed under the bed

with Mama prayin’

 *Lord God, forgive us!*

 *What we done*

 *to bring this on?*

One dawn Daddy’s hitchin’ mules,

plowin’ miles and miles of virgin sod, dreamin’

’bout endless fields of gold.

 Next, we’re haulin’ buckets

of dust out the house

to a land swept and left for dead.

Earth near swallowed us up

in ’35. Seemed I couldn’t never get my breath.

Got mean, Daddy did, after that –

’bout tore off my arm for lookin’ one time

when he leaned agin the wall and cried.

He had a fit that summer and kicked

brother Buddy out for good. Mama

bore the worst. And ever’ day dirt

 in our soup, dirt in our eyes,

 dirt between ever’ tooth…

 like when you done somethin’

you shouldn’t, and nothin’ lets you forget –

not sleep, not women, not drink. Scrub yourself

raw with granny’s lye soap. Spit, spit, and spit.

It don’t matter none…

 Been more’n thirty years since I left.

 Even in this here coffee,

 I can still taste that grit.

 *Elizabeth Swann, Kakalak 2014*