American Life in Poetry
This an elegant elegy to a father who has passed, captured in the rituals that families create as a way to remember, to honor and to even celebrate. The extra place set at table before a feast of great sensual and emotional power reflects how mourning touches the deepest parts of our self. **NaBeela Washington**'s poem asks the question: “**Why Do We Set the Table?**”. The poem is the answer.

**Why Do We Set the Table?**

By **NaBeela Washington**

At what temperature does blood begin to boil? Thicken into a roux, slip between bits of basil, minced garlic, orecchiette;

Permeate chunks of spicy kielbasa, bind a dash of salt, pepper, bubbles roiling forth, then dissipating, heat lowered to a hush;

Congeal from the shock of cool clay dishes as a small mound is delicately plated with a large plastic spoon;

Spurt steam, burning both nostrils, as we lean in to say grace, my father's seat empty, placemat bare.
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