

Mochi Tsuki

The starchy smell of rice
fills the chill morning,
as clouds of steam rise
from wooden boxes
stacked over cooking fires.
Sips of hot sake rouse
stiff bones to swing mallets,
pounding sticky rice
to elastic smoothness
for Oghatsu, the New Year.

The men's grunts
of exertion punctuate
the trill of aproned women,
pinching and shaping
still-warm dough into cakes,
steady rhythm of the wooden
mallet's downswing: hit,
turn the dough, slap.

I step to the granite bowl,
feel the mallet's heft,
focus on the beat to keep
from hitting my partner's
hands, reaching in to turn
the hot mass of rice.

I close my eyes,
breathe in and lift, drop
lift, step into the task,
swing, hup,
swing, hup

for you, Obaachan,
for you, Obaasan,
for you, Mother.