

Joan McNerney

Waitress

Sally thought everything was
up to luck and she had zero.
Her chances got swept
away with yesterday's trash.

Every day working in this
dumpy dinner slinging hash.

There were the regulars
who knew her name and
left good tips. They had
no place else to go.

Her feet swelled up at
the end of lunch rush.

Sally wiped tables filling
ketchup bottles, salt shakers,
sugar jars while staring out the
window at pulsing rain.

Waiting a half hour for the bus,
winds tangling her hair.

She stopped at the market to
bring a few groceries home.
Struggling now to open her door,
only cold rooms would greet her.

Teacher

She hoped some would leave,
rise above dirty factory gates
past plumes of smoke spewing
from the cement plant.

Occasionally when discussing
great American novels, the walls
shook. Ravines were blasted
for more rocks to crush into powder.

She wished they would not become
clerks for soul-less chain stores or
cooks in fast food joints where
smells of burning grease lingered.

What was the use of teaching literature
and poetry to these children who would
soon grow listless? Their spirits ground
down like stones in the quarry.

Long Haul Driver

At first he was thrilled by the road
thinking it an adventure to roam
through cities and states.

His truck a massive 18 wheeler
winding through snake-like
overpasses, gleaming in sunlight
across ten lane highways.

But then he had to drive
so many hours arriving
only to wait for the next
work order, inhaling fumes
in the cold and in the heat.

Coffee was not enough
now he needed No Doze...
easy to pick up at gas stops.
But how to deal with the pain
in his legs, arms and neck?

Later he felt a slave to the
choking engine and ugly
concrete. The same signs
everywhere, big box stores,
eating holes and truck stops
with cheap souvenirs.

Weary of this relentless surge
of everything always going
forward and that demanding clock.
Finally he felt left behind.

Grocery Cashier

After punching in, she opens her register, counts bills and splits up rolls of coins. Her arms ache from yesterday. From pulling together store items, piling them in bags.

Another day in this dismal place.
Saccharine MUSAC, dim lights
dreary corridors, dingy floors.
No clock, no water fountain,
no public restroom. Aisles stocked
with cans, boxes, frozen foods.

Pushing carts full of packaged meat,
donuts, cases of beer...customers
creep up in line. Trance-like they
press forward with crinkled coupons,
handing out cash or swiping cards.

A camera is poised on her.
Registers are monitored and
the number of sales counted.
Making sure nothing slips by,
"The Man" is always watching.

Maintenance Man

Everything falls apart,
all things rot and crack.

Each day another tenant
fills out forms to request
repairs. Hot water tanks
burst, sinks back up, toilets jam.
Smoke alarms break.
It's a messy life, he pushes
against riptide.

All spring and summer,
weeds keep growing.
Leaves gather during fall.
In winter time, ice
covers walkways.

It's time to go home now.
Tomorrow he will return
to pick up the pieces again.