

Supervisors, Lovers, the Criminals and the Lost

I start drinking in the office while counting down
the day's registers, texting you about a customer

who yelled about his expired coupon, and who has now
stormed home to sleep away the stars. On the other side

of town, you're counting your registers over pineapple
vodka and Red Bull. This is our ritual, and it took months

to get good at changing clothes in a car, to make second-nature
the backpack crammed with deodorant, Chuck Taylors, the last

ounces of youth, a red dress, amnesia for unintended
squandering, and a full flask. I am still trying to grow

into the man I should've been, but I can't stop marveling
at the carnival inside this night city, our bed, our conversations

in nightclub parking lots. I steal dinner for us before
locking up. You reveal the eighteen dollars, unclaimed

from the store safe, that we can use to buy drinks. What are
we at war with? Our friends renounced us, and our friends

stopped singing, and our parents never leave the house,
and this parking lot grows more empty each summer.

We talk. We talk in the bank vault darkness,
in the American forest. We talk in the glacial glow
of a car radio, that smoldering vigil for people like us.

Clock Puncher on Pier 39

Rain had slathered the pier so dark
I thought of chewed tobacco, unwadded
and dragged out in sheets above the bay,
and so I was disgusted with where I walked,
disgusted with what was saving me from the tide.
And there she was, out in the open, at the kiosk
oven with no awning, flipping corndogs over
with tongs and in the rain, hat bill dripping in front
of her glasses. It's often hard to tell
which people carry rage, which people blame
the world more than themselves, who blame
the rain more than the act of working
out in it, but I knew that look in her eye,
because I have poured scalding grease
into trucks on Texas hills, and frozen on a gravel
lot making sure nobody keyed the luxury cars.
It is not so much the desire to quit, but the fact
that you can't, that putting down the tongs,
and storming off the chewed up pier is a form
of suicide, one they will blame you for, and have
no sympathy. Working is an act of tolerance,
enduring the Mt Vesuvius rampaging
in your chest, ignoring that possibly you were meant
for wild adventure in the moonlight, forgetting
that if you were paid \$9 an hour that is precisely
what the booms of your heart were worth.
Then again, she could have been fully at peace
turning corndogs over, in the rain, on a pier,
in winter, in California, and it was all
my own disgust with the grease under
my nails, with the weather, my own life,
and as I watched Alcatraz begin to barely break
through the fog, I could hear the pier creaking
like it might give way.