

Lunch at the Club

Serve from the left and clear from the right--
oh, that our lives would be that simple
and quiet. We stand erect, heads held high,
side towels bleached, as members
enter our stations, shuffling from age
and terrible anger. Their briefcases
are handcuffed like zeppelins
as they coax sweets and martinis from us.
Akron' air is sawdusty and dark.
We perfectly balance the bread knives
as we take confused orders feeling small
and lost. We'd prefer long-necked women
and picnics with brie and chardonnay.
Instead we hear complaints
about shaky stocks, recession,
faulty air conditioners, workers
going back to slums with bigger paychecks.
They idly threaten to move south,
factories, barrels, and all, the heat
to grow inside their slim and hesitant wives.

In ten minutes we are full. Dishwashers
go on strike, busboys are suddenly high,
there's au jus in the kiwis,
the surly cooks no longer speak English.

("Lunch," cont., no break)

Everything about us sags: we were meant
for different roles. We gather
around the coffee machine, whispering
"Let's get the hell out of here."
We want America, to count cows
and billboards, to see green barns
lean into the wind. Outside,
the burning Cuyahoga barely moves
and Opportunity Park's factories
ooze black. One man screams for meat,
"Now!," and another coughs "cocktails"
at us like a smokestack.
In an hour we can possess beers,
slippers, and peace, but now,
like stock car drivers on speed,
we plunge on, dragging deeply
on Pall Malls, hiding wet shirts,
panicked hearts. Some of the tables
begin to sigh. Others leave.
The itchy-fingered managers
review past applications. We're no heroes.
We must first put our lives back together.
A judge asks for his fifth coffee--
we drop the pot on him and his girl;
kneeling to wipe, begging forgiveness,
we steal a sip of his lukewarm red wine.