

## Rubys

Burgers grilling on the flat top. Fish in the fryer.  
The cooks paper translucent hats drip with sweat.  
My hands collect on the cold steel of the salad station.

Tables occupied by 4, 3, 2, 1. Another order in.  
Candy Strippers pass out cherry sodas, attempting  
to fill their customer's cavernous bellies while — pop,

goes the balloon artist. A sword for the boy  
and a poodle for the girl, Rambo collects his rubies  
and moves on to the next. Another order in.

Families and couples. Solo old men drink  
their mud, cowered over the counter. They beat  
their fingers into the table top, tapping along to  
rhythms inside their heads. A dish shatters,  
while a bald man's temper breaks, on  
opposite sides of the diner.  
No cheese please. Not today.  
His cheeks rush with red. Unpleased  
by his service he throws a fit. Vowing never  
to come back, he shakes his toddler loose from a highchair.

Last order up.

A pair of people pick the same thing  
and leave without problems — 20%.

The drive home smells  
like cigarettes and French fries.  
I drop rubies in my cavernous gas tank,  
I'm thankful the shifts are only six hours.  
I'm thankful that the fridge is full,  
the bills are paid.

Gary from the counter isn't so bad.