

Twenty-four Hours Grind Every Day

Midnight

A cloud wafts over with eternal silent stars
raging and gleaming through time and space.
Music plays.

One a.m.

Late show family lights finally off
dark shadows retract to the street.

Two a.m.

Streetlights buzz and distant dogs bark
cricket song pauses to feel and listen.

Three a.m.

The teenage boy's truck roars over the gravel road.
Headlights flash through dust and trees.
The pretty girl is not on this road.

Four a.m.

Waffle House is a big light bulb
The quiet people inside vibrate like filaments.
The streets outside are still.

Five a.m.

The newspaper rests in wet grass.

The unknown poet hurries to it.
A dog barks as he bends.

Six a.m.

The desperate boy is sliding down a hill.
He tries to catch himself on sawed-off tress
that come off cut clean in his baffled hand.
Light floods in and mother screams, "Get up!"

Seven a.m.

The unknown poet pours a mug of coffee.
Straightening his tie, he touches the door knob.
The cool air bathes him toward his office.

Eight a.m.

The retired soldier fast walks on the concrete circle.
He notices the flowers, the birds and the squirrels.
He enjoys the cool breeze and the sound of the steps.

Nine a.m.

The unknown poet is sweating.
The important paper is lost from his desk.
The important paper is not a poem.

Ten a.m.

The desperate boy runs to recess.
His battered shoes pound the dirt.
He unwraps his cookies as he runs.

Eleven a.m.

The retired soldier sits in the Waffle House.
He's sorry his buddy is sick today.
He's glad when the lunch crowd starts in.

Noon

The unknown poet eats a sandwich at his desk.
The room is stark and quiet.
He worries about the lost paper.

One p.m.

The bartender is awakened by his cat.
He breathes the stale smoke in his hair.
He is both tired and rested.

Two p.m.

The teenage boy checks his phone.
He calls the number again.
He is still trying to find the pretty girl.

Three p.m.

The desperate boy's mother dials and drives.
She is late to pick up her boy.
She rear-ends the white Ford.

Four p.m.

The unknown poet finds the lost paper.
He puts it in a folder and leaves the office.
The air outside is cool.

Five p.m.

The desperate boy can't do his homework.
He doesn't understand the book.
He draws circles all over the paper.

Six p.m.

The night cook enters the Waffle House.
He helps the day crew finish the dinner rush.
The door swings as they enter or leave.

Seven p.m.

The moon rises over the Mississippi Sound.
A gentle south breeze blows warm.
The unknown poet sleeps in his chair.

Eight p.m.

The pretty girl answers the phone.
She tells the teenage boy a long story.
He gets in his truck to go meet her.

Nine p.m.

The bartender refills the bottles.
A couple plays pool in the game room,
The band sets up on the stage.

Ten p.m.

The desperate boy is in his bed.

He is not asleep.

He is seeing the paper of circles.

He is seeing the trouble next day.

Eleven p.m.

The unknown poet wakes with a sigh.

He wants relief from the weight of his mind.

He sips bourbon with the tube volume low.

Life in the Factory and Other Notes on Bleeding Steel

Then we went down the alley of the serpent's throat
basking in the milk of candy bars and televisions.

All the people swirling
swirling

Can't see can't see
can't hear can't hear
just blurring swirls of confident motion
distant voices and muffled breath.

Life is a factory where you turn screws
clean up messes, generate money.
No windows shine light from outside.
The dull fluorescents buzz and blink.

You keep the products clean.
You box them neatly.
You blow the dust out of your own nose.

Boy girl woman man (that's what we were, you know).

You try to keep your paperwork organized.
You think you think
and think.

You think how important it is.

The sun shines or it rains.
A cloud above the metal roof twists marvelously
into countless shapes and shades of color
before dispersing after several unseen hours.

The time clock clicks.

Her husband died Friday but she's here Wednesday,
hunched over, turning screws, breathing quiet . . .
Forty-seven dollars in ones, quarters, dimes, nickles, pennies
collected for her tragedy
tucked safely into her shining black purse.

A buzzer goes off and
Click.

Hushed conversation falls silent as the boss walks through,
wide eyes clearly seeing,
keen ears tuned to the sound of screws turning . . .

Satisfied that they're turning fast enough
he moves along quickly
more engrossed than any screw turner

If it's cold or hot outside
or a hurricane blows or tornadoes demolish
the trailer park next door
or the pavement outside cracks
while lovers cry in loss or pain

it's all the same to him. . . living in the factory.

Engaged

Maybe we'll tie the knot in May

or June with the dragonflies.

The lettuce all cut, eaten or plowed under

while children and ripe tomatoes abound

juicy and full with a sandwich at dusk.

Perhaps a moist dawn will soon follow

with sweat in your brown underarms.

The affected magnolia, heavy, leaning on our window

a fog wrapping tightly my lights and tires

while the wet air presses the glass.

But we could dry and shrivel some morning

overcooked eggs are death by fire.

The flaky sponge of a scorched, thin omelet

to wash down with cold cold milk

in hopes for a better lunch.

The Passing of Childhood

Multi-colored balloons pop in his mind.
The increasing weight of school books becoming
an absurd torture festival of mismatched bricks.
Once comprehensible subjects swirl
in a fearsome vague rush of x's y's o's
ridicule and red ink.

His thick dry tongue helplessly licks
the sparse blond sprouts on his chapping lip.
Class chums uncertainly pass in puzzled silence
wielding vague smiles and half-offered hands.

Then he finds himself alone in heavy air.
Singing out and grunting to explain somehow
the clenching of fists and the fast-beating heart
Open-mouthed for cool rain under thick trees of shouting.