



STOOLS

poetry from regular places

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by Christine Glade

stools

when trish shouts sit anywhere to the
couple that's walked in behind me
she nods toward the bleachers
the cheap seats at the tables
along the far wall

leaving the counter free for
season ticket holders
owners and celebrities like me

folks who can spout stats
make wagers and swap dirt
folks who recall the
current roster's rookie years

right off ben says he's heard old
chester's retiring at the end of the
season : that knotted back of his can't
take one more spring on the plow :
besides no money in it these days :
those eighty acres are worth more
growing asphalt

and you hear boney's wife traded him
in ? for a one-eyed electrician from up
in essex : took the girls with her
: makes him a free agent

trish raises her brow but stays quiet
as she snatches a mug

from a cubby on the wall
that's marked with my name
in magic marker and masking tape
a trophy of belonging

she plunks it down full of coffee black
where i'll soon be sitting

i see in the paper that sally allen's oldest
has a new baby boy but we knew that
of course
she was in yesterday crowing
with a fistful of snapshots and a grin
buying us all boston creams

that new allen kid's a big boy i pitch out
into the air : says here he's fourteen pounds
: a starter for sure : : : for sure

these stools at the counter
are not seats
but pedestals
and we upon them
are at once
the players and
the cheering crowds

sick days

three days in bed
and you feel like
a cardboard cutout of yourself
flattened stiff
laminated to the bed
in a room
that didn't seem so messy
when you could leave it

those days
this coffee may as well
be crude oil

those days
you know someone else
is taking your place
and you can only pray they're
not doing too good a job

those days
you know
this here jelly donut is
just a future stone in the road
to your ex-wife's house

1 hundred

when you're one hundred
you're a number

they introduce me to their friends

it's always
this is my grandma
she's a hundred

single mother

you know
i watch her twirling
on the stool by the register
with that tattered doll face down
in the crumbs and powdered sugar
she's waiting for someone who i know
one day won't come back

i sweep the floor for words that will
make her feel less stranded
here with me

every jingle of the opening door
spins her around
and i worry it's unhealthy
for such a small body
to deflate so often

then there's days i just sit there too
with her in my lap pressing my lips
lightly on the crown of her head
in an endless kiss

two of us twisting back and forth
one of us worried
that we're wasting our time

martha stewart

on what planet do people
really press their sheets ?
could you just see me ?
i don't even iron my trousers
and i sleep in them too
what a world

bar back wanted

: that's the job

: so why should i hire you ?

he throws the question at me
like tossing water on the witch
i'm melting

i can't find a voice
to sing my own praises
grandma always warned
you can't sing while you're fibbing

: because i need a job ?

that cinches it
i might have still had a shot
but the words arced into a question
not an answer

now i'm the swizzle stick
he's using to mix the boredom
into the rest of his day

bar tabs

how'll i ever pay for oil this winter
how'm i going to heat my house
with the oven again
like in '93 ?

i don't make enough
to pay these prices
social service tells me
i make a nickel more
than poor people
never shoulda told them
about this second job
nope
just can't get caught up
at this rate
i'll catch up
to the end of my life quicker

take out

door chimes trumpet your arrival
over the chatter of gossip
and clatter of dishes

the local paparazzi lining the counter
ignore you except for a few flashbulb
eyes that fire as they rise over the rims
of spectacles, ceramic mugs and the
daily news signaling that someone's
sitting in that empty stool beside them
or will be

the heavenly aroma of unadvertised
contentment and freshly roasted
conversation cling to your jacket in the
time you swap a couple crumpled bills
for a wax paper bag

jelly-filled, magic dusted,
warm morsels of in here
that you'll take out there
where the in here stops

that's why you'll come back
tomorrow

toasting the dead

i'm waiting for the funeral
where the reverend says
all i really know of this man
is he's dead

nothing burns me up
more than someone
being eulogized by strangers
especially eloquently

occupations

it's gotta be a janitor at some busy airport - imagine the kinds of messes all those people leave ?

no sir, big city garbage collector's worse - imagine the stench and the scum ? the maggots ? in august ?

Nah - commissioned shoe salesman - imagine chasing folks around all day trying to sell 'em shoes ?

you're all wrong - it's tarring a roof

oh c'mon - nothing beats a mortician
am i right ? am i ?

um retired widower

jackpot

got my ticket for tonight
34 million
what i would do
with that money
i'd buy hardcover books
new

flirting tips

you sprinkle the coins you're handed
into a mug of money on the counter
before she's gets too far away
to hear the clink clink of your offering

keep your money mister
what you really come here for
can't be bought only bartered

or so prays the loitering posse
of young guns leaning back
in their chairs
and their fantasies

late getting back to the job
trading their grit and flattery
for her sweet little smile

counter service

sit
swivel
lean in on your elbows
to whisper that off-color joke
into kitty's ear

she tosses a wink over her shoulder as
she carries the coffee pot
back to the burner shaking her head
then quakes with a laugh so large
the whole damn place wants in
on the secret

you smirk
take a sip
swivel

here
your cup's full
long after your stool's empty

these poems were acquired the way
most poems are, i stole them

i swiped them from the places where
local folks gather

southern vermont places like
mrs. murphy's, mulligan's, zoey's
double hex, sherrie's, spiral press
café, birdseye diner and the barn
restaurant's tavern

a couple came from farther away like
a coffee shop in montréal and a bar
in cape town, south africa

all i had to do was take them home,
and wipe them off with a rag dipped
in a little imagining

