***“Saturday Waitress”***

***By***

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The first thing I smell on Saturday morning is the café.
It is heavy with the odor of cooking food.
Plates of eggs, toast and bacon are piled on the crook of my arm.
Clusters of hungry customers are waiting at the door.
Their feet track in mud and snow like melted chocolate
mixed with chunky diamonds. The open door gapes its white jaws
and blasts refreshing arctic air inside the sauna of the restaurant.

I am behind the counter, pouring hot black coffee
the elixir of wakefulness and alertness. My friend
scrubs dishes as he bends over the sleek gray sink,
up to his elbows in greasy, stained dishwater. The counter
is too small for his burly swimmer’s body.

Children stack jelly packets like miniature building blocks
and top them with spires of half-and-half creamers.
Their heavy-lidded parents scribble red, blue, and yellow wax
upon old wrinkled paper I have found in the counter shelves.
The fresh cinnamon buns on the desert table across the dining room
are always the first to be selected as the best breakfast treat.
They will all sell out – all fifty of them – by ten a.m.

The cook calls from the kitchen that orders are up.
My fellow waitress flock to me, asking for me to grab a muffin,
pour more coffee, seat more patrons, create a beautiful-looking parfait
filled with vanilla yogurt, layered with frozen berries,
and sprinkled with colorful granola I have scooped from
the glass silo of breakfast crunchies.

Customers hand tickets with green money at me
like they are handing train tickets to a conductor.
I pound the keys like a metal-band drummer
into the relic of a cash register.
People call my name, ask for more help.
Syrup the color of ambrosia spills on my new jeans
Ketchup that resembles candy lipstick sticks to my arms.
Tidbits of food and crumpled napkins that are
lounging on the floor latch to my shoes.
I pour more happiness into more ceramic cups. A child
hands me a drawing of a cookie and tells me I look very beautiful today.
I find a smile for an incoming couple who clutch a young child’s hand.
Yes, Mrs. Hill, I have your new order of eggs, just the way you wanted them.

My feet hurt, but the amount of your wages can always be found
on the arches of your feet.
I am a ballerina, a professional acrobat. My Nike sneakers are my slippers.
The café is my stage.
The customers are my paying audience.
They watch me relay my moves, duck under arms and under plates
whisk away tickets, direct others to sit, pirouette from table to table.
They watch me coordinate and execute a perfectly
choreographed performance.

At closing time I sweep the remnants of a good morning
into a pile and move the mouth of the vacuum over the stack,
watching it inhale it’s late-morning meal.
The vacuum’s appetite bears a remarkable resemblance
to the display of teenage boys
gorging themselves on the offerings of the kitchen
only hours before.

My pockets are stuffed full of wadded green tips.
The last of the people have left,
the dessert table is deserted.
It has been a good morning.
I am the Saturday waitress, and
the last thing I smell on Saturday morning is the café.