

## WAITRESS

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*Hari Bhajan Khalsa*

In the Fifth Street diner, windows  
wide to the guttered slush and pale-bone  
sky, the day shift passes like nickels  
and dimes—buzzing coffee and sugar,

grilled cheese and slaw, cups of  
and sides of, all up and down the formica  
counter, out to the smooth-hide  
booths, ring the register, pocket a bill

or two in the waisted apron. Click,  
clicking across the linoleum:  
slinging fries, choco malts and the one  
o'clock pie. Wind up the smile,

the hustle, tend the regulars  
and occasionals who lunch with chatter  
spilling through lettuce and dills,  
straw slurp and chomp. Four plate

juggle and sideways slide, order  
up, take out and slow clunk  
of the clock till the last tab's out  
and slam the shutters, clamp the lock,

mop up and count up the take—  
jitter, all foot throb and brew  
waft, out of the fry, the ogle, into pine  
pitch air and car spew, to bide

and poke along, hugging the tatty  
collar the round way home,  
beneath a wedging honk of geese,  
the scarred and bloated moon.