



The Year of Minimum Wage

Guillermo Castro

You are a cashier without a green card, ringing up
 chicken wings Buffalo style
complimentary celery and bleu cheese.
 Your boss rents you the ground floor studio in the back
 where your neutered Siamese dreams
 of scaling the crisp airshaft's bricks.
 You watch snow peak on majestic garbage bags.
 Your boss calls you again from the bar next door. "I mean,
 where's the money going?" he says,
 "the more supplies I buy the less money comes in."
 He asks you to keep an eye on the cook.
 "You guys don't care. I'm gonna have cameras
 aimed at the register, I'm gonna have spotters
 watching from the sidewalk!"
 You remember the gun in his basement office.
 "Soon I'll fry somebody's hands - It's been done before."
 The only customer is David, snoring in his chair.
 The frankfurters he ate remind you of his bare toes
 you saw last summer
 when helping unload lard from the delivery van.
 Today he used his Social Security
 check to pay for his food, instead of
Papi mira mira give me someting por favor.
 Your boss walks in wearing no jacket, his stomach,
 a third trimester pregnancy. He stands next to the slumped man
 whose chin is covered with mucus.
 He slaps David once. A beat. A slap. David does not wake up.
 The cook keeps chopping fleshy things. Another slap.
 Two red faces. Your boss stops and glares
 at you, as if saying "This is how you do it!" Then he storms out,
 back into the snow. You hide behind the loaner register
 with "taxable items" handwritten on one of the keys
 you always misread as "*taxable dreams*".

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