



# Food Vendor in a Strip Mall

Brian Clow



Yellow light dilutes into the fog in the  
parking lot  
while security carts that putt by  
carry pressed shirts stretched over wrinkled  
men  
who don't look both ways.

Everything sits in an owned space,  
like this chicken shop and its captives.  
Inside, the registers are broken,  
one of them is resetting.

The cashier tends to a creeping line of  
inconsiderate complainants;  
the clothes draped under her work apron say  
that her wallet is shallow,  
and she says her car tire blew.  
Still, when I reach her, she's, 'sorry'—  
smiles and looks down  
while her boss yells at a cook about the cash  
box.

People could outlast the chairs in this  
place,  
but I leave as soon as I'm able.  
She says 'sorry again about the registers.'  
I wish her well with her car and her boss,  
and for a time

both of our eyes brighten. Outside the fog  
has relented,  
yellow light paints circles on asphalt,  
and people bathe, alone, within them, not  
seeing beyond their circle.  
But I look around and hear, from some far-off  
speaker that I can't see,  
the trilling brilliance of worn horns and  
trumpets  
that play for the ones who listen—for her and  
for me.