

Curse

by Fred Shaw

Waiting for steak and fries
beneath this dining room's cold light, I look on
as Angelita, the stocky Paiute waitress, hauls
ales and elk burgers to tables of Germans
touring Utah parks on Beemer bikes.

It took until senior year for me to balance
a full tray of steaming chow, elbow wobbling
until I learned to spread fingers wide, hoisting
the fiberglass oval on the level plain
of my palm, held steady above my right shoulder.

And when the boss said to hustle, I wore
a ready smile and worked without pause, buffing
lipstick from wine glass rims, scooping up
what was left behind—spoons and mugs half-full of cold coffee,
chicken bones and change, once a slimy denture.

Delivering dumb calories
to hungry mouths is enough to consider
the flocks of fried fowl,
the braised and broiled herds I've lugged,
three plates at a time

on one of my skinny limbs,
and to wonder if it's worth sharing
with this hardworking woman
how I measured out my tired body by the decade,
one arm grown longer than the other.

Fred Shaw is an Emerging Poet Laureate Finalist of Allegheny County, 2020-2021.

“Curse” is used with permission.

[City of Asylum](#) received a [RADical ImPAct Grant](#) from the [Allegheny Regional Asset District](#) (RAD) for the project [All Pittsburghers are Poets: Poet Laureate Program](#).

