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John Bradshaw

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On Karl's Last Day at the GM Plant: A Christmas Gift from the WTO

by John Bradshaw

Winter laughs in his face with biting breath
As slate gray clouds press down upon his shoulders.
His boots crunch through the crust of winter's coldest snow
As his gloved hands slash the air in a struggle for simple balance.

At the bus stop he waits for the welcomed diesel roar
That won't come for a thousand (year-long) heartbeats.
His mouth, a modest steam vent, issues plumes of vapor
That are stolen away by a thirty-knot howl of cold despair.

On *this last day*, he stands shivering in lake-effect misery,
Lost in numb remembering—warm and noisy factory floor,
The hardy raucous laughter borne of deadlines and delays,
Of friends whose bonds of labor stretch across the misting years.

The bus arrives with a squeal of brakes and a woosh of doors,
The driver's voice, wrapped in an old Christmas muffler, whispers "Hi'ya Karl,"
With all the practice of a lifetime of graveside condolences.
Karl nods and finds a seat near another pink-slipped zombie.

And all that Karl can think about, in his last ride to work, is that somewhere in Mexico
Some tired worker will be building *his* cars, using *his* tools,
Wearing *his* GM cap, sweating *his* sweat—
All for a lousy two dollars an hour.

