

**Incident in a NYC Bookstore  
(For Anne Waldman)**

I'm sitting behind the cash register  
In an East Village bookstore  
On St. Mark's Place  
Near Second Avenue  
Looking at a postcard  
That's taped to the wall  
Of Anne Waldman, topless--  
It's been there a long time  
But I've never actually read  
The message she wrote on it.

So I'm kind of distracted  
And I almost don't notice  
A guy duck into the office  
Where the manager's bike  
Is chained to a desk.  
I'm alone in the store  
And I don't think Anne Waldman  
Will be coming to my rescue.

The guy comes out of the office  
Wheeling the bicycle –  
He must have cut  
The lock somehow.  
“Hey,” I shout at him,  
As he approaches the door,  
“That doesn't belong to you–  
Put it back where you found it!”  
He leans the bike  
Against a bookshelf  
And slowly walks over  
To where I'm perched  
On my stool.

Gripping the edge of the counter  
I look down at him. He's short  
And stinks of alcohol--  
His eyes glazed over.  
But he lashes out  
Lightning fast  
With a knife that sinks  
Into the top of my right hand.

The blade gets stuck in the cartilage  
And he can't pull it out,  
So he simply lets go  
And stands there motionless,  
Like a toy whose battery has died.

There must be something  
Seriously wrong with me,  
Because I suddenly find myself  
Lecturing this neighborhood junkie.  
"I could do anything I want to you,"  
I tell him, picking up the club  
We have under the counter  
And waving it for emphasis.  
"You're small and drunk and stupid.  
I could probably even kill you  
And get away with it,  
But that would be pointless."  
I yank the knife  
Out of my hand  
And give it back to him.  
"Just get the fuck out of here."

He exits the store,  
Slashing some flyers  
Posted near the door as he does so,  
Leaving me and Anne Waldman  
Alone again.

## **Factory Still Life**

Eduardo, my night shift partner,  
Shovels another load  
Into the blazing furnace.

He cups his nuts  
As flames spew out  
And circle around his face.

His eyes glow  
As he tells me a dirty joke  
That goes on approximately forever.

## Hand Jobs

It's my first day on the job --  
A factory making hand trucks.  
"You'll be rubbing acid on new  
Welds to seal them," the foreman  
Tells me. "Here's some rubber  
Gloves," he says, throwing me a pair.  
"You don't want to get that shit  
On your skin." I put them on  
And feel air on my hands.  
The tips of the gloves are  
Worn away, and I wiggle  
My fingers for his benefit.  
"Sorry, dude, it's all we got,"  
He says, as I give them back  
And head out to the parking lot  
Get into my pickup and smash  
The dashboard with my fist.

A couple of weeks later  
I manage to get hired by a  
Container plant making boxes.  
After I punch in I'm told  
To stack cardboard flats  
As they drop off the end  
Of a conveyor belt.  
I watch the young guys on  
The assembly line crack jokes  
As they toss bundles of scrap  
Into the steaming pulper  
Which turns everything  
Into an endless sheet of paper.

I was hoping that this gig  
Would be easy but the  
Finished cardboard  
Is not only still hot, it's  
Razor sharp, and cuts the fuck  
Out of my hands when I first  
Try to pick one up. "Sorry,  
We don't have any extra gloves,"  
The boss tells me and shrugs—  
I flip him a bloody finger as I split.