

they knock over,  
as they call each other sons of bitches —  
everyone running machines  
or climbing stairways  
or sitting at desks  
around them  
stopping to stare and listen waiting  
to either laugh or rush in to prevent a murder,  
knowing that the Lead Man and the manager  
are no more sure than anyone else  
whether they are joking or not.

#### NO GEORGE WASHINGTON

Curly holds out a time-card the supervisor gave him  
and now he's doing a celebration dance  
like a touchdown scorer in the end-zone,  
flopping about the huge mop of Afro-like curls on his head  
and saying to me,  
"You know, Fred, Goodstone's TESTING me, they say I forgot  
to fill out my timecard last Thursday — the Thursday I  
wasn't here, remember? — and Ron says for me to fill out  
this time-card so I can correct my mistake of not turning  
in a card and get PAID for last Thursday ...," Curly,  
giggling as his uncontrollably delighted smile begins to  
make his eyes water, saying, "You know, Fred, Goodstone's  
testing my MORAL FIBER ...  
they're testing my INTEGRITY ...."  
Curly dance-stepping about  
knowing he need say nothing more,  
knowing that I know as well as he  
that Goodstone  
couldn't have made a more totally misguided  
strategic error.

#### FRUGAL

Though our supervisor  
will not purchase the cutters we need to do our  
jobs on our milling machines  
correctly and efficiently, though  
our cabinets are largely bare of any parallel bars  
or vise jaws or chucks  
or cutters  
which would normally be available to machinists trying  
to do  
the best job they could,  
our supervisor does  
put big padlocks on all of the doors to the cabinets  
and locks  
on all of the gates and doors leading into our  
machine shop area,

and our supervisor does issue all of us machinists keys  
and makes us use them to open  
the gates and doors which we are told  
must be kept locked at all times,  
and our supervisor does promise  
to put all thieves  
in jail.

When you have as little to work with as we do,  
you've really got to hang on  
to it.

#### REPRIEVE

When the final buzzer sounds  
throughout building 8,  
machinists jump to life  
for the first time that day,  
hustling in a line  
to the final punching of the timeclock  
to charge out the door,  
legs and arms pumping and eyes brightening  
as they get their circulation and alertness back  
and regain full lung capacity,  
breathing huge sighs of relief  
as they increase speed  
heading toward the guard gate  
and laugh,  
pointing at the speed and energy of those ahead of them,  
saying things like "What drive!"  
or "What initiative!"  
and making jokes  
about the resurrection of the  
dead.

— Fred Voss

Long Beach CA