

SOME DAYS

Some days more than others I'm willing to put my two-cents in—say what I'm thinking if I'm thinking without hesitation. Like when I'm paying for groceries or paying for something else. Looking for an answer. Anywhere people wait in line and I'm one of those people and there's a person in charge. Maybe I'm talking about the clerk, totally jovial, whose employee manual possibly includes “chat with the customer” or something hopeful like that. When I'm in those lines I'm often convinced these guys really mean it—and the customers, too. Good for them. Because some days I could mean it. But others I don't and therefore stay silent, even if, for instance, there's a girl in front of me at the hardware store buying furnace filters, wood glue, a keychain flashlight she noticed, as I did, in that jar near the cash register, and she's pretty in a smart way, you know, a subtle way that's maddening, and she asks a non-hardware question like directions to a restaurant, or if it's any good. And the clerk's desperate to help, but he's foreign and lacks a native's answer. But I, in my aloofness, could be sitting on a good one, a two-to-eight-word answer that says it all about that restaurant, an answer she'd appreciate for its concision, the same one I wouldn't give that could persuade her to remember me later. Am I the kind of contemplative man I never cared for as a boy? I was a contemplative boy, but didn't know it then. But now I meet a clerk at the gas station who rings up my wine, my cigarettes,

my scratch-offs, and he's got a friend behind the counter who clearly doesn't work here. A girl. Appealing. Looks natural and appealing doing what she's doing, which is reading the clerk's poem, one that he wrote, in front of him while he says things interruptive like: *I tried something there, but I don't know if it works.* And I'm having the kind of day . . . I'm feeling words are inadequate, but here's a guy with a friend who reads his poems
in a gas station!
Something false inside me wants to spill out,
and I feel the need to express something definitive,
but instead it's: *So you like that shit, do you?*
And the girl continues reading as though my comment
couldn't matter
but the clerk's a tactful bastard. Tells me it's OK. Tells me I'd have to write them to "truly understand." Tells me he has *intelligent friends who just don't get poetry either.* I nod and grab my things, walk out like I want to walk back in and say something. But what is there to say?