The Secret Life of the Lunch Lady
By Kelly Mullins

She spends her day locked away in the back of a kitchen.

She makes the food you and I take for granted: unattributed to caring hands.

In the sunlight, she has no face, no smile, no form.
You neither love nor hate the food she makes,
but it nourishes you.
And maybe you are grateful if you are the fortunate type of person that thinks about where your food comes from.

But hold on.
She doesn't want you to feel guilty for forgetting her.
Recognition is not her calling.
Cooking is not her calling.
That's just how she pays the bills.

But…
Her life when the sun goes down… that's where she lives.
It's where she comes alive.
It's the music though which she moves her body,
through which her body moves.
Where she faces stranger's eyes to see
into you
as she moves.
As rapid, island beats fill her soul with Ja and Love
she smiles, and dances, and kicks her feet with joy,
she pumps her arms with ecstasy,
she bends at the hips with repetitive flexibility found only in Rasta rhythms.

Though surrounded by others, she dances alone,
whether or not there is music playing – sometimes,
she dances to the memory of rhythm.
She doesn't sweat, because
it's not about that.
It's not about working hard, or
fighting for the struggle, man.
It's about the presence of God
whose hands reach out for her
whose hands caress her tightly in a grip of Love, and so
she simply allows the grip to move her,
move her,
move her along the scuffed, beer-stained, hardwood floor:

splotchy shades of old dust browns

She makes the band smile, and
turns the volume in their voices up,
the beats on the drums up,
the deep lyrics of the bass up,
the joyful squeals of the saxophone up,
the mood of the room up.
They are all so high.
So high above the daily grind,
above the faultless blameless ignorance of her existence, she moves.
She moves through the illusion of strangers, the
awkward dancers peppering the floor she shares with them and the illusion fades behind their faces and
they are known to her.
She searches pairs of eyes where friends and lovers hide
and finds them widely smiling, clapping away the ends of songs
or sometimes singing along
oblivious to her
She recognizes transformations congregating in shared surprises and raucous laughter,
the kind that comes pleasantly surprised at sudden hilarity.

When the night is done and the music rests,
she travels lightly to her apartment, where
she sits quietly in the dark,
moving her shoulders to the memory of Rasta Rhythms.
In the morning, the sun will come back up and she will make us our food, and we won't know how she moves.