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"'We write too much about love and sex,' Stuart Dybek once said after his students discussed a story which took place mostly on a construction site. 'We should write more stories like this, about work.' The construction site was not only planks, concrete, and power tools--it was a web of interactions among workers, bosses, and customers, all with their own philosophies, temperaments, and frustrations. Such a workplace, it turned out, was rich in everything that made a good story.

When Larry Smith and I put out a call for submissions to this Working Lives anthology, we were overwhelmed by the response. Writers across the country sent thoughtful, well-crafted stories in which characters struggle with the challenges and indignities of every sort of job and often found meaning there, often in the camaraderie of fellow workers who were similarly angry, exhausted, or somehow resilient and hopeful. It was a privilege to read each submission, and it was a humbling experience to choose, from among them, the small number we could include here.

We hope you enjoy the works of these twenty-one contemporary authors--some new, some established. By writing wisely and beautifully about work, they give us insight into what other people are doing all day (or all night) long. They show us, through these stories, that somebody else's job can be as exotic as a foreign country, as dangerous as a battlefield, as complicated and weird as somebody else's sex life."