

Two Poems

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Modern-day Shoe Factory Workers Sewing Nike Uppers
(photo by Dara O'Rourke)

SHOE FACTORY WORKER

Lynn, Massachusetts, 1895

Alone at your stations, you keep sewing in tongues, another
girl's job--hand-stitch the eyelets. How many pairs did it
take to unlock the door, step into a dreamless twilight--

At a boarding house in candle dim, a bit of time to wash
away grit, and worry: *The foreman hired by owners on the
hill, what will he take?* How many stillbirths did you bury?

Peaked, your own shoes worn through and not a dime to
save, Taylor's wayall this kindled whispers and when hell
could not be traded,
your brave walked out into daylight.

Men hired to knock billyclubs against auburn tresses said
you spread backtalk against the boss, riled a strike. Who
knew during taper
hours you read *Adam Bede* and *The Copperhead*.

The photo hides maimed fingers, bones bowed by rickets.
After influenza, orphan-daughters owned no Sunday-best.
They fashioned ladies' hightops and paid their mothers'
debts.

REASCENCE

Every dawn, people rise up one by one
and to see them from the earth above
through clouds and crowns of trees

the standing is a surging wave. Hurlled out
of darkness riding earth's carrousel, with slant
grasses, marigold instinct enamors sunward.

Before a day's finale, in unison, peoplereturn
from work and after untold pressure, recoup
one by one, recline, rest a while, lay with.

Prodigious thinkers dormant in midnight's
velvet, surrender to a pillow's mercy. Sleepers
hope their muscles unknot limber as taffy.

Scaling defeats, the prostrate rise erect,
exalt the lift and fall of hands to harvest
what a mind seeskindling for the flames.