

'Making Clogs at Gallowgate'

Catherine Graham

for Doris

I let him believe I'm fourteen; old enough
to be a clog-maker. The rough, green overall
tied tight around my waist gives me the figure
I haven't got: I comb my fringe to the side.
Uppers hang in the workshop like kippers;
the genuine smell of leather all around.
Gripping the sycamore sole between my legs,
I squeeze my knees together, like mam
says I always should, and hammer like hell
at the horseshoe, braying the nails into the wood:
Slicing leather with the sharpest knife in the world;
my hands bleeding, like Christ up on the cross.
Soon I'll be promoted to stretching the skins
over metal lasts, if I keep my head down.
My workmates are five sisters, all would-be
opera singers. Listen, you can hear them
even now: Si tu ne m'aimes pas prends garde à toi!
And old Ebenezer next door, stitching:
Our would-be baritone. Every morning
we're greeted by a longtail that runs along the pipes.
The same R.A.T. (for it's unlucky to say the word),
comes out again at noon, scurrying around
like a frantic clerk of works, on the look out
for idle crumbs. The loud clock ticka ticka ticka ticks
its way to Friday when the shop window is filled
with beautiful black clogs, perched in pairs
on shelves, like lovebirds, and I collect my
seven and six. That's when I leave work
by the front door, so I can pass the window
and Fenwick's with its felt hats and blouses
made from the finest of satins and silks.