

Long Paddock

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Vespiary

In this yellow room above the factory floor
the chatter of sewing machines
fills the air like summer cicadas. Music
from a tinny radio, and the voices
of men making money, making clothes,
making the most of their timeless time.
It's a pittance, how little will keep
a man alive – a phone call, a pouch
of tobacco – how little will define
the man as human – a voice, an answer
to a name. The gaol factory below
buzzes with industry,
there is even laughter
that is otherwise punishment.
Sometimes the air is physical.
The sunlit day beyond assaults the retinas
of all who emerge from the gloom.
The sewing machines silent
in windowless midnight.
Shadows between piles of cotton
containing no ghosts, no ordinary evil
than is otherwise humming in my head.
My footsteps, too, squeak on the floor.