

Imperial Cannery, 1913

Standing inside the door (the river . . .) how shadow lies
just inside the cannery floor, sun, pouring down outside,
the river streaming slow, slow, by. Now she feels old enough,
now she is wearing her long print dress & leaning into the
threshold, waiting for work, the wheel that time is, Whose hands
are standing still, hers, empty, Whose friends also surround her,
waiting, waiting all morning for the fish to come. Nothing moves
but occasional strands of long hair the subtle wind is lifting,
up off the river, the Fraser, mouth of the Fraser here where it
debouches, into marsh, delta, swirling around & past those
pilings of the cannery wharf they are standing on, muddy &
pale grey teeming, invisible fish . . .

Now she is old enough to be her
mother inside, working, with the smallest one standing by her skirt
in grubby dress, & the blood streams down the wooden cutting board
as the "iron chink" (that's what they call it) beheads each fish . . .

Now she is old enough for the wheel's turn, she is feeling her
body in its light dress wind blows thru, as past the faces of
her friends, likewise silent, impassive. Wind blows thru
those open doors (two) because, in the dark where machines are,
& the cans, & the steam, & a cavern of men with rolled up
sleeves & straw hats, & men in oilcloth slickers spattered with
fish gut, beyond & across the corner of that dark stands
another door, & the sail of a boat crossing the river, wind,
wind . . . An open door, where men unload their hauls of fish, the
collector's boat, float, sliding one, a hundred, on top of another,
their own scale grease that keeps them alive in sea they're
taken from to dry, in open sun on an open dock.

But she is in her
element, dreaming of sails, her father's, or a friend's son, at the
Imperial which owns their boat, their net, their debt. But the
Fraser gives of itself, incessantly, rich (so the dream goes),
& wooden houses jammed on pilings close together, leaning, with
wooden walks & muddy alleys, laundry, & the dry marsh grass that
stutters out of silt the dykes retain, from a flowing
ever eroding & running river . . .

dreaming, of fabric she saw at Walker's Emporium, & the ribbon. A
woman of means she dreams, barefoot on the dock in the wind, leaning
into her threshold of work, machines, the wheel that keeps turning
turning, out of its wooden sleeve, the blade with teeth marked:
for marriage, for birth, for death.