



J.L. Conrad

Poem in Which I Enter the Fray

This place is called the pocketbook factory.
You can still see the footprints of machines.
Along the far wall, customers throw peanuts to the floor.
I save the skins as if another day awaits us.
The contract stipulates what we can and cannot eat.
I keep thinking of the word *zest*. Machines fill
themselves with ice. Machines fill the air with humming.
The waitstaff dances every half hour, heels clapping.
There's a reason this is called the end of the line.
In the middle distance, someone has built a fire.
Its tongues lick the air like they're coming home.
We all wear spurs that score the wood beneath our feet.
After a while, everyone looks the same. Your voice
hits my ear as if projected from a megaphone.
I am preoccupied with safety you say. But what I hear is
I am preoccupied with keeping you safe.

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