

Inside the Glass Door of the Seongnae-dong Clothing Repairs

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Translated by Brother Anthony and Jake Levine

In an alley bent like a carp's backbone
sunlight too is bent. Time, a hunchback too
has a hard time traveling
so between galvanized iron walls sits
a sewing shop with a low glass door.
At nightfall when earth's tilt coils the sunlight
sometimes girls
might look at the shop from a distance but
what they see is just their white faces
reflected off the dark behind the glass
and whoever it was that walked up that alley
that turned into a sheet of paper
must have wondered what lay inside the glass door.
Sometimes to turn up the legs of newly bought trousers
a customer pulls at the door handle
like it's a cover of a fairy tale book.
But the old wife's not there
just the husband spitting out a bit of thread
who, with amphibian eyes, greets you briefly.
If someone shows him
the length of the trousers with their thumb and forefinger
he pretends not to understand
just vibrates his gills then soon
as if to train someone's needle's eye in biting
he begins a backstitch that looks like an ellipse.
Inside the glass door is a wave

that no one coming out expects
 as the husband checks the rake
 of the thin, ever-thinning needles
 in the two fins lying on the sewing machine.
 Threads with buoyancy float about
 and a carp that lives on thread hides there.
 Sometimes a newspaper comes flying and knocks at the door
 but the door doesn't open. If it frequently allows time to enter
 the carp's scales will grow dry, so the glass
 obstinately keeps its dentures clamped shut.
 Next to the bent alley, there's a sewing shop.
 Since all the Seongnae-dong people
 have gotten thin like paper
 no one has taken a peep inside the glass door.
 Like how a fluorescent tube gets bent in a fish tank
 whenever people pass the store
 they can't avoid their footsteps from twisting.

