

ROGER NASH

## THE SEWING MACHINE

As a girl, she'd sewn everything by hand,  
in every minute available: pillowcases,  
hems of always fraying lessons  
at school, whole blouses of arithmetic,  
well-stitched borders of good handwriting,  
short skirts of long hopes.

As a wife, with that plug-in sewing machine,  
the room filled with seamstresses  
at the jig of a switch, all of them whirring,  
cross-legged, at the kitchen table,  
though otherwise demurely invisible, pins  
held in their sometimes short-circuiting teeth.

The needle swooped up and down  
so fast, life raced to keep up with her.  
She lengthened pant legs before her children  
caught up and grew taller,  
stitched rips in shirts before they had time  
to make enemies, or even friends, to tear them.

Fabrics—cotton, silk, even thin  
canvas—glided through the machine as smoothly as . . .  
well, as the vapour trails of transatlantic  
flights: intercontinental shirt cuffs,  
main runways of blue serge,  
conning towers of tightly stitched ties,

the whole world linked by patterns  
in ladies' magazines. The needle turbojetted  
fashions at 30,000 feet.

When she got cancer, we thought dying couldn't possibly  
catch up with that bodkin. Not realizing,  
as children, the fastest thread can still break.