

## GRANDMOTHER AT THE DRESSMAKERS'

By Marc Harshman

A bolt of heavy, cobalt gabardine,  
    shot with silver and scarlet threads,  
    lay across the cutting table.  
It was July. The overhead fan threw slow shadows  
    upon the patterned, tin ceiling.  
The neckline of Grandma's cotton housedress  
    had grown dark with sweat.  
The street outside, Mulberry, was empty – it was that hot.  
Grandma, however, made lists and did not move from them.  
*A few minutes, that's all.*  
I did not chafe too much at the familiar words  
    heard in grocery, at the neighbor's fence,  
    though always  
    my hand was tugging at her sleeve.  
Bored, yes, but content enough, able  
    to wait for the promises: lemonade, ice cream, cookies.  
It was to be an elbow's length longer than the yardstick.  
There was tracing paper, thimbles, tweezers, bodkins,  
    and pinking shears with their intriguing teeth.  
I took it all in, bothering and circling the women  
    with questions, anxious to know as much here  
    as I did in the barnyard with Father.  
It was not poetry. Not yet. But it was life as I knew it  
    and I was keen to know it more, to keep gathering  
    as I did berries and stamps and pebbles,  
    to see what rarities might show up, sparkle and speak:  
        musled cloth, scissor slash, and how precision  
        might be wedded to beauty,  
            to be the kind of gatherer  
            who would not starve  
            even if my clothes grow thin  
            and I can't find much to say for myself  
            other than I am still here,  
            tugging at her sleeve.