

The Quilter

the woman in her 90s, sits alone in our quilting room
at her sewing machine and table, her hands in her lap,
her silver-chrome shop shelves stocked, floor to ceiling,
clear plastic bins holding cloth remnants, patterns, batting,
thread—pins, needles, scissors—her upright, expanded
ironing board and steam iron ready, piecing, pressing,
pinning smooth all blocks like a puzzle solved, her project
'til completion—for next's year county fair's Best of Show.

Her quilting past, rustic, offered no luxuries—yet she looked
beyond the Singer she pressed for even stitches, recalling—

She hanged a quilt, centered in the living room, two screw-eyes,
staring down, meeting her blank gaze. With the help of her father,
she mounted pulley and cord at each end—then hoisted the quilt
frame ceiling-close, hiding the light fixture. Becoming her habit,
she pulled the work up by evenings—family, home—watched
black & white news of a distant war. By day, during workweeks,
younger sisters rode away on rural school busses, except Chloe
who sneaked under the quilt frame, her dream fort, the child
exclaimed, before the cotton cloud hung suspended. The Quilter

sees herself 70 years ago dropping the stretched quilt,
1,000 pieces, inviting neighboring women,
all older than she. Their chatter filled their afternoons—

*little Taylor learned to lace his shoes;
Edna's daughter played "Moonlight Sonata"
for graduation; MaryBeth's German chocolate cake
at Sunday brunch will be gone, plate empty,
bets made with requests for her recipe;
plans for sister's June wedding.*

They faced each other around the rolled frame, like a long
pedestal table, running needles, thimbled fingers in running stitches.
These women, Quilters, week after week, thought practical,
stitched, talked. They saw their final work a gifting
to each other, sisters to draw more than thread,
before children returned home to kitchens and chores,
before the second great war enlisted them in the work force.

—City of Moscow Poet Laureate Susan Hodgins

"The Quilter" was written for the fourth and final Third Street Gallery exhibit
program called "Textiles," scheduled Thursday, December 6, 2018, for the collection
entitled "Stuff: What We Collect and Why."