

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

In this week's poem an elderly Maine woman tells such vivid stories about her early life, she transports her listener, poet Elizabeth Tibbetts of Hope, back to the past.

Eighty-Five

by Elizabeth Tibbetts

“Shoo,” she says and waves me away
like a big fly, though she's been happy to talk,
her lipsticked mouth taking me word by word
through her life: born in this town, never left,
widowed once, divorced twice, one daughter—
now dead—and forty years in the fish factory.

She and the girls loved every minute of it,
racing—piece work, you know. Gossip swooping
through the long room like a flock of starlings
while their hands, separate animals, filled
hundreds of tins day after day. Some days
they'd lift a big icy fish from the crate,

lay it on the boiler to steam, then eat it
with their fingers. There was never anything
so fresh. She fiddles with a button on her robe,
her nails roughly painted to match her mouth,
and no, *she* doesn't need help with her shampoo,
washing her creases, soaking her swollen feet.

She looks as though she never could get out
of that chair, but somehow it's easy
to see how she would have stood on a corner
in the South End, her feet in pumps, one hip
cocked, talking to a girlfriend, and seeming
not to notice the men from the shipyard loose
on Saturday night in their clean white shirts.

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