



In the Bindery

[Elaine Terranova](#)

The shift begins. Metal clanks
against metal. It's the sound
of a thousand Houdinis shackling
themselves. Over this, the women
go on talking. They understand
each other well enough.
"I fell down the stairs. I had
to have it fixed." The other
can't help wondering if her husband
broke her nose. If she had
the operation for her looks.
She's a student. This is
real life to her, this summer job,
while Lena's here for good.
All night the two step out
in small, one-sided pirouettes.
They lift the paper onto
its cradle on the belt, where it
will be trimmed and stapled
farther on. At each step
something is added or taken away.
The steel hands meet unhurriedly,
over and over, at right angles.
The women count on this and on
the short dead points that come
in anyone's life. "Chicken,"
Lena calls. "Don't work
so hard. They don't give medals
here." It's true her muscles ache.
This is the first time they've
been put to any use. She feels
the sweat that stands out
on her forehead like a seal.
Lena is staring straight ahead,
gray eyes like two clear lights.
These were machines, you never
tempted them. Where they held
and supported, they could crush.
The metal rings with force and clarity.
Sometimes it seems to have
a change of heart but then goes on.

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