

Mending

Hazel Hall

Here are old things:
Fraying edges,
Ravelling threads;
And here are scraps of new goods,
Needles and thread,
An expectant thimble,
A pair of silver-toothed scissors.
Thimble on a finger,
New thread through an eye;
Needle, do not linger,
Hurry as you ply.
If you ever would be through
Hurry, scurry, fly!
Here are patches,
Felled edges,
Darned threads,
Strengthening old utility,
Pending the coming of the new.
Yes, I have been mending...
But also,
I have been enacting
A little travesty on life.

[This poem is in the public domain]

Program Note

Hazel Hall (1886–1924) was an American poet who nearly lost her life to scarlet fever at the mere age of twelve. This ailment – and potentially a serious fall – left her in a wheelchair for the rest of her life. Due to paralysis, she continued her education at home where she took to reading and writing. Her primary source of income came from her work as a seamstress, spending long hours in the upstairs room of her home. Peering through the window, inspiration for poetry would often spark as she watched the world pass by. This poem is a typical example of her work, reflecting on life experience through the lens of sewing.

This musical setting was commissioned by a dear friend of mine who has always had a passion for sewing, particularly in the context of costume design for theatre. For that reason, this text setting features rhythms that encourage a speech-like tone. Moments in which the voice soars freely are reserved for special dramatic effect. Much like other art songs centered around sewing, this piece features a rhythmic ostinato in the piano that mimics the consistent lilting motion of a sewing machine. A pandiatonic approach to harmony and motives create a sense of ambiguity that reveals itself as the piece progresses.