

VII

by Ed Frankel

The hokey pokey man sells penny ice cream on brown paper,
down the street from Tin Pan Alley.

The woman that Molly clean for tells her,
“You want to go to the ball Miss Smarty Pants?
Go dance with the laundry.”

The Hurdy Gurdy man cranks the magic box
and the monkey in the red cap dances.

Outside the factory, at the general strike meeting
the Pinkerton Captain tells his men
to get the red-headed one.
The big mouthed Jew-girl with the bandana.

In di Goldenh Medina, hungry hands are the smart hands
that sew shirtwaists for the Gibson girls
who gaze off into the distance from the cover of *Harper's Bazaar*.
Molly, the learner, buys her own thread and Singer machine.
Forty five dollars down, a dollar a month.
In the din of pressed air, the piece work, and shadow pools,
the machines roar like the engines of heaven.
She joins the other sewers, pressers, basters, pullers,
the fellers, tenders and turners at the sooty windows,
where they gather for lunch,
like they pressed toward the portholes in steerage.
Each week the girl who produces the least is fired
at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory
at 33 Washington place in 1911.

In my newsreel memory, factory foremen
sugar the police with fifty dollar bills in cigar boxes.
Hired thugs and prostitutes pick fights with the women picketers.
The police move in to restore order to things.

My Farbende, the fire that dances,
I see you Molly in your one room forth floor walkup
That you shared with Sara Brenman.
You climb slowly into the tub in the kitchen

your, arms, black and blue, swollen purple and greenish-yellow,
that covered your head from the policemen's clubs
when you threw marbles under their horses' hooves
outside the factory, when the private guards
knocked you and the other girls down,
and the rich ladies on the sidewalk,
the Gibson girls on the trolley cars cheered.

Shirtwaists: popular kind of blouse, popularized by the Gibson Girl look.

Gibson Girls: Models drawn by Gibson that appeared in magazines such as *Harpers* in the early nineteen hundreds.