

The Cordwainer

A day on the mission

We sagged into his slim room
From the dusty street,
His company a dirt floor and dog.

I had never seen a
Beast of such sorrow:
His daughter blind, his wife gone,
His health only a memory.

He knew the cobblestone miles
From Montevideo to Melo,
The enmity between flesh and field,
The bruised heel, the cursed climb.

Scraps of light shifted across
The floor of his shop. He offered us
Bread, water, a chair. I gave him ten *pesos*,
All I had. I removed my shoes.
From a high shelf he chose the finest leather,
Then knelt and measured my bare feet,
And cut, stitched, glued.

In my stupor I saw,
Comprehending at last
The small miracle of making a life,
The quietude, the tuck of leather to tread.

After all, it wasn't his sorrow we were meant to seek,
It was his hands.

—Terresa Wellborn

This poem won second place in the BYU Studies 2016
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