The Proofreader's Lament I & II

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THE PROOFREADER’S LAMENT

What brews as habitually as morning coffee:
her slinking in, sleek, skittish; shimmering polyester; “Where’ve you been,” I boom,
surrendering the crutch of my neck to her slender, miracle hands. But it’s business,
not pleasure, that brings her: the first quarter’s report hoisted onto my desk as foot-to-calf-to-endless thigh sealed in nylon.
“How will I mark it,” I shriek. “Where...the margins,” but I’m losing breath, can’t object
as she wriggles free of the last quivering stitch. Hear that humming in the breasts. See these fine separate silken hairs descending the stomach, O touch slowly this tensed inner thigh.
Such love of detail earns the proofreader his marks.
THE PROOFREADER’S LAMENT II

The alarm goes off and you’re dreaming a movie:
from under the blankets comes a hand of viper
swiftness striking ringing to stunned silence.
The camera pans a field glimmering dew in the hush
of dawn. You dream yourself happy. It’s a beautiful
beginning but up on the screen the image blurs and you
wake to the clicking of loose ends. Monday morning.
Work. The week. You slept fitfully, your hair looks
like nothing in Hollywood and there’s no Catherine
Deneuve disheveled luxuriously at your side. But then
your own resemblance to Newman, Redford, or Belmondo
is mistaken nowhere. “Say, aren’t you...?” and you nod
yes yes sadly behind sunglasses. You’ve been recognized
as you which shoots your day to hell. You had planned
gills and a suit of scales in hopes of swimming through
the office unnoticed. But you arrive and your boss
bellows good morning, you’re late, and pointing to the
heap of unread copy on your desk threatens: by noon.
Woozy, you slump to your chair, the light blinks on, and
through half-shut eyes needles of print swirl into view.

— Mike Keller