

Signs of Her

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Vestiges d'une vie

Des bas-culottes, un chemisier marin, un sac à main manifestent son absence. Tout ce qui reste de la mère de la narratrice, ce sont les vêtements demeurés dans le placard après sa mort : les vestiges d'une vie, une famille en soi. La narratrice tente de déchiffrer les signes laissés par sa mère à travers ses vêtements et veut décrire les différents passages de sa vie à travers les souvenirs que ces témoins font ressurgir. Un voyage effectué en Irlande en 1991 en est un exemple. Mais que sait-elle au juste? Que disent exactement ces signes que sa mère lui a laissés ?

the stockings that she put in the drawer
two grey hairs on the high ruffled collar of a navy blouse
a kleenex in the pocket of a plaid skirt
small white and pink mints in a black clutch purse
signs that she was here
sorting her outfits
into four piles: to keep, to send to Ireland,
for a friend, for the Salvation Army
trying on her Donegal tweed suit
stepping into her elegance
wrapped in what's left
I want to try on the way she said calmly
he has no power over me
the way she banged the brass gong
as her husband's and son's voices exploded around the room
the way she wrapped my nightie around a hot water bottle
left it on my pillow with a note
the way she packed me a lunch of wheaten salad sandwiches
the crusts cut off
the way she said of a trifle with fresh strawberries, raspberries, custard
and cream

it goes round my heart like velvet
finely crocheted white lace collars in the drawer
don't know who made them
they were round her neck
a closet to clear
caught up with what's in the pockets
I could fill the pockets with notes
what I know
bought at Norma Bradley's Dress Shop in Waterloo
wore to Ireland in the winter of 1991
held her first grandchild on the lap on this pleated skirt
wore this sleeveless dress on a warm summer evening in 1975
at Goderich when she spread out a table-cloth
and opened a wicker picnic basket by the lake
what I know and don't know
don't know about her
how to clear a closet
a row of handbags
two round hat boxes
her clothes on the empty bed
my photo in her wallet
my photo beside a pile of hankies folded in triangles
in the top drawer
my name on a small name tag in her jewelry box
one left over after she had sewed the others
on the inside of the collars of my clothes