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Stranger In My Seams

AUDREY ZOFCHAK

This was her dress and she wore it on June 23, 1943. No, make that the Fourth of July 1943 and now I'm wearing it to the bus stop. It's the very same dress but I never starch it as she did and I never press it either. She would have done both and she would have dried it on a clothesline in the sunlight.

It's a gray dress, nearly white with delicate black and green roses. It has cap sleeves, a square neckline and a high waist cut just below the bust where the original black belt still remains. This is important since so many of these vintage gems have become separated from their belts at the hand of their careless owners. But she cared for our dress. She'd run her fingers over its detail; the black lace which

runs along the zipper and the two deep pockets in the skirt. When she was nervous she'd tie and untie the three small black bows around the collar.

The dress is mine but it's still hers and she's still alive in the fibers. She is a stranger that I can button and zip, hem, take in or take out depending. But she fits perfectly. We match in that aspect, and she probably snacked in it frequently, being careful not to smudge grease into the cotton and if too tempted to wipe her hands she would do so in the hem of the dress where there is plenty of extra fabric in an unseen fold.

I'm in her dress and she's inside me, and when I walk it's with a slight swing of the hips which is unnatural to me but perfectly natural to the woman I share my dress with. And she wore gloves and a hat, a full slip, and heeled shoes; none of which I wear, but she never wore stockings. Stockings were rationed so she wore her legs bare and with bare legs we walk in our dress down Fulton Street past the library. And people stare; they always stare at me when I walk inside her, in her conservative cut and vintage design. They stare as if I might have walked out of a time machine somewhere between the gas station and the bridge. But then my sloppy hair and tennis shoes give me away at which point they turn their heads and attention back to the red light or traffic jam before them. But I like to think that perhaps, if they drive by quickly, those small details will go unnoticed and I will become a ghost of sorts; just an apparition; a conversation piece. I become a gravestone with a name; I become the deep scratch in the old

hardwood flooring; voices whispering, "We came first, we are still here now."

I like to imagine a fluke in space-time which would allow us to meet. I'll throw a party and invite all of the owners of my belongings. There shall be so many guests we'll be shoulder to shoulder and forced to shimmy from one room to the next. The past tenants of my apartment will arrive and we'll bathe in our bath tub together with our knees pulled to our chests to make room. Around the chrome table an all American family will serve me meatloaf and mashed potatoes which we'll eat only to reveal the atomic patterned plates of yet another family. And then after dessert we'll play dress up, swapping our mismatched clothes from mismatched eras. Someone will put on one of our records and we'll all hold hands and dance in circles around the living room floor. It will be a grand event and the quintessential moment will be when she arrives, fashionably late with perfect timing.

Waiting for the bus I ask myself, how many bodies will fit in our dress before it shall tear at the seams? And which body will wear this dress when my body is no longer a body? Will she remember? Will she understand? Will she let me hide in the hemline in a fold unseen?