

Seán Hewitt

In a charity shop

Sat behind the counter,
old watches spread,
bracelets, teaspoons
neatly priced,
hunch-huddled,
a child-like smile almost
discernable beneath the map
of her skin, like
an unmade bed.

‘Couldn’t you just sit,’ I ask,
‘and watch the street outside change,
and the people
change, and the weather
change
like friends with time.’

Everything’s easy.
It slips like oil through an engine,
with the occasional sting
stopping
to rifle through the
pensioner-permeated racks.

She looks up,
thinking aloud like a dream,
'There are some days,' she says,
'when the rails look like
lives clustered into the clothes, some
afternoons when the sun
presses through the dusty window
to fade the colours of the carpet,
and people come in,
binbag-laden
with mum's blouses,
dad's old shirts and trousers,
sorry to let them go.'
The pace is always
slow,
charitable,
sad.

'Yes,' I thought, 'nothing ever
changes.' I wondered
if she'd pictured
her dresses
being brought back here,
her son thinking
'that's what she'd've wanted'.
Her scarf, her necklace.
That brooch.

Or if she ever
leant back on her stool
and realised that,
really,
she was just passing the time,
that the whole reason she was
sat, hunch-huddled
behind the counter,
was because she had no other cause,
no-one else to spend her days
watching, and so thought she might
hide the fact
in stale jumpers
and behind
shelves of chipped china.

I smiled. She was right.
The rails were like
lives woven in cloth,
a tapestry,
by which
all that's left of us
is sold off.