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## The Thread

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Molly  
Zebell

# The Thread

"Do you know what this is?"

My mom is holding out a dress. Its cream colored with age, made of silk with a full-length skirt and delicate beads in intricate patterns around the wrists. The silk sways and shimmers as my mom displays it before me.

"I just bought it at an estate sale. It looks like it was made by hand. And it's a wedding dress." She releases the train that she's been hiding in back, which falls delicately to the floor. "It's not dirty at all, not even on the train. It makes me wonder . . . I think it's never been worn before."

The year is 1960 in Benton Harbor, Michigan. In Edna's Sewing Shop, the bolt of fabric waits. Women come up to it, touch it, feel the smoothness of the pure white silk in their hands, and they have visions of what they can create: a beautiful evening sash, curtains for the bedroom, a luxurious nightgown. But they release the fabric and turn away, forgetting the images as quickly as they came to mind.

And then, a twenty-year-old girl with long chestnut brown hair and a delicate frame, like that of a Russian ballet dancer, enters Edna's and walks straight toward the virgin silk. She takes the corners of it in both hands, feels the slippery texture, and gazes at it intently, thinking. Smiling, she takes the bolt of fabric and has four yards cut. "It's for my wedding," she tells the lady behind the counter. "I'm getting married in a month. My momma's going to make me my own dress." The lady behind the counter smiles and carefully tucks the fabric into a bag.

Out of the bag at home, the fabric watches as momma measures the young girl's waist, her delicate wrists, and the length of her slender legs. She traces outlines on the silk, cuts pieces, takes them toward the sewing machine, and carefully pushes them through. A sleeve emerges, then the bodice. And finally, the skirt, complete with train, is hand-stitched to the bodice by momma. Momma tells her daughter to try it on. The skirt flows down to the floor, barely brushing it in front and delicately sweeping in back. The bodice is gathered and tucked into the waist, accentuating the girl's dancer frame. The dress catches a hint of fragrance, like daisies, from the girl's long chestnut hair. "You look gorgeous, my little girl," says momma. "Your wedding will be beautiful." And momma hangs the dress on a hangar, covers it in a plastic bag, and places it in the closet to wait . . .

. . . and wait. But the girl does not come for the dress. The closet is dark.

It smells like dust and musky old clothing. The dress listens. It can hear the girl crying at night into her pillow. It can hear momma telling the neighbor on the phone that the wedding is off. Each day more dust covers the dress in its plastic bag, weighing it down. A heavy wool overcoat and a soft cashmere sweater join the dress in the closet. The cashmere smells faintly of perfume, perhaps from momma. It's been worn before, lived in. But the dress has not. It wonders what it would be like to be taken out, dusted off, in the fresh air, surrounding someone's body.

"I think you should try it on," my mom says. I take the dress out of the plastic and put it on in my room. The skirt dances around my legs as I step out where my mom is waiting. "You look gorgeous, my little girl," she says. "Maybe you should wear this for your wedding someday." As I return to my room to hang the dress up in my closet amongst overcoats and cashmere, I detect a hint of some fragrance. I raise the sleeve to my nose. I smell the pungent scent of old fabric and dust. But beneath them, something more: the scent of daisies.