



**DEAD PEOPLE'S THINGS**// **KATHRYN G. WATT**

Once the executors of life's accumulations have extracted the saleable and sentimental,  
the leftovers arrive folded, boxed, washed, unwashed:

Beige underwear, elastic a little stretched

(someone could get some use out of these)

The hair comb and old-fashioned manicure set

(not worth holding onto, too practical to rubbish)

A box filled with loose buttons we were going to sew back

(but didn't)

The watch that stopped ticking

A lifetime's worth of Reader's Digest

Bathrobe felted with fine hairs,

pocket stuffed with white tissues

A pair of plastic earrings.

Held to the light

appraised, refolded, divested;

a small stapled sticker denoting price in Rands.

They will be fitted to Other bodies.

The intimately banal relics of our existence

straps readjusted to new shoulders.

Alive again.

.....**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**.....

*Kathryn Watt is currently pursuing an MA at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. This poem emerged out of her ethnographic research investigating the nature of trade in three charity shops in the Western Cape, South Africa. The charity shops rely entirely upon donated goods, particularly clothing, to sustain their business. Whilst working in the back of the shops receiving, unpacking and sorting donations, she first encountered the leftover belongings of the recently deceased – unwanted by their families, these had been divested through donation. The donations were mostly the stuff of everyday life: of no great value, but not valueless. In the back areas of the charity shops, these leftover objects were laboriously revitalised, their status as commodities made intact once more by brushing away the intimacies of their dead owners. From the shop, these goods would be consumed again, and resume their functional life assisted by other bodies. Resurrected in this way, the objects outlived their former owners, moving between different bodies, homes and states of value.*