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Handle With Care

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POETRY

HANDLE WITH CARE

Cass Sissel

I tell people I'm an old woman. It's
because I like my books and my clothes used--
or hand modified. We were tie dyeing
in Bram's kitchen, stoned out of our decade-
my purpling fingers in the wet shirt, hovering
over their mint green countertop put me
right back in the 70s. I've been there.
Sank my toes into thick brown shag carpet,
tapped my fingers across the shivering hide
of sprawling orange couches.

My grandma had a wall of VHS tapes,
I crawled inside one day and never came back
out. I liked the acid bright curves of "The Magic
Pony", and I understood something deeper
about the world in the delicate strength
of "The Last Unicorn". My favorite part
was the clean endings.

I tell people I'm an old woman
because I don't like to drink much, and
I like my sounds quiet. I wear the floral
shirts in that laminated tissue paper
texture-- have since Woodstock. I remembered
under a wave of deja vu at Bram's dad's house--
a pile of cabinets, cupboards and closets--
each empty like the day I moved out.
Goodwill took my clothes; sorted my memories
with all their dust and dead skin, ready for
sale and second life.

I forget to remember the orange velvet couch; its
hard buttons pleated into my tender hide
one wall away from the living room. Pointed
touches prodding me right off the cushion
pushed me from my body's skeletal cradle.
It's the bones that understand time's passage.

I tell people I'm an old woman
because I can't remember my childhood.
Because drinking too much makes me feel
like I'm 7 years old again, not in control.
Because when I read I can forget that orange
velvet couch in my grandma's VHS room
and I can forget the memories my
5 years bigger brother stashed away there.
I tell people I'm an old woman
because old women have survived.