

Legacy of Shadows

Excerpt

Toronto. March, 1926

Painting beneath the skylights at the academy, I cast shadows. I stand out in three dimensions, don't I? It seems I amuse my professors. "She can capture anything we put in front of her," I've heard them say. "Everything's easy for Lisbet."

If only they could see me here at home where nothing's easy, and no one sees me. Martin's gone. The twins, grown discontent to be my dolls, have forged their own iron wills. And I lack my mother's skill to make them want to please me.

Father had me gather Mother's clothes to give away. And yet, he singled out one dress to keep. I puzzled at his choice: the slate gray woolen jersey - long sleeves, high neck, a deeply gathered skirt. It was neither the prettiest, nor Mother's favorite. Now, it hangs in her empty closet - like a woolen shadow.

Tonight, after my chores, I bent my head into Father's room to whisper goodnight. There he was, squeezing the shadow in his arms. I knew at once he'd picked the dress that could best enfold him, the one that could almost return his embrace. Father didn't see me waiting at his door. He'll never speak of this. And I will never dare to. The moment will be closeted with all the others we might have shared.

At the academy, I stand out in three dimensions, don't I? But here at home, Father sees more of a person in Mother's empty dress than he has ever seen in me.