

Remnants

At eight-thirty on Thursday mornings,
Mrs. Cohen rolled deep canvas bins
out onto the breezeway
in front of her dry goods store.
Those bins brimmed with exotic treasures:
remnants of velvet, bolt-ends of silk
ruby red polished cotton and stern grey wool.
My mother and I were always among the first
to dive into that sea of possibilities
'This print here would make
a nice shirt for sister,'
This deep green chenille is so soft —
we'll do bathrobes for Christmas gifts'
By nine o'clock, thirty women stooped
over the bins, laughing and talking,
consoling and condoling, gossiping and shush-ing,
exchanging knowing looks and arched
eyebrows above their daughters' heads.
By nine-thirty, the bins would be empty,
the week's news disseminated,
the judgments made.
The scraps and pieces of our small town
bundled and tied, taken home
to be cut to pattern
and sewn into something *respectable*.