In the Basement of the Goodwill Store

By Ted Kooser

In musty light, in the thin brown air of damp carpet, doll heads and rust, beneath long rows of sharp footfalls like nails in a lid, an old man stands trying on glasses, lifting each pair from the box like a glittering fish and holding it up to the light of a dirty bulb. Near him, a heap of enameled pans as white as skulls looms in the catacomb shadows, and old toilets with dry red throats cough up bouquets of curtain rods.

You’ve seen him somewhere before. He’s wearing the green leisure suit you threw out with the garbage, and the Christmas tie you hated, and the ventilated wingtip shoes you found in your father’s closet and wore as a joke. And the glasses which finally fit him, through which he looks to see you looking back—two mirrors which flash and glance—are those through which one day you too will look down over the years, when you have grown old and thin and no longer particular, and the things you once thought you were rid of forever have taken you back in their arms.

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