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SHIRLEY ADELMAN

Packed Up

At my father's funeral the rabbi
looked me in the eye and said,
"I never knew there was a daughter."

Erased eight years earlier,
My belongings packed into boxes,
like my mother's, so soon after she died,
the dust hadn't yet settled on all
she made beautiful. The plants growing
in glasses that once held sour cream,
looked moist and green, bathed in sunlight,
as though she would return to them,
in the early hours of morning,
after the kettle hummed, and she sat
at the kitchen table, sipping steaming coffee,
and writing out a shopping list with a #2
Pencil, always adding candies last,
because she really believed the words,
when coaxing me to eat dessert,
"The last is the best."

Spoken with a Yiddish intonation,
so the line almost rhymed,
like the Yiddish songs
she sang to her grandchildren,
before sending them off with chocolates
and chicklets, and shiny quarters,
minted the year they were born.

There was hardly time to mourn her,
before the objects of her life
were packing up like found items,
unclaimed cargo when they still
held her scent and shone
lustrous from a lifetime of care.

Shirley Adelman is a writer of poetry and creative non-fiction. Her work has been published in academic, literary, feminist, and medical humanities journals in the United States, Canada, Israel, and South Africa. Much of her writing deals with issues of social justice, both historical and present. She is the mother of Haim and Rachel and the Bubbie of Maya and Avi, and Zane of blessed memory.