

3 In the extract below the writer describes her shopping habits and the feelings they bring out in her.

(a) Comment on the style and language of the passage. [15]

(b) The writer's mother has become concerned about her daughter's great interest in buying old clothes. In a letter to a friend she outlines her thoughts and feelings about it. Basing your answer closely on the material of the original extract, write the opening to the letter (between 120–150 words). [10]

I *feel* history when I walk into a vintage-clothes store. Sometimes, I can see history too. I imagine the heel catching on that ripped tweed skirt and the young woman fighting tears as she rushes past her annoyed-but-patient father to change. She climbs two steps at a time, her mind already rifling through her sister's closet for a plan B outfit. He reaches for another cigarette, exhaling any hopes of that steady drink before meeting "the man of her dreams." 5

I imagine the wine splashing on that filmy high-neck pale-pink blouse and the perfumed and powdered owner laughing it off, her attentions on the handsome soldier courting her. The next day, she hugs the blouse close to her heaving heart, soaking in the memories of their one evening together – the short sweet memories that will have to sustain her through the lonely months ahead. 10

I see the flushed cheeks and shining eyes of the young-and-in-love bride as her new husband secures this string of pearls around her neck. Her reflection in the tall moonlit looking glass shows a girl becoming a woman. He sees it too ...

There's romance in vintage. 15

There's courting, love, sex, sadness, and pain in vintage.

It's not always obvious from the dusty crowded windows, but it's there – the weddings, the funerals, the parties, the disgraces, the secrets, the celebrations, the lives. Sometimes, the storied pieces call to me from across the street, forcing me to "just take a quick look." Other times, I have to comb and climb through overcrowded racks of patterned polyesters, 80s mistakes, and moth eaten wool. But when I find that special something, I get goose bumps. 20

In evaluating the condition of a piece, I can't help but wonder at the life it had before me. Sometimes the past lingers in the fabric, the secrets stuffed deep in the pockets or shoved up stiff sleeves. Holding a dress to the light, you can often see the form of its previous owner. It's most obvious with vintage shoes, where in the scuffed soles, the worn heels, and the wrinkled tow-cap, you can see the footprint of a path once walked. 25

I live in a New York City apartment so, unfortunately, I can't adopt every little embroidered hankie, laugh-lined shoe, or patterned shift dress I think has a story. My wallet is always flexible but my closet is not. So I look for unique pieces. 30

In searching for vintage dresses or unique patterns, I've recently taken to trolling eBay\*. I've found some reliable vintage stores, but my few experiences have reinforced what I've always known to be true: there's a very fine line between vintage and costume. With the right styling and photography, any vintage item can be made to look like a find. I recently purchased a vintage belted cream lace dress that I was very excited about. 35

It had a square neck and balloon sleeves and it looked special in the photograph. I ordered the dress and when it arrived, I noticed the frayed hem was not as edgy as it had appeared in the photo, and the collar and sleeves made me look like a Renaissance fair worker. I knew even before I tried it on that it was a nice dress, but it would make a beautiful cushion cover. 40

Had I found it in person and physically handled it before purchasing, I would have paid less, with that cushion – not my cushy backside – in mind. So now, I remind myself to make careful decisions when shopping vintage online, especially when it 45

comes to budget. The thrill of the vintage-store find is a rush but it can be tempered with a few step-away-and-step-back moves and a slow front-and-back reality check in front of a mirror. The thrill of the online auction however is more difficult to reign in. Take it from me that virtual-shopping can cloud your judgment and you'll suddenly find yourself needing – and willing to pay anything for – that vintage Chanel skirt that you can't even be sure will fit. I'm not afraid of eBay though, just aware. When used appropriately, it's a great resource for vintage fabrics, scarves, beads, shoes, jewelry, and other accessories. 50

I prefer to stumble – not click – upon my special blouses, dresses, and tees. I want to spot them nestled between the polyester disco dress and the satin nightie. I want to feel my pulse pick up as I cross to the rack, wondering if that pattern is as I imagine, if the fit is as I dream. I want to hear them separate from the rack, shaking loose their creases and tales. I want to take them home and introduce them to my other storied finds. 55

Then I want to add a new chapter. 60

\*eBay: an online auction site