

The Address

Marga Minco






War in Holland

This short story is a **poignant** account of a daughter who goes in search of her mother's belongings after the **War**, in Holland. When she finds them, the objects **evoke** memories of her earlier life. However, she decides to leave them all behind and **resolves** to move on.

Poignant: Evoking sadness and regret

Evoke: to bring to mind

Resolve: to decide



‘DO you still know me?’ I asked. The woman looked at me searchingly. She had opened the door a **chink. I came closer and stood on the step. ‘No, I don’t know you.’ ‘I’m Mrs. S’s daughter.’ She held her hand on the door as though she wanted to prevent it opening any further. Her face gave absolutely **no** sign of recognition. She kept staring at me in silence.**





Chink: a narrow opening




**Cardigan with
wooden button**

Perhaps I was mistaken, I thought, perhaps it isn't her. I had seen her only once, **fleetingly**, and that was years ago. It was most probable that I had rung the wrong bell. The woman let go of the door and stepped to the side. She was wearing my mother's green knitted cardigan. The wooden buttons were rather pale from washing. She saw that I was looking at the cardigan and half hid herself again behind the door. But I knew now that I was right.


Fleeting: for very short time




‘Well, you knew my mother?’ I asked. ‘Have you come back?’ said the woman. ‘I thought that no one had come back.’ ‘Only me.’ A door opened and closed in the passage behind her. A musty smell emerged. ‘I regret I cannot do anything for you.’ ‘I’ve come here specially on the train. I wanted to talk to you for a moment.’ ‘It is not convenient for me now,’ said the woman. ‘I can’t see you. Another time.’



She nodded and cautiously closed the door as though no one inside the house should be disturbed. I stood where I was on the step. The curtain in front of the bay window moved. Someone stared at me and would then have asked what I wanted. ‘Oh, nothing,’ the woman would have said. ‘It was nothing.’






I looked at the name-plate again. Dorling it said, in black letters on white **enamel**. And on the **jamb**, a bit higher, the number. Number 46. As I walked slowly back to the station I thought about my mother, who had given me the address years ago. It had been in the first half of the War. I was home for a few days and it struck me immediately that something or other about the rooms had changed. I missed various things.

Jamb: vertical part of door

Enamel: Coating of paint





My mother was surprised **I should have noticed** so quickly. Then she told me about Mrs. Dorling. **I had never heard of her** but apparently she was an old **acquaintance** of my mother, whom she hadn't seen for years. She had suddenly **turned up** and renewed their contact. Since then she had come regularly.

Acquaintance: familiar, Known





Silver dishes



Antique Plates




Vases

‘Every time she leaves here she takes something home with her,’ said my mother. ‘She took all the **table silver** in one go. And then the **antique plates** that hung there. She had trouble **lugging** those large **vases**, and I’m worried she got a crick in her back from the **crockery**.’ My mother shook her head pityingly.

Lug: To carry with difficulty




Crockery



My mother seemed to notice that I was not entirely convinced. She looked at me **reprovingly** and after that we spoke no more about it. Meanwhile I had arrived at the station without having paid much attention to things on the way. I was walking in familiar places again for the first time since the War, but I did not want to go further than was necessary. I didn't want to upset myself with the sight of streets and houses full of memories from a precious time.

Reprove: Disprove







In the train back I saw Mrs. Dorling in front of me again as I had the first time I met her. It was the morning after the day my mother had told me about her. I had got up late and, coming downstairs, I saw my mother about to see someone out. A woman with a broad back. 'There is my daughter,' said my mother. She **beckoned** to me.



Beckon: to move your hand or head to point out sth



The woman nodded and picked up the suitcase under the coat-rack. She wore a brown coat and a shapeless hat. 'Does she live far away?' I asked, seeing the difficulty she had going out of the house with the heavy case. 'In Marconi Street,' said my mother. 'Number 46. Remember that.'






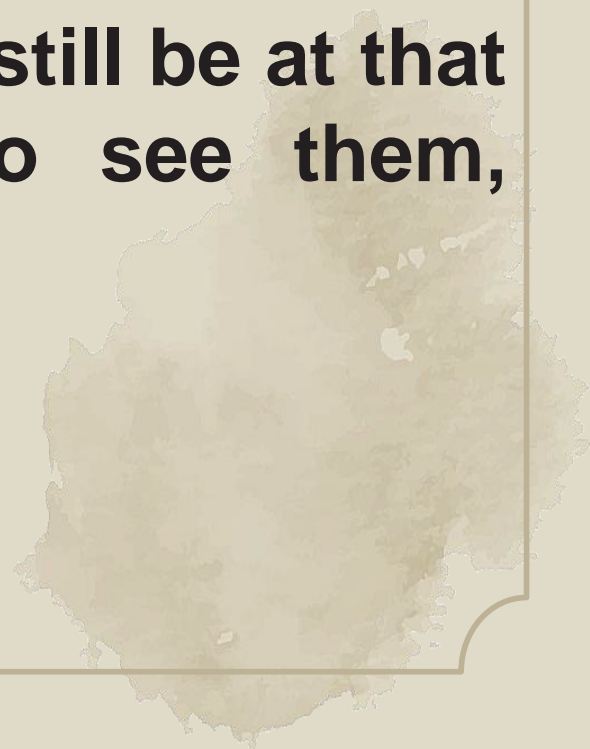
Connection

I had remembered it. But I had waited a long time to go there. Initially after the Liberation I was absolutely not interested in all that stored stuff, and naturally I was also rather afraid of it. **Afraid of being confronted** with things that had belonged to a **connection** that no longer existed; which were hidden away in cupboards and boxes and waiting in vain until they were put back in their place again; which had **endured** all those years because they were 'things.'

Endure: to suffer with pain



But gradually everything became more normal again. Bread was getting to be a lighter colour, there was a bed you could sleep in unthreatened, a room with a view you were more used to glancing at each day. And one day I noticed I was curious about all the possessions that must still be at that address. I wanted to see them, touch, remember.





The second visit

After my first visit in vain to Mrs Dorling's house I decided to try a second time. Now a **girl of about fifteen opened the door** to me. I asked her if her mother was at home. 'No' she said, 'my mother's doing an **errand.**' 'No matter,' I said, 'I'll wait for her.'

Errand: A distance covered for some work



**Hanukkah Candle
Holder**

I followed the girl along the passage. An old-fashioned iron **Hanukkah** candle-holder hung next to a mirror. We never used it because it was much more **cumbersome** than a single candlestick. 'Won't you sit down?' asked the girl. She held open the door of the living-room and I went inside past her.

Hanukkah: An bi and heavy candle holder



Cumbersome: Awkward



Muggy

I stopped, horrified. I was in a room I knew and did not know. I found myself in the midst of things I did want to see again but which oppressed me in the strange atmosphere. Or because of the tasteless way everything was arranged, because of the ugly furniture or the **muggy** smell that hung there, I don't know; but I scarcely dared to look around me. The girl moved a chair.

Muggy: unpleasant smell in air



I sat down and stared at the woollen table-cloth. I rubbed it. My fingers grew warm from rubbing. I followed the lines of the pattern. Somewhere on the edge there should be a burn mark that had never been repaired.




Cup




Spoon

‘My mother’ll be back soon,’ said the girl. ‘I’ve already made tea for her. Will you have a cup?’ ‘Thank you.’ I looked up. The girl put **cups** ready on the tea-table. She had a broad back. Just like her mother. She poured tea from a **white pot**. All it had was a gold border on the lid, I remembered. She opened a box and took some **spoons** out.



‘That’s a nice box.’ I heard my own voice. It was a strange voice. As though each sound was different in this room. ‘Oh, you know about them?’ She had **turned round and brought me my tea. She laughed. ‘My mother says it is antique. We’ve got lots more.’ She pointed round the room. ‘See for yourself.’**





Apple on Pewter Plate

I had no need to follow her hand. I knew which things she meant. I just looked at the still life over the **tea-table**. As a child I had always fancied the **apple on the pewter plate**. ‘We use it for everything,’ she said. ‘Once we even **ate off** the plates hanging there on the wall. I wanted to so much. But it wasn’t anything special.’

Ate off: to eat away



Table Cloth with burn mark

I had found the burn mark on the **table-cloth**. The girl looked questioningly at me. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘you get so used to touching all these lovely things in the house, you hardly look at them any more. You only notice when something is missing, because it has to be repaired or because you have lent it, for example.’




spoons ,forks and knives

Again I heard the unnatural sound of my voice and I went on: 'I remember my mother once asked me if I would help her polish the silver. It was a very long time ago and I was probably bored that day or perhaps I had to stay at home because I was ill, as she had never asked me before. I asked her which silver she meant and she replied, surprised, that it was the **spoons, forks and knives** of course. And that was the strange thing, I didn't know the cutlery we ate off every day was silver.'




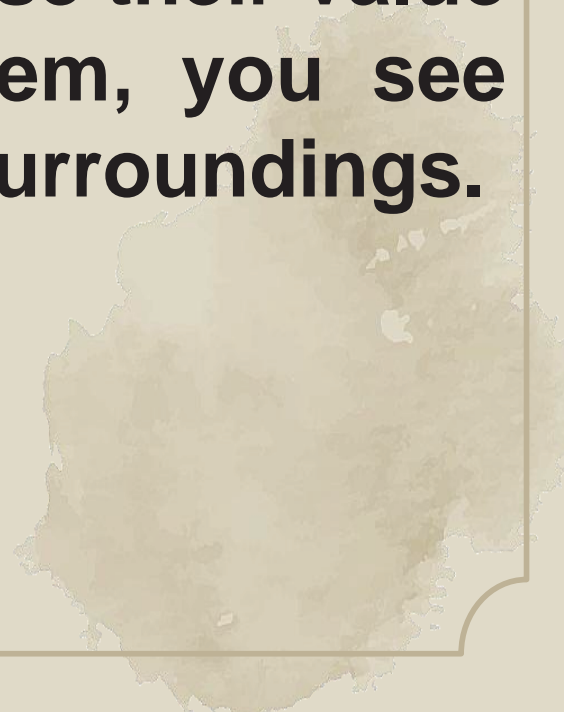

Sideboard

The girl laughed again. 'I bet you don't know it is either.' I looked intently at her. 'What we eat with?' she asked. 'Well, do you know?' She hesitated. She walked to the **sideboard** and wanted to open a drawer. 'I'll look. It's in here.' I jumped up. 'I was forgetting the time. I must catch my train.' She had her hand on the drawer. 'Don't you want to wait for my mother?'



**‘No, I must go.’ I walked to the door.
The girl pulled the drawer open. ‘I can
find my own way.’ As I walked down
the passage I heard the jingling of
spoons and forks.**





At the corner of the road I looked up at the name-plate. Marconi Street, it said. I had been at Number 46. The address was correct. But now I didn't want to remember it any more. I wouldn't go back there because the objects that are linked in your memory with the familiar life of former times instantly lose their value when, severed from them, you see them again in strange surroundings.



Small rented room

And what should I have done with them in a small **rented room** where the **shreds** of black-out paper still hung along the windows and no more than a handful of cutlery fitted in the narrow table drawer? I **resolved** to forget the address. Of all the things I had to forget, that would be the easiest.

Shred: Very small amount

Resolve: To decide



Daughter walked down the passage