

LAYAWAY HEART

The hastily
scrawled note affixed
to the plastic
hanger read *Hold*
Susan Today.
And there it hung

until closing;
the perfect dress—
gray embroidered
sheath with princess
seams cut on the
bias—vainly

awaiting my
return. Wasting
days that summer
at the mall, I
fondled products
at each pointless

specialty shop:
shower scrubs and
gels, beads, kitchen
gadgets, bulk bins
of organic
produce and spice.

I rarely bought,
just pulled the day's
obsession from
the rack, told the
sales girl to put
it on hold, and

it was mine for
an afternoon.
Sometimes it seemed
that things were all
I could count on.
Patiently, they

sat wherever
placed, waiting to
be useful: the
glazed ceramic
bowl for its splash
of milk; chenille

gloves yearning for
outstretched fingers
to give them shape.
What thing doesn't
want to be stroked
to life, to be

considered by
hands? A sweater
can mimic an
embrace, the way
the slub of silk
learns the body's

curves. How could I
know someone that
well, so close I'd
take on their scent,
their heat? Even
a mail-order

bride, acquired like
property, is
studied, tailored
to exacting
measurements. I
wish I *were* that

dress sometimes, all
silhouette and
shimmer, nothing
but surface, the
brilliant facade
we buy to wrap
our common lives.