

Claire Guyton

Three Things

She left three things behind.

The rings, I understand. On a scarlet dinner napkin—from the set we used for Christmas, when she folded the fabric to look like poinsettias, each rising from the center of a bone-white plate. Now just this one, flat square of cloth, blood against the rings, laid at her place at the table. The diamond glitters in the low light of sunset. The plain gold band hardly looks like it would fit a finger, molded, as it is, to the shape of an egg. So thin at the pointy bottom.

And I get why she left the shoes. I splurged years ago for her birthday, Italian leather, hand-stitched, heels impossibly high. For Valentine's Day, on our anniversary, any Big Day—wearing those shoes was shorthand for romance. She'd parked them on the lid of the recycling bin. One had fallen over, the strap splayed out like a lolling tongue.

Here's what I don't get: her umbrella. Open, of all things, and hung upside down by its strap from the light fixture in the center of the living room.

It will never rain where I'm going, is that what she's trying to say? Is it a reference to the old saw that an umbrella opened indoors brings bad luck, and that—the worst, blackest luck—is what she wants for me?

Or is this simply a last, whimsical act as Conductor?

Up, she says, with her stick, up here, and hold ... hold ... Stare, she says, train your baffled eyes on this ridiculous object, at the curved spines and taut purple fabric, this useless tented bowl. Like a good boy, always the good boy, I do, I stare, my neck beginning to cramp, my eyes blurring. Until I run out of the air holding this note of her absence, I will be unable to walk away from the shadow this thing casts, and yet equally unable to reach out, take hold of it, and pull it down.

Pull it down? But why? Like an open flower, isn't it, collecting, at its center, a small, silk-petaled peace?