

The Hand-Me-Down Secrets of a Red Skirt

by Patricia Sykes

**O my wardrobes
Centuries of designs**

**Sacred prostitute
to sex goddess
to drag queen
to opportunity shop**

**cotton field whips
stripping labouring backs
for the red dyes
of blood**

**rolls and rolls of me
turning the looms
in my grandfathers' mills**

**my family history
is shaped with scissors**

**bibles without begats
to tell which branch
decapitated the candles
in the cottage industry**

**the bias cuts of new trends
have me roaring off-shore
from tiger economies**

I'm dancing, I'm dancing

**I've cartwheeled
with circus breasts
across all the continents**

**how many flags I've flown
in support of ringmasters
how many banners
in protest against them!**

O my gorgeous revolutions!

**One of my lovers
Used me to clean
His guerilla rifle**

**When he was killed
I shot the enemy myself**

**My mother stitched her finger
To the sewing machine
In the altering of me
—it's the lest of our bloods
now she is rheumatic
and in need of red flannel**

**so what if this
is an age of trousers?
I've found myself
an orphan in a storm**

**what might she become
with my mouth
around her waist?**

**You are not the first
I warn her**

You are not the first

