

## **Grandmother's shoes**

### **Elizabeth Shove**

I hated dismantling the material remains of Mum's life, but it had to be done. I had emptied most of the house and there was just the loft to do. I found the battered cardboard box up there, next to the chimney and covered in cobwebs. I brushed off the dust and lifted the lid, not knowing what I would find.

The box contained a pair of well-worn shoes and a set of toe clips. My heart raced. Gran! These must be Gran's shoes from the days when she was a champion cyclist. Unknown to anyone, Mum had kept them all this time.

The reddish-brown leather was still in good condition, moulded by the shape of Gran's feet. I fingered the creases. Gran died before I was born, but I had seen the cupboards full of medals and trophies that she had won. Mum had given the entire collection to the National Museum of Women Cyclists, but for some reason she'd kept the shoes. I wondered why. My mother was not in the least bit sentimental and although she got on well with her father, Gran was known to be a difficult woman.

Now Gran and Mum were gone. Mum's house was sold and everything had to be cleared. I carried on with my work, but I put the shoe box and its contents to one side. When the weather improved, I'd fix the toe clips on my bike and if the shoes fitted, I'd put them on and go for a ride.

Gran must have been just my size: it was as if her shoes had been made for me. It was a glorious morning when I set off through the open countryside. The primroses were already out in the ditches and the birds were singing. I sped along, exhilarated by the exercise and the fresh air.

I was about half a mile from home when I realised that something was up. I felt a strange sensation in my feet, not exactly a tingling but something like it. It was as if the shoes were gripping me, relentlessly propelling my legs round and round. The fields and trees flashed by, faster and faster. I glanced down at my bike computer and it was then that I began to panic. I was going at thirty miles an hour - something I'd never done before. The road was straight and empty but at that speed I'd have no chance if a car came the other way. I pulled on the brakes, but nothing happened. I squeezed and squeezed and eventually came to a juddering halt. I got off, trembling and shaken.

I leant the bike against a stone wall and looked at Gran's shoes. The early sunshine had gone, and there was a chill wind. I shivered, overcome with strange feelings about my family and my footwear. Gran had held the regional time trial record for more than two decades, beating anyone who tried to catch her. She didn't care about the prizes, but she was competitive to the core, or so I'd been told.

But what if it was the shoes? Did they have magical powers and was that the secret of Gran's success? I don't believe in fairy stories but in this case, I couldn't be sure. I undid the laces and inspected the shoes: first the left and then the right. They looked normal enough.

Sorting out Mum's belongings had been a powerful reminder of the fact that the lives of objects are entangled with the lives of those who own them. What if Gran's achievements had been etched into the leather, along with the creases. What if the shoes had taken on her spirit and determination and what if I was the one who was possessed? The thought of being a hybrid monster, part Gran, part shoe, part me, was terrifying but at the same time strangely comforting.

There was no getting away from it, I *was* an amalgam of overlapping histories. My mood lifted. I got back on the bike and set off again, knowing that Gran was with me, and knowing why Mum had kept the cardboard box and the secrets that it contained.

Back home, Adam, my boyfriend, was sitting on the sofa, checking his phone. 'Did you have a good spin?' he asked. 'Yes' I replied. 'It was quite a journey'.

