

Triptych III
The Night Sewists

Scene 1

A cozy living room. The fireplace is really just a video screen, and the furniture is both cozy and high-tech. An older woman (SOPHIE) and a young girl (LIZZIE) are sharing a couch, while watching a movie on a different monitor. As the credits roll, SOPHIE deactivates the entertainment system.

SOPHIE: Well, that was fun. Did you like the movie?

LIZZIE: I liked the clothes. We don't have a lot of clothes like that now-a-days. We just have school uniforms and everything else fits everyone the same.

SOPHIE: We used to dress a lot differently, you're right.

LIZZIE: Like Jo March, in the movie?

SOPHIE: No... not quite. People did dress like that, but it was a long time before you were born.

LIZZIE: What about when you were little?

SOPHIE: Well, I was part of the Denim Generation. We lived in jeans. T-shirts and jeans, sweaters and jeans, tank tops and jeans. Sometimes we even put dresses over jeans... but whatever we wore it expressed who we were.

LIZZIE: What changed?

SOPHIE: Well, when I was a little older than you, our world was in turmoil. We had all different governments and none of them really knew how to take care of increasingly diverse populations. People grew up fearing the onset of World War III, but it wasn't until the late 2020's that anyone realized *that* war had been happening for decades, but since it didn't have formal battlefields or bands of allies working together – since it didn't *look* like an old-school war, no one put it together.

LIZZIE: And then there was the Great Unification. We learned about it in school.

SOPHIE: Exactly. But in order to get to the point where we had a OneWorld government, there were a lot of horrible things that happened. Textiles like cotton and silk and linen became rare, partly because the people who made synthetics were waging financial war with the people who cultivated organics, and partly because so many people couldn't afford to buy well-made goods.

LIZZIE: They wanted everyone in uniforms.

SOPHIE: They did, but the people didn't want that. Still the trend was toward drab, simple clothing that didn't make you stand out. (beat) Are you comprehending all this, Lizzie? If it's boring - ?

LIZZIE: It's *not*.

SOPHIE: Anyway, people were in pain. And drab, boring clothing that looked like everyone else was how people expressed their pain. Eventually the OneWorld government was voted into power, but we still lived with severe austerity measures.

LIZZIE: Austerity?

SOPHIE: It means we learned to live with only the most basic needs.

LIZZIE: That's sad.

SOPHIE: I agree. But... it wasn't like that forever. By 2031, we had the Night Sewists.

LIZZIE: Knights who sew?

SOPHIE: (chuckling) No, not knights in armor, night like nighttime. The Night Sewists were a group of women who had grown up doing handicrafts - sewing clothing, doing embroidery, making quilts... all sorts of things you could do with a needle and thread and fabric.

LIZZIE: Why the *night* sewists, though. Were they vampires?

SOPHIE: Hardly. They called themselves that because when the Replication Mandates came out – the rules requiring that we replicate our clothing and housewares instead of buying them – they could only sew at night.

LIZZIE: In the dark?

SOPHIE: Not quite. They had to hide their sewing machines and quilting frames, but they typically did that by building secret rooms in their houses, or carving out space in closets and bedrooms. If one woman had a lot of space, she would let her friends keep their machines with her.

LIZZIE: Like a club!

SOPHIE: Yes, except it was secret. They would keep track of where to buy fabric and supplies, and their husbands and partners would often help obtain things.

LIZZIE: Did they sew only at night?

SOPHIE: Not *only*, but mostly. They had to work when no one would notice. They disguised their sewing circles as book clubs and yoga groups. And at first they would only sew for themselves, but they realized that wasn't fulfilling.

LIZZIE: So they made things for other people?

SOPHIE: They did! They started with little things... a little girl might wake up in the morning to find a set of doll's clothes on the foot of her bed. Or a little boy might find his beloved teddy bear had been fixed up.

LIZZIE: Like elves. Sewing elves.

SOPHIE: Sort of. But they also took note of people in need. If a family didn't have enough replicator rations to get new school uniforms for their kids, the Night Sewists would get together and make them. If there was a young woman going to her first formal dance, the Night Sewists would provide a dress for her.

LIZZIE: That's so cool!

SOPHIE: It *is* cool. After a while, the Night Sewists would offer invitations to the people they'd gifted with clothing. They would be invited into the circle and into the secret.

LIZZIE: Boys too?

SOPHIE: Of course. In fact, one of the Night Sewist's best knitters was a young man named Jeremy.

LIZZIE: That's Daddy's name! (peering at SOPHIE) Mommy, are you and Daddy Night Sewists?

SOPHIE: If I tell you will you keep our secret?

LIZZIE: I promise.

SOPHIE: I never wanted to sew or embroider or knit or make quilts when I was your age, but my grandmother – your great-grandmother Eliza – you're named after her – my grandmother would come and spend time with us, and her quilting friends would come over to work on their projects. Your Grandma Kate was one of them, but she didn't do a lot... and eventually, they told me about the ritual and drew me in.

LIZZIE: Ritual?

SOPHIE: Every handmade piece, whether it's art or clothing or a quilt has a bit of the essence of the person who made it. Usually it's just a pinprick of blood – an accident caused by sticking your finger with a needle – and the stain washes out, but the essence stays.

LIZZIE: Why do they do it?

SOPHIE: Originally, it was a way of including intent – love, safety, peace, happiness, into whatever was being made. Later, it became a way to say, "we were here, we made this thing. It's not some prefabricated computer-generated *thing*."

LIZZIE: Ohhh. I like it.

SOPHIE: Sewists are quite subversive.

LIZZIE: Can I be one? A Night Sewist?

SOPHIE: You think you're ready for it?

LIZZIE: I do.

SOPHIE: Then let's get you acquainted with the sewing room. Come.

Sophie and Lizzie exit the stage. As the curtain goes down, we hear the sound of an electric sewing machine whirring into action, and the voice of Lizzie:

LIZZIE (v/o) Mom, this is magic. You make MAGIC in this room!

Blackout.