FLASH FICTION

Everything Finds Its Tin

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"Runny Eye" by Anna Kohlweis

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How alike they are: biscuits and threads, needles and butter, loneliness and sugar, boxes and houses. Tights clumped together resemble feelings, tangled and held together by holes.

I had a drawer full of them, each hole expanding into the other; I needed them mended by the afternoon.

“So, to mend my tights, I must get the biscuit tin?” I asked.

“To mend your tights, you need a needle as subtle as blood,” my grandmother answered.

“And where do I find a needle as subtle as blood,” I asked.

“Where else? In the heart,” she said.

For a moment, I stood still and thought of my poor heart as if a needle were already moving through it. Then I noticed my grandmother walking toward her drawer, reaching into it, and pulling out a tin. She sat beside me with the tin on her lap and opened it. There it was. A heart. Red, bloody and soft as a cushion. Three needles were pinned into it.

“Don't think about it too much,” said my grandmother. “It happens. We needed somewhere to pin the needles. It is far worse to lose one. If a needle is lost, it finds you and there is nothing worse than a needle finding you.”

But I couldn’t understand what could be worse than turning your heart into a pincushion.

“It finds you and travels through your blood; it becomes a journey, a silver fish in a current thinning and silvering into a dagger’s edge, reaching you. Don’t let it roam. Pin it, pin it onto your heart!”

I looked down at my tights, at the holes of different shapes. I reached out, took a needle from the heart, and began to mend. But as I was trying to pass the thread through the needle, it slipped. It fell onto the carpet and disappeared between the fibers. There were things in the house that seemed to hide without going anywhere.

My grandmother looked at me with terror in her eyes.

“Harm happens all of a sudden,” she said. “We need to sift the carpet. We need to sift the moment.”

Her white hair was now two long antennae. She was bowed down toward the carpet, moving in slow, sweeping circles, searching for the needle among the fibers. Had she always been like this?

I watched her from the sofa. The carpet looked like it was breathing through her movements as the afternoon hid away the openness of the drawer. The holes in my tights looked surprised.

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I, too, had hidden a needle in my heart.

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