

The Nearest Thing

Magic isn't real, or answered prayers, but the urge
to protect the young is a truth I pin to my coat,
on the day a blue Miraculous Medal of the Virgin Mary
falls out of an old tin of pins belonging to my mother,
shaken from the leavings of the dead generations
just before my grandson is ready to be born –

probably the very talisman she fastened
to the lining of my little sister's dressing-gown,
that I coveted for its embroidered pictures
of the trademark ladybird and a white rabbit
holding an orange leafy carrot, a tiny garment
bought specially for the city cardiac ward
where they would mend the holes
in my sister's two-year-old heart,
which our mother said was just
like sewing up the ripped seam in my teddy
to keep his kapok stuffing in his chest –

a new operation that would open up the child
as if parting the shell of a soft-boiled egg
to lift the top off, leaving stitch marks
to zigzag right around her like a closed zip
half-circling her from sternum to spine,
enlarging as she grew into her life,
maintaining its seal while she danced, studied,
worked, walked the dog, and laboured
to birth two babies, a certain miracle.

Gráinne Tobin

from **Brooksong and Shadows**

Otterton and the Great War

xvi) High Peak Camp

Parish crown:
it rusts the skyline,
its brushwood signals home.

She stoops among the pine scent
carding soil. How fine
these ruffle marks, knapped flint.

Layers, loam, particulate.
The struck flakes fall
as if we've always pared the dark,
flints nested in firelight

more drawn to warmth than war –
this charcoal smear,
this crab-apple tang, oak char.

Earth-camp
draw your arc around us.
Fir cones' crackle,
starlit shawl.

High Peak Camp – excavated by
archaeologist Sheila Pollard

Lynne Wycherley