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BJ Thomason

DRESSES ON THE LINE

(In response to: 'On the line' by Janet Goldman - linocut)

We didn't understand the value of money
or what it meant to be 'broke', until later
in life, when as adults, we turned a page
and saw for ourselves the connotations
of collected coins in our Hubbard's pantry.

At almost fifty, my sister, in a voice
that alluded to shock, said, *we were poor*.
The rhetorical question hung about, broken
up by busy thoughts; what moment had it come
to *me* in this brown paper bag of breadcrumbs?

Not, when a new bike appeared at Christmas,
with floral seat, aflutter with pink tassels
and bright paint, smelling of fresh vinyl,
mixed with the waft of roasted lamb,
brandied fruit cake, and after dinner mints.

Never, when our seven little heads collided
over the last scone as it emerged from a hot
wood-fired oven in the middle of summer,
smeared with home-made butter, and apricot jam;
the odd kernel to kick in with bitter-sweet.

It never did make sense. The words
because I said so were not uttered from a mean
mother, but a sorry one who didn't know how
to say; *no money for your Brownie camp, or new
shoes or party dress*. How I cried, over practical.

We saw our mother agonise over warp and weave,
pulling cheap fabric through the Singer,
pumping stitches, peering half-blind in yellow light;
we heard her yelp as a broken needle crunched
a ragged hole. Or tore into scraps of flesh.