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Sestina, Great Aunt Kate

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SESTINA, GREAT AUNT KATE

My Great Aunt Kate never spoke of the sea.
She'd just sit quietly, knitting,
Available to talk to any child
Who wanted attention. She didn't like screaming
Children. She believed you could reason
With them. We all knew this about Kate.

But when she was young, Aunt Kate
Married a Scotsman who shipped her across the sea
To his home in Scotland during World War I. The reason
For the move was his desire to imagine her knitting
By the window in his childhood home, far from screaming
Bombs. His parents could help her with baby and child.

Illness came, and the baby died. But the child
Recovered. Money was tight, so resourceful Kate
Took a job. Being busy kept her from screaming
In agony, over her loss. Across the sea,
In Canada, her family hoped knitting,
Mothering, and factory work would save Kate's reason.

Without a new emergency as reason
To keep him home, her husband had to leave child
And wife, and go into battle. At night, she sat knitting
Thick socks to send him. At work, Kate
Grew distracted, thinking of him fighting across the sea.
Preoccupied, she slipped. Horrified workers ran to her, screaming.

Blood covered her hands, as she fell to the floor. Screaming,
Kate saw that whirling blades were the reason
For her pain. All her fingers were gone. A sea
Of despair washed over her. Then she thought of her child
And willed herself to gain control. This was Kate.
In time, she recovered; even resumed her knitting.

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SESTINA, GREAT AUNT KATE

As a child, I watched her knitting,
Using thumbs and stubs of index fingers. Screaming
Children grew quiet at this sight. Kate
Waited, knowing they would ask the reason
For her missing fingers. She told each child
The truth, but never mentioned her journey across the sea.

But, on quiet nights, while knitting, she was haunted by the reason
For her silence: cavalry horses screaming on a burning ship at night; the child
Clinging tightly to his mother, Kate, as subs stalked their convoy across the deadly sea.

— *Sandra Penrose*

LONELY

The favorite bear
loved
dearly
hugged
into near
non-existence
and
missing
an eye.
Overlooked
in the adult bustle
of leaving.
Now sleeping
on a plane seat
on the other side of the earth.

— *Jo-Ann Ledger*