

The Button Moon

Every surface in my grandmother's bedroom had a job. The nightstand held tissues and a glass of water and the remote. The armchair held a sweater she was knitting for nobody. The dresser held the button jar.

It was a pickle jar, washed so clean you could still read the ghost of the word bread in the glass. She'd pour the buttons out onto the lace runner — white ones, brown ones, brass ones, the little mother-of-pearl ones that looked like they'd fallen off a doll's coat. Two holes, four holes, the ones with the shank on the back like a secret hinge you couldn't unpick.

She sorted them by color. Then by size. Then back into the jar.

I watched her do this once. She held up a white button, four-hole, nothing special, and turned it to the window until it caught the sun on its rim.

"Been looking for this one thirty-two years."

She dropped it back in.

The jar is still there. The lace runner yellowed. No one in the house knows what to do with a button sorted thirty-two years.