The Size of a Pinhead

By Jenny Hale

I was fourteen
when I learned
how small a girl can make herself.

Not disappear—
that comes later—
but compress.
Condense.
Fold inward
until the pain fits
in the size of a pinhead.

You were busy then.
Men, mostly.
Your life arriving in loud, urgent parcels
that took up all the room
in the house
and in you.

I learned to hover.
To wait.
To read the weather
in your footsteps.

(This is not the same as love,
I would later learn.)

I learned that being good
meant being quiet.
That being loved
meant not needing.

That my feelings—
raw, adolescent, untrained—
were an inconvenience
best packed away
behind my ribs.

So I did.

I became small.
Smaller than my anger.
Smaller than my grief.

Smaller than the ache
that throbbed behind my eyes
when I realized
you were not coming back
to get me.

Not really.

You were the best mother
until you weren't.
And no one tells you
what to do with that sentence
once it's true.

I carried it with me—
that pinhead of pain—
through lovers,
through marriages,
through rooms where I pretended
to be whole.

It never grew.
It didn't need to.
It just stayed—
sharp,
precise,
waiting.

Consider this my confession:
I survived you.
But some nights
I still roll that tiny point
between my fingers
and wonder
how something so small
can still draw blood.