

The Darning Needle

Hans Christian Andersen

Once upon a time there was a darning needle who imagined she was so fine that she really was a sewing needle.

"Be careful and hold me tightly!" she warned the fingers that picked her up. "Don't drop me! If I fall on the floor you may never find me again; that's how fine I am!"

"That's what you think!" replied the fingers, and squeezed her around the waist.

"Look, here I come with my train!" said the darning needle, and she drew a long thread behind her, but there was no knot in the thread.

The fingers aimed the needle straight at the cook's slipper, where the upper leather had burst and had to be sewed together.

"My! What vulgar work!" sniffed the darning needle. "I'll never get through! Look out! I'm breaking! I'm breaking in two." And just then she did break. "I told you so," she said. "I'm much too delicate!"

"Well, she's no good now," thought the fingers, but they had to hold on to her all the same. For the cook dropped a little sealing wax on the end of the needle to make a head, and then she pinned her kerchief together with it in front.

"Look! Now I'm a breastpin," said the needle. "I knew perfectly well I'd be honored. If you are something you always amount to something."

Then she laughed, but it was inwardly, because no one can ever really see a darning needle laugh. There she sat on the cook's bosom, proud as if she were in a state coach, and looked all around her.

"May I be permitted to inquire if you're made of gold?" she very politely asked a little pin near her. "You look pretty, and you have a head of your own, but it's rather small. You must be careful to grow bigger. Not everyone can have sealing wax on one end like me!"

Then the darning needle drew herself up so proudly that she fell right out of the kerchief into the sink, at the very moment the cook was rinsing it out.

"Looks now as if we are off on a journey," she said to herself. "Let's hope I don't get lost." But she really was lost down the drain.

"I'm too fine for this world," she observed calmly as she lay in the gutter outside. "But I know who I am, and that's always a satisfaction." So the darning needle was still proud, and she never lost her good humor. She watched the many strange things floating above her-chips and straws and pieces of old newspapers.

"Look at them sail!" she said to herself. "They don't know what's down below them! Here I sit! I can sting! Look at that stick go, thinking of nothing in the world but himself-a stick! And that's exactly what he is! And there's a straw floating by; look at him twist and look how he turns! You'd better not think so much about yourself up there! You'll run into the curb! There goes a newspaper. Everybody has forgotten what was written on it, but still it spreads itself out, while I sit quietly down here below. I know who I am, and I shall never forget it!"

One day the darning needle saw something beside her that glittered splendidly in the sunbeams. It was only a bit of broken bottle, but because the darning needle was quite sure it was something valuable like a diamond she spoke to it, introducing herself as a breastpin.

"I suppose you're a diamond?" she asked.

"Yes, something like that," was the reply.

Then, since each thought the other was very important, they began talking about the world, and how conceited everyone was.

"I used to live in a lady's case," said the darning needle. "And this lady was a cook. On each hand she had five fingers, and you never saw anything so conceited as those five fingers! And yet they were only there so that they could hold me, take me out of my case, and put me back into it."

"Did they shine?" asked the bit of bottle glass.

"Shine? Not at all," said the darning needle. "They were arrogant. There were five brothers, all belonging to the Finger family, and they kept close together, although they were all of different lengths. The one on the outside, Thumbling, who walked out in front of the others, was short and fat and had only one joint in his back, so he could only make a single bow. But he insisted that if he were cut off a person's hand, that person could not be a soldier. Lickpot, the second one, pushed himself into sweet and sour, and pointed at the sun and the moon, and it was he who pressed on the pen when they wrote. Longman, the third, looked over the heads of the others. Guldbrand was the fourth—he always wore a golden belt around his waist. And little Peter Playfellow didn't do anything at all, and was very proud of it. They did nothing but brag all the time; that's why I went down the sink."

"And now we just sit here and glitter," said the bit of broken bottle. But just then a flood of water came rushing down the gutter so that it overflowed and swept the bottle glass away.

"See now! He's been promoted," remarked the darning needle, "but I'm still here. I'm too fine for that sort of thing. But that's my pride, and that is very commendable!" So she sat up straight, lost in many big thoughts. "I almost think I was born a sunbeam, I'm so fine; besides, the sunbeams always seem to be trying to get to me, under the water. I'm so fine that even my mother can't find me. If I had my old eye, the one that broke off, I think I might cry about that. But no! I think I wouldn't cry anyway; it's not at all refined to cry."

One day some street boys were grubbing in the gutter, looking for coins and things of that sort. It was filthy work, but they were having a wonderful time.

"Ouch!" one cried as he pricked himself on the darning needle. "You're a pretty sharp fellow!"

"I'm not a fellow; I'm a young lady," replied the darning needle. But of course they couldn't hear her.

Her sealing wax had come off, and she had turned black; but black always makes you look more slender, and she was sure she was even finer than before.

"Look!" cried the boys. "Here comes an eggshell sailing along," And they stuck the darning needle fast into the shell.

"White walls, and I am black myself!" cried the darning needle. "That's very becoming! People can really see me now! I only hope I'm not seasick; that would surely break me!" But she wasn't seasick, and she did not break. "It's a very good protection against seasickness to have a steel stomach and to remember that one is a little finer than ordinary human beings. Oh, yes! I'm all right. The finer you are, the more you can bear."

"Crack!" went the eggshell at that moment, for a heavily loaded wagon ran over it.

"Goodness, I'm being crushed!" cried the darning needle. "I'm going to get really seasick now! I'm breaking! I'm breaking!" But she didn't break, though the wagon went over her; she lay at full length along the cobblestones, and there we'll leave her.