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My Grandmother's House

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My Grandmother's House

"I couldn't find walnuts in the shell anywhere,"
are her first words to me.
My husband cannot understand the tragedy
of my grandmother's greeting.
He cannot see the fat little girl
run into the house
and go straight to the pewter dish
with the little squirrel sitting on the edge
greedily filling its cheeks with the nut's meat.
He cannot see the fat little girl
sitting on the floor cracking walnuts
as the conversation of adults floats above her.
He would rather not be bothered with nutcrackers.
He prefers to eat the meats by the handful.
He does not understand the challenge
of getting the meat out unbroken,
of placing the perfect halves in lines
or the pleasure of distributing
them to uncles and aunts and grandparents.

At night when I cannot sleep I leave
his snoring and go down to the silence
of my grandmother's livingroom.
There on the table next to my wedding picture
sits the dish and the squirrel
still eating the same nut.
Holding a broken walnut meat in my hand
in the semi-darkness I am unsure
whether I should laugh or cry.

Karen J. Hall