

Nut salvation

by [Anya Silver](#) in the [November 28, 2012](#) issue

In the crate of ornaments not to be touched,  
rested in cotton my mother's golden walnuts:  
glass, thinner than egg shells, easily shattered.  
She hung them from the boughs herself.

Real nuts, we ate on Advent evenings,  
sitting round the burning wreath, cracking  
hazelnuts and almonds, peeling tangerines.  
My father split the walnuts single-handed,  
then let us root out gnarled halves and pieces.  
Each nut, a mystery beneath its sealed shell.

*I hate mysteries*, my son proclaims one day.  
And yet, he sits all season snapping nuts,  
gathering pecans from the back lawn,  
separating the green and black or gnawed.

The tools—a toothed and silver hinge, a screw  
and lever, assorted picks—he places on the table.  
Some of the harvested will be rotten, some unripe.  
The best emerge from cocoons as rich as butter,  
most in shards and others whole. All of these  
will be put to use in pies and bread.

He works quietly, entirely focused on the task.  
On the oilcloth, a pile of husks easily swept away,  
and the delight of knowledge, gleaming brown  
and full of grace as a new pair of shoes.