

ERIN NOTEBOOM

## Not a Tragedy

She takes the tin of green beans  
into the shut heat of the bedroom.  
She has stolen them. Her hands are tight.  
Opening the tin will be the end  
of all her blessings. Her little family  
is asleep on the screenless porch—  
two babies, her husband too sick to stand.  
The heat holds them heavy.  
Even dog has grown so dull  
he only lifts his narrow jaws a little  
from the patience of his paws.

She has put on her best skirt  
and walked eight miles into town—  
through ruined crops and tall-grass scutch,  
in a bad year for grasshoppers,  
at the end of the Dust. The county clerk  
assigns relief work, tinning green beans.  
The August sun billows through plain windows.  
The day boils on and the light thickens  
to honey, goes red, goes sea-green, grey. Grey  
with dust and charity, she walks home.  
The scorched corn creaks into darkness.

She opens the tin and sees it—a grasshopper—  
tough and brown-yellow as a bad bean,  
long as bad luck, fat and shelled and jointed.  
The next morning the black blizzard  
slams up against the northwest wall.  
By midday it is so dark she lights the lamp  
above the supper table. She bows her head  
above the bread without butter,  
the beautiful green beans. As if on a ship  
far out to sea, the lamp  
sways. She prays. Tomorrow  
falls the long slow blessing of the rain.

My grandmother. The beginning  
of the story.