

## The Old Man and the Beanstalk

Three beans in the clay pot,  
one for each hope left to the old man.  
A week passes with soil still bare,  
watered by thick hands,  
until the morning a single stalk  
bends its neck to the sun.

Noon. He waits for his son,  
beef stew cooking in the pot,  
rises, once, to check the slight, green stalk.  
The night smells of burnt onion. The man  
does not eat and the door handle  
does not turn, too shy to bear

his steadfast gaze and bare  
itself in turn. The morning sun  
unrolls its slow heat a handbreath  
across the sill, limns the clay pot  
and the table where the old man  
sleeps, restless. The beanstalk

seems no bigger, lacks more stalks  
for context. Dream bares  
its throat to waking. The man  
finds a brief message from his son,  
who is sorry he forgot. A pot  
of coffee later, the shaking in his hands

has faded. He soaks the soil in handfuls  
of water, tender of the brown stalk.  
He is sorry he let the pot  
dry. A story then, low-voiced, of a bare  
field that grew a sturdy beanstalk and a son  
who climbed it and became a man,

or maybe a thief. Where is a man  
who can reach that high, hands  
giving instead of taking? Too much sun—  
the old man is baked as dry as the stalk.  
He spills out two dead beans, the stalk and the barren  
earth, then walks away from the empty pot.

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