Kernels

by David J. Rothman

When you told me about his whistling belt
And your cruel stepmother, who placed each kernel
On the hard floor then made you kneel, I felt
Like I had wandered into some infernal
Fairy tale. But it was real. How strange:
To sit in your calm home, crisp autumn light,
Jazz, coffee, hearing that. Failure to grieve
Can freeze what frees us up. I’m sure you’re right
To try to let it go. And I believe
You have. What strength it takes to be that story,
See it clear, then give it up, conceive
It now as a mere childhood allegory.
You did the brave thing, learning how to live.
But me? They hurt a child. I don’t forgive.

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