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.