

The Walnut

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Consider the walnut

its crenellation, its meat
like a miniature human brain
that you chew; a nut
that imitates a cerebellum.

Consider the flesh of the brain

which you will never see
except as splotches of color
on a CAT scan prior to diagnosis
of cancer, if you are diagnosed
with brain cancer, or are, instead,
told that your headaches,
stress related, can be controlled.

Consider how the flesh of the brain

responds to the positive news
that today you have not been told
that you will surely die,
though some people, a lucky few,
do, in fact, survive brain cancer
but not the daughter of a colleague
who withered away after months,
eighteen to be exact, of various treatments

and you had coffee with him,
 her father, and watched him cry
 every Friday between sips
 over the fact that he would outlive
 his darling, his beautiful darling,
 only twenty-eight, and a nurse,
 if you can believe so much in Fate.

Consider the softness of the brain exposed
 how it was the spikes driven
 into her head, the ones that shoot
 streams of radioactive chemicals
 to kill the tumor and the person, too.
 He could not stop visualizing
 the spikes, like a weird punk hairdo,
 in his own brain. A type of crying, too.

Consider the walnut cracked open
 two halves, broken, bicameral,
 like consciousness is broken
 when we cry, when we think
 and feel simultaneously, when
 we thank something called God
 (whose brain we cannot envision)
 that we are not dead, though
 we can watch someone wish
 he could die, could give his life
 in place of his daughter's.

Consider the taste of the walnut
slightly bitter, not as bitter
as the father's view of life
at this moment, crying and
alone with Fate. The walnut
flesh softly breaks in your mouth,
the earthy tang deepens
as you chew the meat;
it sweetens slowly, you swallow,
instinctively reach for a glass
of Montepulciano to complement
the subtle, nutty taste, a combination
that soothes your brain, which,
had it been cracked open
and closely inspected,
would not look like meat
of a walnut at all, but would
look like a hardened mass of gray,
crenellated clay folds, inedible,
except to other animals, maybe,
though gourmands eat the brains
of certain ruminants, would taste
like nothing, which no doubt is
how the coffee tastes to the father
whose quiet tears have not stopped
and who stares straight at you
to ask the unanswerable, "Why?"