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Q. Woodward

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The Fruitcake I Bury in My Backyard Each January



Q. Woodward

I can't tell her no, so she brings the same thing every year. "Oh, Grandma," I say, "you shouldn't have." It is the only truth I speak all week. She settles into my rocking chair, and I set the heavy block beside the microwave to sit in its plastic shroud for seven days—seven slow days until she leaves. Every night at dinner she mentions it. I feign deafness. She persists. "We've just had so many sweets lately," I conjure. "Besides, we want to save it all for ourselves"—as if our greed for her gift were boundless.

Her car rolls out of the driveway, and I crouch beside my back porch, digging the eighth identical, tiny grave alongside the last seven years' unmarked martyrs. I wonder if their rubber-fruit skeletons are still resting beneath the hard winter earth, and if, when Grandma goes the way of all fruitcake, she'll meet the ghosts of her offerings and learn the secret of my annual wake.

One day, when my mother begins bringing my children the same Christmas curse, Grandma will soar through the sky to my home, float above the row of stockings hanging from my mantle, and cast an angel's spell of hardened dates and bitter nuts upon my calloused heart.