

Charles Harper Webb

PFEFFERNUSSE

I want to hoard the season's last one
the way Mark Twain, suicidal in San Fran,
gripped his last dime so that he wouldn't die

dead broke. But time turns cookies hard.
Their flavor wastes away. With every
hour, less pleasure waits. Still, I hesitate

while my tuna sandwich, which the pfeffernusse
would cap perfectly, churns through
my stomach like a ferry crossing the Rhine

to Switzerland. 1939. Otto the baker—
Jewish on his mother's side—
has taken his friend Dieter's advice.

His children wail. They'll never see
their pals again. His wife, Greta, weeps
for their parents, who swear the Nazi

mishugas can't last. Now, home
receding, Otto opens a box he packed
for their trip: pfeffernusse, two each

for Greta, both children, and him.
He will bake them, his little peppernuts,
in the new place, the U.S.A. These are the last,

though, from the Deutscheland he loved.
How good they taste, how soft and sweet,
with just a dash of clove, a touch of rue.

