



## Sand in a Cup

Norbert Kovacs

My grandmother collected grains of sand and kept them in a cup on a book shelf. She got each grain from a different place. One from a beach she had walked at sunset. Another from a shady lane ambled with my grandfather. Yet another by a laurel she discovered blooming in the hills. She sifted the grains in her cup with a gold stylus, a memento, she had at the ready on the same shelf. Her blue eyes wide over the cup, she studied the shifting sand and spoke, believing her phrases held true and good. "His heart is in the right," she said once when I told her about a friend who suffered. "We should cross the river *there*," she announced at news of our coming family trip. "Take care when you go forward," she said of my leaving for college and set the cup on the shelf squarely again.

My grandmother admitted that speaking by her sand had its troubles. Sometimes, the grains took her down dark paths from which she turned and fled. She believed a companion who would turn out to dissemble and break her trust. My grandmother added new grains to right the sand when this happened and trusted it a remedy. She never dumped the cup as if to pretend its sand had not guided her well the many times it did: she remembered too easily. At other moments, she believed the sand off; it gave her words a plenty but not confidence. She stirred the sand differently then to see better into its corners. Often, this made it more sound to her. Fuller. Deeper. There were occasions, though, when she drew a blank over the grains. The sand would appear so many loose bits in their pile. She waited then, studying the cup's insides long, hoping. She actually could gain an answer this way. As some grain tumbled or the wind from the open window sped inside the cup, she saw the sand run; a flicker of faith would seize her and she felt she could speak honestly once more.

You might call it odd that my grandmother consulted a cup of sand over her many questions. It was, after all, a small handful taken from the whole, great world. However, those grains were hers, a statement that she was *of* the world but not *it*. The cup that held them was a world for her, in fact. So she found a path in her cup. She saw her course forward in the grains that shifted with her touch. Her sand was as good enough refuge and guide, I think, as might be in this impersonal universe.



**About the Author:** Norbert Kovacs lives and writes in Hartford, Connecticut. His stories have appeared or soon will appear in *Thrice Fiction*, *Westview*, *Squawk Back*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, and *FIVE:2:ONE's #thesideshow*. Norbert's website is [here](http://www.norbertkovacs.net). (<http://www.norbertkovacs.net>)

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