

Elizabeth Bishop, *Sestina*

September rain falls on the house.  
In the failing light, the old grandmother  
sits in the kitchen with the child  
beside the Little Marvel Stove,  
reading the jokes from the almanac,  
laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears  
and the rain that beats on the roof of the house  
were both foretold by the almanac,  
but only known to a grandmother.  
The iron kettle sings on the stove.  
She cuts some bread and says to the child,

It's time for tea now; but the child  
is watching the teakettle's small hard tears  
dance like mad on the hot black stove,  
the way the rain must dance on the house.  
Tidying up, the old grandmother  
hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac  
hovers half open above the child,  
hovers above the old grandmother  
and her teacup full of dark brown tears.  
She shivers and says she thinks the house  
feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove.  
I know what I know, says the almanac.  
With crayons the child draws a rigid house  
and a winding pathway. Then the child  
puts in a man with buttons like tears  
and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

But secretly, while the grandmother  
busies herself about the stove,  
the little moons fall down like tears  
from between the pages of the almanac  
into the flower bed the child  
has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.  
The grandmother sings to the marvelous stove  
and the child draws another inscrutable house.