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PYTHAGORAS' NIGHTMARE

Once all his calculations came out
like peas. You could pop them
whole from the pod, perfect spheres.
And they were sweet. The number two
tasted the way deep fields taste
after rain. You could take the trees
apart, find godlike shapes
if you didn't look too hard,
which is why I feel sorry for
Pythagoras: he tried to take a pure
square apart, he was tinkering
around too much. One hard look
at the diagonal, and it was too
late: the quality of light
had already changed. It lent the wind
forbidden possibilities, the clouds
this odd, this brooding weight;
for the diagonal was the square root
of Two, and what Two was made of—
this hard, sweet pea—what all
these leaves, these animals and clouds,
the sun, even these ugly dreams
he'd been having recently at night
were made of, would not add up.
The harder you tried to add them
up, the finer they became, the faster
they sifted through your fingers,
the incommensurable parts of everything.