For Dodie
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I. As if a God Had Ripped the Sundown
Remember

that morning
in the desert
when the sun
was a slice
of tangerine?
When we chewed
honeycombs,
our sunburned chins
dimpled and red
as cherries?
When, tipsy
on mimosas,
we wove
through the rosy
yellows of dawn
like mice
in a basket
of apricots?
When even
our teeth
were sweet?
Apricots

A few blocks off the plaza,  
in the Santa Fe evening light  
the color of brandy,  
on the street below the branches  
of the tree, they glowed in rosy,  
yellow hues as if a god  
had ripped the sundown, rolled it  
into fuzzy, dimpled balls,  
and flung them to the ground.  
Fast as we could, deep  
into the fabric of our shorts,  
we crammed them till our pockets  
sagged, and lumbered down  
the darkening street  
like lumpy angels, holy  
with the light of apricots.
In a panic, the woman at the day-care center begged me to help her find them, the two rowdy toddlers who just moments before squeezed through a rut beneath the fence and toddled off. Their playmate had seen them, and run to tell the woman they had gone. I found them five houses down, standing beneath a tree of fruit, some pieces of which were strewn upon the ground. Each held his prized, ripe apricot with both hands as a man would a cantaloupe, fumbling it in his palms like a young god in training sphering clay into a sun.
Fried Pies

To make the filling, the mothers
cut the ripened apricots from their stones,
slice them into strips, soak them in pots of water,
cook them, add sugar, cinnamon, and cook them
again till they reach just the right consistency.
As the filling cools, they roll out the dough
for the crust, cut it into round pieces
they spoon the filling into the middle of,
fold them neatly in half, seal the curved
edges, pressing them with the tines of a fork,
and deep-fry them in bubbling lard
to a perfect medium brown.
As the pies cool on the table,
the children close their eyes and salivate,
picturing a thousand ripe apricots
dangling from the branches of the trees,
each a fuzzy, rosy, yellow sun
setting in the maw of the night.
II. Their Skins of Rosy Yellow
Interlude Late in an Afternoon

For several days in a row, when I was home alone in the waning hours of the afternoon, basking in the shadows of the porch, she walked by sans speaking, clad in a loose, cotton sundress and barefoot. Her hair was straight, long and dark, falling to her bare shoulders and back. One afternoon, out of the blue, she stopped and queried whether she could use my phone, only for a minute. After her call, during which I never heard her speak, she thanked me and left. The next afternoon, a flush of embarrassment on her face and neck ending at the shadow of her cleavage, she approached me holding in her hand something wrapped in a paper towel. Extending her offering and pressing firmly into my hand whatever she had wrapped in the towel, she smiled. I felt, oozing through the paper, the wetness of two apricots, overripe, their skins of rosy yellow splitting, bleeding onto my palm the sweet and sticky substance of a pass.
At the One of Solid Silk

Her unexpected death
two weeks ago
left him a widower
at twenty-five.
As night falls, as he has
at every dusk since she died,
he ghost-walks to her clothes
in the closet. He fingers
each of her blouses, lingering
at the one of solid silk,
a print of vivid, ripened apricots
lifelike as a detailed photograph
fit for framing, each apricot
crowned with drops of dew,
laden with her scent,
the blouse she wore
the moment his interest in her,
passing like a film fast-forwarded,
stopped, cropped to the frozen,
single frame of love.
The Picker

In the blur of a single motion, she thrusts her hand into the branches, clutches a cluster of ripened fruit, snaps it from its stems, and lays it bruiseless in the basket dangling from her arm like a cheap straw purse. She'll work like this till dusk, filling baskets brimming with the promise of a better life. At last, lumbering to her shanty in the darkness, with bronze, aching hands spared not even a moment for washing, she'll ease her infant from the arms of her grandmother, squeeze her to her breasts for nursing, place her in a makeshift cradle, cradle the weary head of her husband, and collapse quickly asleep, her calloused palm curled around the corner of her pillow, redolent with the scent of apricots.
The Dream

For two years now, when he’s slept in his cell at the state pen, he’s had the same, recurring dream. The apricots have ripened on his front yard trees, bowing the branches so the lower ones touch the ground. Frozen in his chair inside the window like a quadriplegic, all he can do is watch as the crows descend like a black, cawing cloud and devour the ripened fruit, their beaks slashing like black knives. His trees bereft of fruit and even leaves, he wakes, remembering how for miles around the locals came to gaze upon the glory of his trees, the largest and most productive in the county, bestowing his dilapidated shanty with dignity, hiding it from the street with a dense veil of fruit and leaves. He remembers how he only meant to graze the big teenager who awoke him late one night, stealing his apricots, but, firing an errant shot, dropped him dead as a cold, pulpless apricot stone.
III. Fecund with the Promise
The Apricot Tree

Though it was established with a grand root system which drew its needed moisture from deep within the earth, he tended it daily as a gardener would a rosebush. He tracked the seasons with its foliage, and took great pride in the imperceptible widening of its trunk. Even in mid-January, when its leafless branches clacked in the howling wind like the antlers of rutting stags, he’d don his heaviest coat, take his place on his porch, and watch it through the afternoon to dusk. Sans even moving, it creaked him through the seasons like a wagon, tugging him toward the summer of his ninetieth year, toward dark green branches bowed with the bounty of apricots, fecund with the promise of baskets and damsels.
The Centenarians

Their gospel
is the obvious.
They love
their weightless,
rawboned frames,
allowing them
ghostlike movement,
the inconspicuousness
of a mind
whooshing
through the rooms
of memory.
They cherish
their collections
of canes,
new and antique,
perfect for balance
or weaponry.
In the falseness
of their teeth,
they’ve found
their Truth,
reliable
as their diet
of rice, spring water,
and, canned,
dried, or fresh,
apricots.
Still Life

Of dried, cracked oil on canvas, it hangs on a white wall, illumed by the slanted beam of an early afternoon spotlight-sun of track lighting: a white table covered with a white, cotton tablecloth; a white porcelain plate; a knife and fork of sterling silver; and a fresh, ripe apricot placed off-center on the plate. Only the sheen of the plate and its shadow distinguish it from the tablecloth. The knife and fork, lying equidistant from the plate, draw the viewer's eye to blade and tines, auguring imminent violence. For the moment intact, the peel of the apricot, taut with the pressure of flesh, pulses with the heat of pinkish yellow, braced for the inevitable ravage just beyond the canvas edge of manicured, human hands.
Artificial Fruit

I saw them in a basket
on the table, in a slant
of late afternoon, winter
sunlight, a scrumptious cluster
of apricots so fresh their stems
were still attached, bearing, trembling
in a current of air from a vent,
browning leaves curling in the act
of dying. I stood there bothered
by their symmetry, too perfect
for actual fruit, so I bent
toward them, checking for redolence
or a bruise. Their plastic smell
gave them away, the telltale
sign of fraud. I felt a sadness
in their unbridgeable distance
from the real, imagining
their hollow desire, yea, longing
to trade their everlasting beauty
for even the transitory
dirge of decay, or clank of the knife
bounded against the stone of life.
About the Author


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Photo by Carol Rowe DeBender.

Acknowledgements

The author offers grateful acknowledgment to the following publications in which the poems noted were originally published:

The Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas: “Artificial Fruit”