

My Favourite Fruit (Man, Go) - Mia, Year 9, NSW

Content Warning: References to past sexual assault

My favourite fruit is a mango. But I've always been told to run when one comes near. Go, go, get away. Howl "fire" from parched lungs because it's an easier issue to deal with than broad arms holding a teenage girl down in an alleyway.

I braid each letter into the journal before me, like the women who trudged the frontlines of this society bled ink into parchment with their fountain pens of hostile truth. I am not sorry.

Who am I?

I am a ticking time bomb, explosive, irrational. A disillusioned, misinformed child. Distortion crinkles my reality, and I cannot decipher fruit from figure.

I picture my mother's reaction to my writings of self-hatred and swell with shame. I forfeited my identity that day, and the effort to put my scrambled jigsaw puzzle of a human back together has been tiresome. *Worthless, hopeless. Do those words define me?*

Each curved word ribbons out into another bittersweet summer memory. The heat drizzles sweat down my bronzed forehead and plasters it into the fabric of my sundress. Sizzling mosquito coils smoke out the hive where I perch cross-legged as though I am a fragile honeybee, waiting delicately for my singular gift to this world to be collected. No, snatched.

These memories are eternally tainted, stained with the ichor of my body and crumpled by bashings. If they could feel the way I do, they would have mauve bruised under their eyes the way I do. But they are limp and soulless. Serving only as a scar to my autonomy, and the lingering presence of that day scalds my tongue and elicits phantom agony in unharmed places that were once mottled like sycamores.

#

Often, my mother tells me that I am not alright. That I should not be reactive to unarmed creatures, bearing flowers in place of fists. She clasps my hand in the therapist's waiting room and reassures me that I will be alright. I do not say so, but I think differently.

I think I have changed.

The idea summons a seasickness in my abdomen, and I rock back and forth absentmindedly.

The therapist passes a notebook to me. Marks aloud to my mother that I'm a 'thinker'. That I'm a lot more 'damaged' than she realises. My mother's eyes gloss over like nail polish, and she fidgets with her cuticles. I'm sure she means to say that my softened soul has been

mangled in a paper shredder. I'm also sure that she doesn't for the sake of the poor woman to my left.

Her head inclines to the vanilla-white pages. I'm picking up what she's putting down.

Write. I can do that. Yes, yes I can.

#

I am greater than my femininity. Yet, I am constantly urged to embrace it, ridiculed when I don't, when I do. The normality of it all simmers into my chest, creeping and itching like a parasite. Tension snaps at my limbs, jagged-toothed, spitting spiteful comments at my idle silhouette. A hostile movement flares hot-blooded and knife in hand I am suddenly severing cuboids into the middle of an unsuspecting, amber-speckled fruit.

As a child, I scorned crosswise slices into their insides, wolfed down my hearty meal, and begged for more.

Always starved, always giggling, always smiling; teeth and all. I don't want more, anymore. I'm full. A laugh couldn't punch its way from my sealed lips the moment my anxiety ruminates, my lips are permanently curled downward. A smile begs them to engage. I don't want to beg, anymore.

Sunkissed surface, the shape a symbol of eternity. Around and around and around. Walk with two fingers along every yellowed path and find they all lead back to the beginning. Where the stalk hung with mighty rigor from a tree that predates you. It has always been this way. Child, you have an imagination the size of the moon but a grasp on reality emulating a kernel.

Eat. And I did.

I regret. So, now I write.

#

When the sun breached the window of my bedroom the morning after, I recall lying stiffly in the wrap of dirty sheets in my dirty room in my dirty bed in my dirty body. I did not wish for time to keep moving. For day after day after day to pass. The world had succumbed to nothing for me, and yet did not falter in its perpetual routine. Tomorrow was the most harrowing word for me. Gnarling at my wounds with hunger. Get up. Get moving. Live.

I lost my appetite those first six months. When I did eat, it was vitamin-deficient and solely from behind closed, creaky doors.

Words fumbled lacklustre from my lips, but my hand still retained muscle memory of how to talk, how to breathe, how to live. It's nice, you know, the journalling. It's nice to know that something is still wary of my voice.

#

Teeth scrape seed yearning for more flesh.

Teeth scrape flesh yearning for more evidence in case something goes wrong.

Something always goes wrong. Honey-flavours slip down your wrist and blemish your skin sticky and damp. You lap at the remnants of your feed and something goes wrong, again, smothering onto your reddened Cupid's bow, instead of burrowing onto your tastebuds.

Wrong. You're always doing something wrong. You shouldn't have been there. You shouldn't have worn that. You shouldn't have been alone. You shouldn't have said that. You shouldn't have done that. You should've done this. You should've said this. Wrong place, wrong time.

I am wrong. I am the common denominator. When a math problem is incorrectly done, they circle the error. Well in every equation, my circumference is mutilated until there is no more ink to keep going. Mango. Man. Go.

#

Man is always let go. Girl is always held accountable. Carve the rules into my raw skin, so I am forbidden to forget, why don't you? Sisters, scratch your nails into my palms to practice the depth needed to identify his DNA. My hands will heal, but the scar tissues are bloodied crescent moons in my dreams. My joints have pounded me away from danger, but now they wail and groan beneath my weight as I rise. I will rise. You cannot entrap me within the molten core of this planet, expecting me to not tunnel to the surface. My grave will be guarded with cob-webbed iron chains stationed as a battalion and my nimble posthumous body will find a way through, I assure you.

One morning, I will swallow the sun because I envy the carelessness of its beauty – knowing that if I shone with the same profound glory, I could die – and it will writhe within the pitfalls of my intestines and with a violence known only to soldiers it will emerge, not unscarred.

Why continue chewing if to only bring pain upon yourself? Why not avoid that of which harms you? Why not avoid that of which you wish didn't?

The people cry hope. The people march change. The people fathom future.

I know that not every luscious, bumblebee-battered, pollen scented beast is rotten. But after enough nasty bites; cotton mouthed I become at the thought of kissing sweetness again. Bile scrapes my throat like sandpaper as my grip on my pen enforces.

I fear the rabid, feral stray I would turn into if provoked. Again.

The pest control would hunt me down and still after euthanasia, I'd haunt the orchards. Domestic, soft-eyed, loyal. I crave the family dog I could've been. But I am a hound.

I wince at daylight and devour it expecting a remedy for the invisible gouges in my soul. But no elixir can be brewed from captivity and no higher being can revise the past. Each sunfall, the moon blinks helplessly at my lame self but werewolves cannot be comforted, only abused by the lunar pearl hanging whole.

Even if I have to squint at the sun to encompass its magnitude, I will not break my stare. A mango grows best in full sunlight. One day, another diced square will slip down to the core of me. I will not panic. Instead, a splitting light will flitter through the air like windchimes.

I will relearn how to giggle. How to break into a smile instead of a run when a boy tells me my eyes sparkle. Time has trickled by since they lost their iridescent, opalescent quality.

They cannot take any more of what they already have. I said no. I say no.

Mine. I am mine. Myself. My self.

Girl, what is your favourite fruit? A boy will ask.

My favourite fruit is a mango.