

STONE FRUIT

by

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Stone Fruit

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master
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by

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DEDICATION

To all of my poet friends, who continue to make me better in so many ways.

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A special thank you to my parents, who have never tried to talk me out of poetry.

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ABSTRACT

STONE FRUIT

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This thesis is a collection of poems.

BLOOD ORANGE

a small white envelope arrives
filled with wild mug wart

lavender and sage
that he had gathered

i smell his hands
moving swiftly in the grass

the way his mind hummed softly

tonight a blood orange
pumps in my chest

a fragrant mass
a scent that stains bright

i peel back the rind
find such juicy segments

soaked in such a color
that i lift the fruit from it's cage

and slide my tongue
across the darkening sunset

THE SANTA ANAS

1.

from here the earth
is a shade of the darkest
blue before black

i look out the window
and i know where we are

where the desert looks
like the ocean at night

and if the plane fell
i thought *at least i'd die*
in California

2.

there's a specific memory
a feeling that comes

when the windows are open
at night

and the air is a dry
certain kind of cold

i'm in my bed at my parents' house
it's late and i tried to sleep

but there's a sad movie on TV
and it feels good to be sad
right then

3.

the house i grew up in
had yellow paint peeling
to white

a too small kitchen
with a back door

a driveway
of broken asphalt

which my bare feet
always forgot

until i was outside
and running
without shoes again

4.

driving to Christmas dinner
the dry heat whipped

my hair into my mouth
but nobody could hear anybody
over the wind anyway

5.

the smell of burning
rises from the stale hillsides
to the South

acres and acres
are scorched black

the smell of smoke clings
to my hair and clothes

to the curtains and couches
throughout the house

6.

young and crying

i stood in the hallway

as my parents moved
my brother and his things

into the spare room
our father had used
as a dark room

i didn't know
a night without him

there
in the other twin bed

i didn't know
what night

would look like
without him lying in it

7.

the wind
is always travelling
toward me

eyes red and burning
skin drawn tight and thirsty

that is how i know
to go inside

i will feel sick soon
from the heat and the dust

8.

there is an lemon tree
in the backyard

the fruit falls rotten
to the dirt year round

the yield is too heavy
for the tree's many arms
to hold

A HORSE IN THE KITCHEN

i turned to find a horse
in our kitchen and i screamed

but you were not surprised
you said he had come here to die
and you placed your hands against his face

he was run ragged
his black and white spotted hide threadbare
his eyes glossy

i turned and outside five horses stood
in our cul-de-sac

they stared at me
as the sun set behind them
then they ran away somewhere

the horse lay down on the cold tile
filling the room with his tired body
his breath that smelled like hot grass

you lay down beside him
and ran your hand down his back

i wanted to love him too but i was afraid

CAVERNOUS

in your heart
you are good

you are
good

you say out loud
my heart is deep

*like a well dug low
into the earth*

*it is as sweet
as the water pulled*

*from the dark
ground*

you imagine
the soft moss

growing up
the worn bricks

of this well
sitting a few yards

from the edge
of a forest

the surrounding
green is rich

and wet
from an early
morning

heavy beaded rain

but this is not
your heart

yours sits near
the floor of the well

surrounded by
a cavernous darkness

SIX DEGREES BELOW THE HORIZON IN THE EVENING

the light through the windows
turned the room dusk
and our skin a pale violet
there in the kitchen

i made too much popcorn on the stove
and it overflowed onto the floor

she stood next to me and we watched it
falling from the mouth of the pot

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 15TH

my days
and nights
are filled with
re-watching
episodes
of The West Wing
and realizing
yet again
how awkward
it is
to cry
with food
in my mouth
my horoscope
says
*This week's
going to seem
filled with
a deep
swirling chaos
it's going
to seem fast
and wild
Try not to feel
too scared
the robe
i'm wearing
doesn't have
pockets
which concerns
me more
than how
frequently
i imagine
putting
my own head*

through a wall
i think about
how much cat
and dog hair
i have inevitably
consumed
in my life
and it is
realistically
a horrifying
amount
i once wished
out loud
for a straw
for my soda
and then
looked down
to find a
plastic-wrapped
Subway
bendy-straw
at my feet
now i keep
forgetting
to buy straws
because i keep
remembering
to steal them
from coffee shops

A CRAZY WOMAN

*And the light shineth in the darkness;
and the darkness comprehended it not.*
– John 1:5

she was touched
they say

a mind that slipped
into some other plane

of her own making

a mouthful of moonstones
and sharp knives

that are kept silent
inside her

she took a stone
roughed up her body

inside and out
so she could keep herself

AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

it's been snowing all day and we don't have a lot of time
i hurry towards the Abstract Expressionists
looking for the pieces my father would hurry towards

there's a low hum in each room from everyone gasping lightly
and i think of my father's book on Rothko
 that sits on the coffee table in California

i think of the time he tried not to cry while talking about Rothko
 a man so hardened and imposing
describing such a tender piece of art

A STORM

lightning broke the dark
into pieces

again and again

thunder echoed through

i imagined
many men and women
standing on the roof
 waving aluminum
cookie sheets in the rain

suddenly the storm had
had enough

it drifted west

to remind more of the sleepless
they are at its mercy

A BAD MAN

when he says *bad*
he means

damaging a love
ruining

in some small way
that hovers or

in a way that
smothers a spirit

bad is only bad

if you choose to hurt them
for what you want

and bad is only bad
if you remember suddenly

in the dulled sunlit hours
what you took away

he asks you

*do you wonder ever
if you're a bad man?*

and you reply quickly
because you know

what you are
what you've done

you are a bad man
but there are men far worse

than your empty heart
that tries so hard to be open

hoping to be filled beyond
this violent guilt

for how you've found
you're way in the world

for what you do
to the other bad men

who make a life from taking
what was never theirs

STONE FRUIT

1.

it is astounding how
without leaves
this place becomes

the woman's robe
slips off her body

into a crumpled heap
and then the cold
remains for too long

but you are a paper bag
full of ripe peaches

left in the trunk of the car
for after the walk
back from the lake

2.

at the beach with you
i cut the tender flesh

of a nectarine in half
with a black plastic knife
dimpled by the heat

you had fallen asleep
in the shade beside me

so i ate both halves
from the outside – in
leaving the pit pieces

and the meat attached

to them in the sand

DRINK OF WATER

your body leans back
with a charming

weightlessness
and a frightening

sincerity

i try to smile in a way

that doesn't show
how i am thinking

about your body

in a way that doesn't show
how you crack me open

under the weight
of such a thirst

A SMALL DEATH

there is dust everywhere

it is made of parts that have
for one reason or another
abandoned the whole

they are then blown about

dust is the small death
of something much larger

the Great Dust Bowl was the death
of many small things
and then the death of many large things
that had made their home there

the large things left the prairie open
to ruin

then the drought came
and the winds that blew

in California the rain and snow have gone
no one knows where they went
if they're coming back

eventually we will all go hungry

the skin cells that have sloughed off
accumulate wildly

the body is always remaking itself

the body is always working to keep itself alive
despite us

I AM THE FIELD

a field can be daisied
that is full of daisies

i would like to be daisied
my body
like the earth's sweet body

she has been daisied
is what they would say
after i sprout yellow and white
flowers from my olive skin

i would live the rest of my life
covered only in daises
that bloom
 in a wild way all year

i would go to the grocery
to the post office
to a café
to the movies and wherever else
bare but for the daisies

the flowers could be plucked
from me as from a field
placed in a glass vase
on the dining room table
 to brighten up the room
but apart from my body
they wilt

now i am the field
and the room is always bright

THE TREES ARE ALWAYS DARKER

the sound of it was overwhelming
the wind through the leaves

in the dark

and i imagined you coming to me
then

walking through the back gate

sitting in the chair with the broken arm
the way you belonged there

i watched the wind crashing through

and you're right
the trees are always darker

no matter how dark the sky

their scalloped edges the blackest
thing in a forest

their silence mistaken for noiselessness

MAGIC

the mylar balloon had deflated slightly
it hung sad and limp in the air
jostled through the house by shoulders
and arms that had forgotten it
after a few days of listlessness
the balloon slipped out the front door
across the driveway and up into the night sky
the girl ran after it and cried out
she asked the balloon to come back to her
please to come back to her
it had drifted far into the dark
the girl's parents stood watching her
and the balloon from the doorway
they knew the girl would feel pain from this
an object abandoning her
she stood outside in her bare feet and pajamas
her arms outstretched and waiting
after a few seconds the balloon changed course
it swayed in the dark air as it fell
her mother and father watched with mouths open
though they had seen her magic before
a force of will so strong that the world
seemed to bend for her gladly

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 22ND

if your
insecurity
was a gun
i'd put my lips
around
the muzzle
and end up
with a mouth
full
of confetti
and a flag
with the word
bang!
across it
my horoscope
says
*It's a week
for emotion
so strong
it could almost
destroy you
so strong
you could
almost
be happy
for the rest
of your life*
i keep picking
at a scab
until my body
remembers
it has to
heal over
as i sleep
when my
hands
are busy

clenching and
unclenching
last night
i saw my cat
climb down
a ladder
from the roof
talking out loud
to yourself
gets easier
with time
so do lessons
in moderation
if i'm holding
a glass of gin
i've already
spilled it
on myself

VANTABLACK

is the single darkest color

the human eye sees
a void

of two-dimensional
endless space

the color grows
as a forest of carbon

farmed on aluminum foil

each tree one-ten thousandth
the width of a strand of hair

someday they will find

a redder red
a bluer blue

there are no new colors

only science manipulating
light and dark

BLOOD AND BOYSENBERRY

i cut the roof
of my mouth open

with a Dum Dum
left over from Halloween

in the rear-view mirror
my tongue was stained blue

and blood filled the cracks
between my teeth

i swallowed it down
and thought of you

as i used my tongue
to feel where the candy
had sliced me open

IT'S YOU I LIKE

when i hear Fred Rogers
talk in that loving monotone
i cry
i do not stop crying until
i can absorb the shock
of his goodness
the strength with which
he loves wounds me deeply
a remixed video of *Mister Roger's
Neighborhood* has been circling
the internet
he says
in auto-tuned robotics
*you can grow ideas
in the garden of your mind*
he asks
*did you ever grow anything
in the garden of your mind?*
i reply loudly and in public
yes i do that all the time!

then i start to cry loudly
and in public
because of the many minds
he gave permission to be curious
because nobody gives
of their good and kind self
to be consumed by any
who may need it
because i can't figure out how to love
just one person like that

ROTA FORTUNA

1.

there is a woman at the beach
 who will read your tarot
for fifteen dollars

i sat beneath her tattered umbrella
 exhaled into the deck
fondled the cards until they knew me

2.

my past was marked by the Three of Swords
 as most every past is
and what i already know of heartbreak

was shown to me again
 in three double-edged blades
struck through a heart in a storm

3.

the second card revealed
 my present in The Fool
about to step off a cliff

with all the skills to thrive within him
 and a small white dog to guide him
he cannot trust himself to fall

4.

lastly The Five of Cups appeared
 with its narrow rivers of wine
spilling in the dirt

and a home too far off
to reach by nightfall
offers a future half empty or half full

5.

my father's set of tarot cards sits
in the top drawer of his desk
wrapped in a piece of dark mustard silk

i asked him to read my future
but he told me
when you love someone

there is too much you want to see
too much you do not want to see
to see clearly

ON BEING SNOWED IN

birds casually scavenge in the blizzard
they leave trails of four pronged footsteps
that are quickly covered in the backyard

i cannot believe their tiny bodies can survive
the winter when i barely do

this is real weather
 (which those born in colder climates
 remind me each winter i know nothing about)

our cars are buried in the driveway
the patio furniture and the barbeque are buried

i have seen two people out walking
one man running and two people riding their bikes
(all of whom i assume are trying to die for some reason)

still it is the birds and those who cannot burrow
that i worry for

their houses of sticks and mud and grass
many huddled together in the wind

KITTENS

they found him abandoned
in the grass

forsaken while his mother
moved the rest of her litter

by the scruff of their necks
in her mouth

the young girl and her brother
had already watched a stray

give birth to a litter of kittens
on the floor of their linen closet

watched her lick away
the amniotic sac

and chew through each
umbilical cord

their father was a cat magnet
the house was always filled

with strays eating
from the family's cat's bowls

they fed the newfound kitten
condensed milk with an eye dropper

wrapped him tightly "like
a burrito" in soft cloth

which the young girl learned
is how babies like to be wrapped

she wanted to take care of him

to hold him close

like she would want
if she were alone

that night the young girl
took the kitten with her to bed

and in the morning
it lay dead beside her

she ran screaming and crying
to her mother

it looked as if the girl had crushed
him with her own body

while tossing and turning
in her sleep

her mother said no
that the kitten was too sick

when they found him
to be saved

but the young girl knew even then
that she had done this

that in her love she had suffocated
what she cared for

a few years later she found five
kittens discarded in the backyard

she wanted to keep them all
but her father told her

they would be her responsibility
either she raised them

or they would be killed
at the animal shelter

after a few weeks of feeding
and cleaning she had to admit

they were too much for her
she told her father

he should take them away
to be killed

VIRGINIA IN APRIL

the hot rain falls heavy
and often

through the tress and grasses
that are swelling
beyond their borders

(many limbs
leisurely fighting for space
in the wind)

after being buried alive
everything living is clawing it's way
towards the sun

NIGHT

drowns
your sighs

your wet breath
your ripe pleading

the tree frogs
call sharply

the crickets'
chirping grows

the wind
barrels through

it overcomes us

BROKEN

i would like to break everyone

their bodies shining with every
hateful sway of eye and tongue

and my hands

wringing blood
from stone not a stone but

a place inside the mind where truth is

fear keeps them from the door
of that place

and we suffer now from it

everything is poisoned in that way

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 29TH

on a TV show
about prison
there's an inmate
with one phone
to each ear
a priest on one
end
his bride-to-be
on the other
this week
my horoscope
says

*Let the way
that your world
holds you
and the way
that it speaks
through you
surprise you
Call your
Grandma
or read about
the places
you're tied to
instead*

i look up
pictures
of an actor
on the internet
and he is naked
a lot
my best advice
for someone
trying to get over
a break-up
would be to stop
fantasizing

about them
when you
masturbate
sextsuggestions
that's a term
i learned
from a
softcore porn
i'm naked
and my room
smells like
Chinese food
you would
love it here

DEVIL, A MYTH

the devil hiding
as man or woman

will find you
while you're still alive

it will trap you
among others

who too are hiding
their dark places

the dark corners
they made

as they prayed
no one was watching

you will know
like they all do

as they are taken
that you deserve this

for praying
you could hide

the secrets you carried
the devil you are

SIX DEGREES BELOW THE HORIZON IN THE MORNING

the horses are grazing in a frozen field
their tough lips and tongues

unscathed by the sharp grass
their spotted hides untouched by the cold

in the cornflower blue light of these mornings
i face the truth of my fragility

even the earth is working to keep herself alive
in the wake of this frost

THE BLIND PILGRIM

after "Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground" (1927) by Blind Willie Johnson

they say now
only you could cry with a guitar that way

move a slide guitar to tears with a folding knife
in your tight grasp

underneath your own soft moaning

each howl a search for some salvation
from an earthly life

only you could cry that way
freely tenderly with a guitar

and what did the world give you then?
a blind man weeping for only God to hear?

a house that burned to the cold ground

a wet bed of ash
that held your fevered body

after forty-eight years of enduring the dark

HAUNTED

this place is certainly haunted
but my ghost is benevolent

while i lay alert in the dark
she pressed her palm
flat on my back

and nudged me several times
as if to make sure i was still alive

i feigned sleep until she left

after the first few times
i asked her to please
leave me alone

it felt like she could take me
somewhere i couldn't come back from

perhaps i should have let her

THE WINTER SEASON

the many days of snow are melting from everyone's roofs
and from the trees so that it sounds like rain
the melting will again be ice but more dangerous
because it will camouflage as the hard black ground
 i will certainly fall on my ass this week
on Sunday the plow didn't come through until after midnight
it screamed and scraped until after two
an hour later the guy next door decided to dig his truck out
the next morning i almost murdered my housemate
 she wouldn't shut up about how much she loved the snow

A LONELY HORSE

you loved that horse
i could tell

and love is not
an easy journey

a tender heart is
more easily sliced open

you whispered the lie
to comfort him

the lie you told yourself
when mortar shells

were dropping
at the Somme

like him you are
a lonely horse

broken where you
will never repair

a cursed stone
wedged in the hoof

delivering a sickness
that cannot be undone

but your cheek rested
tenderly against his own

your hand stroked
the length of his neck

for a few moments

before you found the gun

*it's just the band
turning up, you said
it's just trombones
and tubas*

one more love
turned sour in your chest

BIOGRAPHY

Caitlin Mohny graduated from St. Paul High School, Santa Fe Springs, California, in 2007. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Chapman University in 2012. She taught English Composition and Literature at George Mason University for two years and received her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from George Mason University in 2016.