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THE OLDEST FRUIT

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THE OLDEST FRUIT

Abstract

Spring came late, summer reluctantly, dry with clouded sun. The tree sucked what it could from its old earth; our feeble watering barely made amends for want of warmth and rain.

The sun that has looked down on Hollywood,
on lust, Las Vegas and the will to power,
rises, *rhododactylos*, on Auckland Airport:
 through the tinted glass

a perfect field of fodder, five sheep,
a tractor nosing at the sedge, the shrill
cacophony of jets rehearsing like a madman
 staring at a vase.

Nothing the amusing natives do or say here
matters in the Capital. The giant engines lift us
through the sky. The next stop — Australia —
 is the end of the line.

Connie Barber

THE OLDEST FRUIT

Spring came late, summer reluctantly,
dry with clouded sun.
The tree sucked what it could from its old earth;
our feeble watering
barely made amends
for want of warmth and rain.

Plums a month late. For the first time
plums to give away;
blood red flesh and juice bottled for winter.
After the holiday we ate plums and plums
while the fig tree spread huge hands
grasping the day's surface.

Dry and hard, poised on soaring shafts,
pithy, tasteless, cold,
shaded by tough leaves from a dwindling sun
figs, outliving summer,
refused to fall for the bronzewings
who fled to their pecking below the wattle.

A grey morning came, magpies sang
stepping among wet grass
when currawongs arrived, flopped and fluttered
among thick leaves,
their season for fruit,
pecked at the figs, swore and flew on.

The pigeons fed far from the tree.
As the magpies sang
louder and louder, pale yellow moon palms
shrivelled and curled and fell.
No black frost spots touched
those golden hands or the bright fruit.

On a carpet of leaves the figs fell;
mine in this strange season.
The secret wombs, hard and sour and green,
flower and fruit, ripened;
without frost, saved
from a late spring and a dry summer.

Figs joined with bitterest orange,
with hot ginger earth hands,
transformed by sugar, arrow sweet
which flowers as the day shortens.
Genii ancient as song
bottled — a myth as old as time.

The dusky currawongs came crying.
One clung to the wattle.
His golden eye glared into the kitchen
where the fruit and the magpies' call,
refined as gold, rest.
For days they cried in the tree tops.