

634 Orchards, fruits & forestry

by Em dash

This is the company I keep: long-limbed, tree-climbing ankle-biters, sugary sons and dangerous daughters of the fruit canners.

There they are in the mornings, sprung from the mud of their forefather's factory, a plum firstborn holding a string of rose hip sisters, rough mulberry brothers. Sweet-talking fire-breathers, bright as vegetable skin, intestines clean and dark purple, organs encased in endocarps. Feeders who reach into golden boughs, feeders of flower ovaries. Some, maybe a plucky baby or a pair of pomegranate twins, will live forever.

You stand in the front where you can be seen, carrying oranges in the folds of your hiked-up skirt. A sea captain leagues away will open his window and smell you. Your scent cures homesickness and scurvy, your scent makes summer month festival gypsies fall in love. None of your sibling's superlatives fit you; you are neither the prettiest nor the wiliest, neither the snake-charmer nor the double-crosser. Pithy, you wake up the lime burner's children and the tanner's babes with your harmonica. They will wade through salt solution and rawhide to get to the citrus of, the citrus in your hands.

I see you sometimes, seated on school steps, when you are peeling fruit for the young. Your eyes are on the mountains, and your hair is in your eyes, and the pucker of your lips is steering you off-tune, you who are tone-deaf already. That knife finding the core, both mine and the orange's, you hum hurruming jazz, a harp bop, double drums, alto sax. The juice that stays on my neck when you tip me back, catching me in an alleyway, holding me upright as the oranges tumble and strike the backs of my knees. You cup your strong-

smelling, sticky-soft fingers around my ear and say *let's blow this city*.

