

Lemons and Apricots
by Jenny Fox

Gerta the lemon tree lady's face was sour and the lemons on her tree were, too. But her heart was sweet and good and she wanted us to take her lemons home before the rot sucked their skin inward and puckered, like the deep lines around her lips. Her husband was dead and gone but she said friends came around for visits and trips to the doctor together. But I only saw Gerta the lemon tree lady surrounded by lemons.

Janet the apricot tree lady said my son looked like her brother during the Korean War. We begged her for candy on Halloween night with all the other masked neighbors. But October in Las Vegas is still dry enough to make thirst and so we trick or treated for water, too. She gave my boy water in a glass and watched him drink it down like a soldier on a civilian's doorstep.

She liked him there on her stoop dressed in a costume that reminded her of her brother. She asked us to come back for apricots when her tree bears fruit in the spring. *Keep an eye on my tree. It gives too much fruit.* She liked watching him drink from her glass like her brother in uniform and she imagined him walking away with a bag full of ripe orange apricots from her tree.

We checked her tree once or twice in the months to come but soon forgot as the distractions of each day pulled us into the insignificant. Gerta died before the lemon tree bore fruit again and before we made the time to visit. We spoke of her often. *I wonder if Gerta's tree has lemons yet.* But we never made that trip across the street to see her and check on her and her lemon tree.

We could have visited Janet and her apricots often, too, if we remembered and made the time. We could have visited Janet even when she had no apricots to give and instead receive stories of time gone by that would have been more precious than the fruit on her tree.

I begged for a story one night while I was drunk on cheap wine in Atlanta wandering from bar to bar wondering why I was traveling alone surrounded by people who told me nothing. The two brothers from Canada tried to booze me up and take me to their hotel room to fuck and forget so that they could go home guilt free to their wives. Their words left my belly empty and hungry and I went back to my room alone.

Story time came two days later on the flight home when an old veteran with sagging eyelids at half-mast over tender eyes shared tales of brutality and survival in Vietnam and on the mean streets of his childhood and the cold home full of beatings he grew up in. He told me of beheadings and bar fights and how to spot an evil doer before they do you harm. *Pay attention to the eyes.*

He dangled these stories in front of me; low hanging fruit dangling from his own history tree. As I touched each piece, they dropped freely into my hands and he relished watching me devour each one. He had no lemons and no apricots, only tales of how cruel men can be to one another and to the women they are supposed to love.

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