**Meditation at Lagunitas**

All the new thinking is about loss.

In this it resembles all the old thinking.

The idea, for example, that each particular erases

the luminous clarity of a general idea. That the clown-

faced woodpecker probing the dead sculpted trunk

of that black birch is, by his presence,

some tragic falling off from a first world

of undivided light. Or the other notion that,

because there is in this world no one thing

to which the bramble of blackberry corresponds,

a word is elegy to what it signifies.

We talked about it late last night and in the voice

of my friend, there was a thin wire of grief, a tone

almost querulous. After a while I understood that,

talking this way, everything dissolves: justice,

pine, hair, woman, you and I. There was a woman

I made love to and I remembered how, holding

her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,

I felt a violent wonder at her presence

like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river

with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,

muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish

called pumpkinseed. It hardly had to do with her.

Longing, we say, because desire is full

of endless distances. I must have been the same to her.

But I remember so much, the way her hands dismantled bread,

the thing her father said that hurt her, what

she dreamed. There are moments when the body is as numinous

as words, days that are the good flesh continuing.

Such tenderness, those afternoons and evenings,

saying blackberry, blackberry, blackberry.

—Robert Hass

**Vespers [“Once I believed in you...”]**

Once I believed in you; I planted a fig tree.

Here, in Vermont, country

of no summer. It was a test: if the tree lived,

it would mean you existed.

By this logic, you do not exist. Or you exist

exclusively in warmer climates,

in fervent Sicily and Mexico and California,

where are grown the unimaginable

apricot and fragile peach. Perhaps

they see your face in Sicily; here we barely see

the hem of your garment. I have to discipline myself

to share with John and Noah the tomato crop.

If there is justice in some other world, those

like myself, whom nature forces

into lives of abstinence, should get

the lion's share of all things, all

objects of hunger, greed being

praise of you. And no one praises

more intensely than I, with more

painfully checked desire, or more deserves

to sit at your right hand, if it exists, partaking

of the perishable, the immortal fig,

which does not travel.

—Louise Glück

**Oranges**

The first time I walked

With a girl, I was twelve,

Cold, and weighted down

With two oranges in my jacket.

December. Frost cracking

Beneath my steps, my breath

Before me, then gone,

As I walked toward

Her house, the one whose

Porch light burned yellow

Night and day, in any weather.

A dog barked at me, until

She came out pulling

At her gloves, face bright

With rouge. I smiled,

Touched her shoulder, and led

Her down the street, across

A used car lot and a line

Of newly planted trees,

Until we were breathing

Before a drugstore. We

Entered, the tiny bell

Bringing a saleslady

Down a narrow aisle of goods.

I turned to the candies

Tiered like bleachers,

And asked what she wanted—

Light in her eyes, a smile

Starting at the corners

Of her mouth. I fingered

A nickel in my pocket,

And when she lifted a chocolate

That cost a dime,

I didn't say anything.

I took the nickel from

My pocket, then an orange,

And set them quietly on

The counter. When I looked up,

The lady’s eyes met mine,

And held them, knowing

Very well what it was all

About.

Outside,

A few cars hissing past,

Fog hanging like old

Coats between the trees.

I took my girl’s hand

In mine for two blocks,

Then released it to let

Her unwrap the chocolate.

I peeled my orange

That was so bright against

The gray of December

That, from some distance,

Someone might have thought

I was making a fire in my hands.

—Gary Soto

**Pineapples and Pomegranates**

*In Memory of Yehuda Amichai*

To think that, as a boy of thirteen, I would grapple

with my first pineapple,

its exposed breast

setting itself as another test

of my will-power, knowing in my bones

that it stood for something other than itself alone

while having absolutely no sense

of its being a world-wide symbol of munificence.

Munificence—right? Not munitions, if you understand

where I’m coming from. As if the open hand

might, for once, put paid

to the hand-grenade

in one corner of the planet.

I’m talking about pineapples—right?—not pomegranates.

—Paul Muldoon

**The Melon**

There was a melon fresh from the garden

So ripe the knife slurped

As it cut it into six slices.

The children were going back to school.

Their mother, passing out paper plates,

Would not live to see the leaves fall.

I remember a hornet, too, that flew in

Through the open window

Mad to taste the sweet fruit

While we ducked and screamed,

Covered our heads and faces,

And sat laughing after it was gone.

—Charles Simic

**Death by Fruit**

Only the crudest  
of the *vanitas* set  
ever thought

you *had* to get  
a skull into the picture  
whether you needed  
its tallowy color  
near the grapes

or not. Others,

stopping to consider  
shapes and textures,  
often discovered

that eggs or aubergines  
went better, or leeks,  
or a plate of string beans.  
A skull is so dominant.  
It takes so much  
bunched-up drapery,  
such a ponderous  
display of ornate cutlery,  
just to make it

less prominent.  
The greatest masters  
preferred the

subtlest *vanitas*,  
modestly trusting

to fruit baskets  
to whisper

*ashes to ashes*,  
relying on the

poignant exactness  
of oranges to release  
like a citrus mist  
the always fresh fact  
of how hard we resist  
how briefly we’re pleased.

—Kay Ryan