

## TO EAT A PEACH

gnarl it free  
with a twist and a pull-back jerk,  
bough pulling up and away, dig  
teeth in right there, at the backend  
of a Vermont summer, towels around  
waists, post-skinny-dipped, relishing  
the aureole sun burst of breasts,  
defiantly proud of sixteen-year-old  
bodies, the heft of them familiar,  
every lick of dripped juice an invite

\*

thin-slice crescents of them on a cutting board—plucked pit  
swelling one cheek—layer them in a circle atop custard so their sunset skins twirl like the  
overhead crane shot of an Ethel Merman dance routine

\*

use a press  
to squeeze peach nectar into a tall glass  
lace with a shot of vodka  
spritz in soda water  
lean in to hear its fizzy whispering  
of what the night portends

\*

read genetics about how they and nectarines are actually one  
species, with only the existence of skin fuzz (or lack thereof) to set them apart

\*

hike to a remote nunnery above Dali, in China's Yunnan province,  
which is being refurbished, help tie off rebar for the new drainage channel being poured  
to direct rain run-off to the peach orchard where bottomless plastic buckets have been  
shoved in the ground, each surrounding a stalk with waxy leaves like hands unfolding  
from prayer. Visit the shrine to Guanyin. See how she's made of crude plaster, garishly  
painted. One of her thirty hands extends far beyond the others in a superhuman stretch,  
fingers tickle a paper mache sphere of fruit nailed to a rafter

\*

enter Xi'an's historical museum and peer into the glass cabinet of fossilized peach stones found beneath layers of soil along the Yangzi, carbon dated to around 6000 BCE. The regularity of their placement suggests they'd been planted, but something interrupted fruition

\*

go to the backyard. Peach tree's stilted with stakes to keep the weight of the fruit crop from taking down what's sending up nutrients into burgeoning hard nobs, to be shared with wasps, birds, worms, and us

\*

leave the sugar and fruit mixture to steep under muslin sheets. Tomorrow, cook it so the golden flesh turns burnt-orange, but keep the fruit whole, prodding only with a wooden spoon. Ladle into glass jars. Cellar until you're under winter's flag

\*

experiment while camping:  
core a peach, insert a sliver of butter, finger of brown sugar, teaspoon of cinnamon, wrap in tin foil, insert in the coal bed and wait until smell calls

\*

taste  
the miracle in your hand.  
Close your eyes  
taste again

\*

scoop up  
loamy Samarkand soil. *Samar*: stone.  
*Kand*: town, near Tashkent, where  
your graduate student guides you to  
a field to steal Han-nurtured globes  
of sweetness and laugh as they bloom  
in your mouths, teeth etched white,

peach pits hurled into the stream  
before you lie back in the grass

\*

remind yourself  
he's Uyghur, that you can't be in contact  
anymore, or he and his family will be  
in danger

\*

let his name be Ilham.  
After praying in the empty great mosque  
the next day, he has you roll over on your back  
and points up at the geometric vines  
lacing the dome: *See how their ends swell?*  
*They suggest peaches, no?*

\*

sound out  
the Uyghur he taught you: *shaptul*

شاپتۇل, spell it, his hand on yours