

FICTION

# The Language of Fruit

*Cindy Lamothe*

She sucked on the mango's savory flesh, its small hairs brushing her tongue with each stroke. This mango was gold-red-green. Slightly bruised from hands prodding it back and forth in the market. Its tangy aroma a punch of air—a fiery flag waving back and forth. When a mango turns rancid, it doesn't stay quiet, she thought. It protests violently within the space it occupies. A hundred feet away and you can smell anger turned from sugar. Rage that was once sweet. She always stopped by the fruit vendors to pay homage before going back home.

Her Nana once told her the story of a girl born on the busiest day of the market. When the mother's water broke, liquid travelled down her thighs and knees, slathering the rotten fruit skins on the ground. The woman's baby arrived on half eaten apples and tossed apricot seeds. Whenever her Nana told her this story, she took out a shiny plum from her coat pocket and offered it to her. "La fruta te habla" she'd say. "The fruit has its own language...sometimes it can alert us to danger. Always listen mija."

At sixteen, it was a green guava that warned her the day she lost her own fruitbaby in the patio behind the house. She had joyfully peeled open its tender insides and spotted a white worm moving among its bitter meat. Immediately, she dropped the guava and stuck a finger inside her pants, touching the warm nectar that slid out of her belly.

That night, her Nana carefully rocked her body back and forth in her arms, singing lullabies in the mother tongue.

Duérmete mi niña,  
duérmete mi amor,  
duérmete pedazo,  
de mi corazón.

## Tiferet

Her Nana's voice was a clear stream taking her far into her ancestors' land. She listened as her throat stretched out in a myriad directions. Once when she was younger, Nana brought her a bowl of sweet mango juice and spread the leftover pulp over her small face. "To protect you from evil spirits."

All her life she was careful of each fruit she ate. At ten years old, she held an apple to her ear and listened intently. If she listened for a long time, it would eventually speak to her. Sometimes it spoke of danger, and other times, it told her stories of la tierra. A ripe melon once confided the story of a married woman from town who kept her lovers hidden from her husband. The cane fields covered their bodies while la Doña pretended to inspect the crops. Oh how she laughed at this story!

Many farmers had spilled their secrets into the earth, and the seedlings inherited these whispers. During coffee season, she remembered to press her ear to the cherry shaped fruit before placing them into large baskets. Ayuda! Ayuda! they pleaded when it came time to slough their wet bodies—yelling for her to listen about the calloused hands of her ancestors, their sweat laden brows, and the hot earth they returned to. Nana used a large stone to strip away their remaining skins in her pila. Oh how they wailed with each stroke! That night she sipped her café reverently, staring out into the open fields next to their farm. A cold wind had spread through el pueblo, and fruit leaves would curl and die for weeks after.

It was during this time years before when a young mother fell into a deep hole in one of the fields. For hours the woman cried for help, cried for her small child who was still suckling. The bright sun fell behind dark clouds, and two young farmers found her clutching the earth days later.

For many nights as a girl, her Nana sat across from her, eating bananos with warm milk. One day, she will return, they whispered. "Listen to la fruta, mija," her Nana's rough chiseled hands smoothed the tears from her chin. "Nunca te mienten."

But every morning, on her return from the market, their velvet peels lay on the ground in silence.