

Fallen Oranges

There was this smell, acrid, in her hands. Perhaps it was hopeless to look for her brother at the bar last night. But she needed to tell him that their mother had secrets. Did he know? Yet as soon as she got there, she realized she didn't really know what she wanted to say. It was just anxiety.

"I know what they did, near the laundry room. There was this acrid smell, remember?" She said, hand warming a whisky cup but not really drinking it.

He was busy behind the counter. Ten years separated the two. She had fast breathing when near him. His image made her think of her father, who had left them when they were young. Now there was nobody else.

"I have to work, Marlene. I think you should go home. Don't you have things to do?" He asked, wiping the surface in front of her and pressing a hose with water inside of a cup. The drink was green olive, and impinged a summer glaze on the glass.

"I keep thinking I need to tell mom the truth," Marlene affirms, smelling the rye and thinking her eyes could get watery soon, from the alcohol or the sadness.

The bar had bikers on one side and prostitutes on the other. They didn't look like escort women, and were dressed somewhat discreet. It was a bar that you could find anywhere downtown. The traces of recognition were beyond reach. There was no need to search for comfort, because there was none. She wanted to be hugged, to understand why her mother died alone, but distance existed between the two.

“After death, there’s no truth, just versions of it. What is it that you need to know?” He asked her, when she had moved to a table near the corner and was trying to nibble on some French fries. She had stopped drinking and had ordered an orange soda.

“You know, I wonder why neither of us got married. Do you think it was the way she raised us?” She asked, seeing traces of orange peel on her hands, as though she were climbing the tree all over, seeing her mother freely grazing through the grass, in the countryside.

“Why is it important to know why things are the way they are? I just never found anyone I wanted to be married to,” he says, lighting his cigarette and folding his apron. The shift was over. All he had to do was put the bottles back to the deposit, and close the register. They stopped talking. Moments later she left and nothing else was said.

In the morning, when she wakes up in her mother’s house, there is this smell, acrid, in her hands. In the living room, the sun is shining on the pink couch. The place remains the same way as it always did, white-shaded, from being close to the orange trees. Her mother’s presence was alive in the porcelain objects, and the pictures spread on the furniture. If she hadn’t died from old age, she would have died from an excess of life.

Slowly, she walks to the laundry room, trying to forget the secrets, traces of sexual intercourse, her mother and her father, later her lovers, leaning against the washing machine. She found them there many times, by accident, turning around and pretending she hadn’t seen them, a child, unaware of the adult’s life. But the place is quiet, the windows opened to the backyard.

That's when she realizes the enormity of the orange trees, standing firm besides the house. It is only then, when she's decided to wash her mother's clothes to give away to donation, that she finds the corpses, accumulated against the wall. A shirt falls, and when she bends to pick it up, the light shining, she finds the fruits, fallen behind the laundry machine, abandoned there for what looks like ages.

There are at least eight oranges, which must have fallen from the near branch. There is mould covering the skin, and this acrid smell. She wonders if there is something inside of her body that recognizes the passage of time and this petrification of the skin, inside out. At once, she pulls the laundry machine away from the wall, gathers the fruits, and puts them inside of the garbage bag. Outside, it is sunny. She feels the warmth against her skin and the sun smells like orange juice.