

## Still Life with Blood Orange

With a finger stained by its blood I mark the page.  
My mouth full of juice and flesh, red with it,  
my pulse loud in me, insistent, I bite down again.  
We all bite down, every toothed creature on earth  
does it and each toothless baby starts by practicing it.  
My parents are dying though they would say  
they are living, my children grow into the lives  
that seem to fit them perfectly though they might say  
they are lost. I am far from home, days away,  
months away too, but I still use this word  
for the place I have found to live in for now.  
The blood orange is soft and I am suspicious of it.  
It might be too old to eat. I have been wary of it  
for days. It glistens, exudes in front of me.

The blood colour darkens at night. This morning  
its chemical blood was veining the outer peel.  
I had woken from a dream of a ladder  
with a dragon curled hot and green  
at its foot, and a garden at the top.  
I had climbed all the way up and stepped  
out under trees in a cool garden  
walled up for centuries. No one was there.  
No one could visit. The two red eyes  
of the sleepless dragon burst themselves  
in anger and sorrow.

I turn the page of the book with the poem  
about a cut finger. It is stained pink now.  
Orange peels grin back at me from the table,  
strings of loose red flesh left in them.  
My parents are dying,  
I can feel the papery skin of this old book,  
I have swallowed the blood,  
I am back at the foot of the ladder,  
I bite down on the inside of my cheek.  
I am burning, the ladder is melting,  
my parents will soon be walled-in high up there.

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