

# With the Light of Apricots



Poems by Larry D. Thomas

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*For Dodie*



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# I. As if a God Had Ripped the Sundown





# Remember

that morning  
in the desert  
when the sun  
was a slice  
of tangerine?  
When we chewed  
honeycombs,  
our sunburned chins  
dimpled and red  
as cherries?  
When, tipsy  
on mimosas,  
we wove  
through the rosy  
yellows of dawn  
like mice  
in a basket  
of apricots?  
When even  
our teeth  
were sweet?





# Apricots

A few blocks off the plaza,  
in the Santa Fe evening light  
the color of brandy,  
on the street below the branches  
of the tree, they glowed in rosy,  
yellow hues as if a god  
had ripped the sundown, rolled it  
into fuzzy, dimpled balls,  
and flung them to the ground.  
Fast as we could, deep  
into the fabric of our shorts,  
we crammed them till our pockets  
sagged, and lumbered down  
the darkening street  
like lumpy angels, holy  
with the light of apricots.





## Five Houses Down

In a panic, the woman  
at the day-care center  
begged me to help her find them,  
the two rowdy toddlers  
who just moments before  
squeezed through a rut beneath the fence  
and toddled off. Their playmate  
had seen them, and run to tell  
the woman they had gone.  
I found them five houses down,  
standing beneath a tree of fruit,  
some pieces of which were strewn  
upon the ground. Each held his prized,  
ripe apricot with both hands  
as a man would a cantaloupe,  
fumbling it in his palms  
like a young god in training  
sphering clay into a sun.





# Fried Pies

To make the filling, the mothers  
cut the ripened apricots from their stones,  
slice them into strips, soak them in pots of water,  
cook them, add sugar, cinnamon, and cook them  
again till they reach just the right consistency.

As the filling cools, they roll out the dough  
for the crust, cut it into round pieces  
they spoon the filling into the middle of,  
fold them neatly in half, seal the curved  
edges, pressing them with the tines of a fork,  
and deep-fry them in bubbling lard  
to a perfect medium brown.

As the pies cool on the table,  
the children close their eyes and salivate,  
picturing a thousand ripe apricots  
dangling from the branches of the trees,  
each a fuzzy, rosy, yellow sun  
setting in the maw of the night.





## II. Their Skins of Rosy Yellow



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## Interlude Late in an Afternoon

For several days in a row, when I was home alone  
in the waning hours of the afternoon, basking  
in the shadows of the porch, she walked by  
*sans* speaking, clad in a loose, cotton sundress  
and barefoot. Her hair was straight, long and dark,  
falling to her bare shoulders and back. One afternoon,  
out of the blue, she stopped and queried whether  
she could use my phone, only for a minute.  
After her call, during which I never heard her speak,  
she thanked me and left. The next afternoon,  
a flush of embarrassment on her face and neck  
ending at the shadow of her cleavage, she approached me  
holding in her hand something wrapped in a paper towel.  
Extending her offering and pressing firmly into my hand  
whatever she had wrapped in the towel, she smiled. I felt,  
oozing through the paper, the wetness of two apricots,  
overripe, their skins of rosy yellow splitting, bleeding  
onto my palm the sweet and sticky substance of a pass.





## At the One of Solid Silk

Her unexpected death  
two weeks ago  
left him a widower  
at twenty-five.

As night falls, as he has  
at every dusk since she died,  
he ghost-walks to her clothes  
in the closet. He fingers  
each of her blouses, lingering  
at the one of solid silk,  
a print of vivid, ripened apricots  
lifelike as a detailed photograph  
fit for framing, each apricot  
crowned with drops of dew,  
laden with her scent,  
the blouse she wore  
the moment his interest in her,  
passing like a film fast-forwarded,  
stopped, cropped to the frozen,  
single frame of love.





# The Picker

In the blur of a single motion,  
she thrusts her hand into the branches,  
clutches a cluster of ripened fruit,  
snaps it from its stems, and lays it  
bruiseless in the basket dangling  
from her arm like a cheap straw purse.  
She'll work like this till dusk, filling baskets  
brimming with the promise of a better life.  
At last, lumbering to her shanty  
in the darkness, with bronze, aching hands  
spared not even a moment for washing,  
she'll ease her infant from the arms  
of her grandmother, squeeze her to her breasts  
for nursing, place her in a makeshift cradle,  
cradle the weary head of her husband,  
and collapse quickly asleep, her calloused  
palm curled around the corner of her pillow,  
redolent with the scent of apricots.





# The Dream

For two years now, when he's slept in his cell at the state pen, he's had the same, recurring dream. The apricots have ripened on his front yard trees, bowing the branches so the lower ones touch the ground. Frozen in his chair inside the window like a quadriplegic, all he can do is watch as the crows descend like a black, cawing cloud and devour the ripened fruit, their beaks slashing like black knives. His trees bereft of fruit and even leaves, he wakes, remembering how for miles around the locals came to gaze upon the glory of his trees, the largest and most productive in the county, bestowing his dilapidated shanty with dignity, hiding it from the street with a dense veil of fruit and leaves. He remembers how he only meant to graze the big teenager who awoke him late one night, stealing his apricots, but, firing an errant shot, dropped him dead as a cold, pulpless apricot stone.





## III. Fecund with the Promise





# The Apricot Tree

Though it was established  
with a grand root system  
which drew its needed moisture  
from deep within the earth,  
he tended it daily  
as a gardener would a rosebush.  
He tracked the seasons with its foliage,  
and took great pride in the imperceptible  
widening of its trunk. Even in mid-  
January, when its leafless branches  
clacked in the howling wind  
like the antlers of rutting stags,  
he'd don his heaviest coat,  
take his place on his porch,  
and watch it through the afternoon  
to dusk. *Sans* even moving, it creaked him  
through the seasons like a wagon,  
tugging him toward the summer  
of his ninetieth year, toward dark green branches  
bowed with the bounty of apricots, fecund  
with the promise of baskets and damsels.





# The Centenarians

Their gospel  
is the obvious.  
They love  
their weightless,  
rawboned frames,  
allowing them  
ghostlike movement,  
the inconspicuousness  
of a mind  
whooshing  
through the rooms  
of memory.  
They cherish  
their collections  
of canes,  
new and antique,  
perfect for balance  
or weaponry.  
In the falseness  
of their teeth,  
they've found  
their Truth,  
reliable  
as their diet  
of rice, spring water,  
and, canned,  
dried, or fresh,  
apricots.





## Still Life

Of dried, cracked oil on canvas,  
it hangs on a white wall, illumed  
by the slanted beam of an early  
afternoon spotlight-sun of track  
lighting: a white table covered  
with a white, cotton tablecloth;  
a white porcelain plate; a knife  
and fork of sterling silver;  
and a fresh, ripe apricot  
placed off-center on the plate.  
Only the sheen of the plate  
and its shadow distinguish it  
from the tablecloth. The knife  
and fork, lying equidistant  
from the plate, draw the viewer's eye  
to blade and tines, auguring  
imminent violence. For the moment  
intact, the peel of the apricot,  
taut with the pressure of flesh,  
pulses with the heat of pinkish yellow,  
braced for the inevitable ravage  
just beyond the canvas edge  
of manicured, human hands.





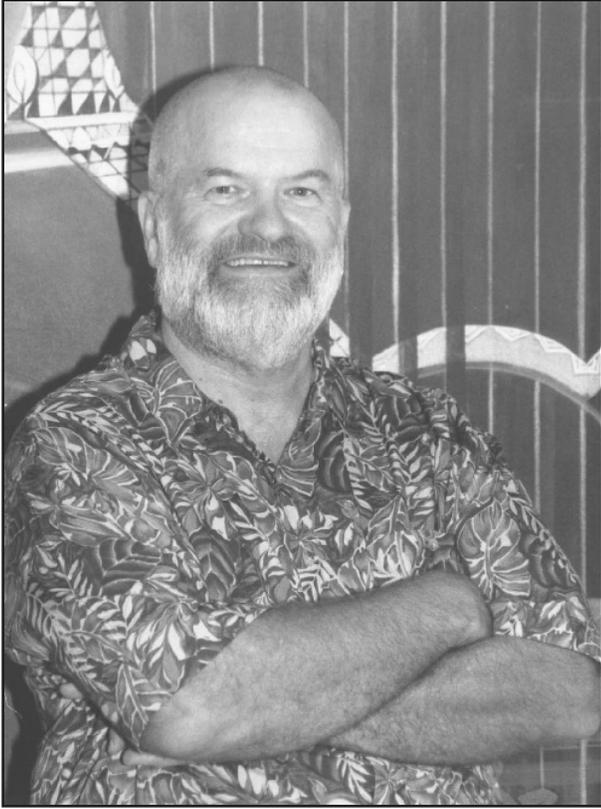
# Artificial Fruit

I saw them in a basket  
on the table, in a slant  
of late afternoon, winter  
sunlight, a scrumptious cluster  
of apricots so fresh their stems  
were still attached, bearing, trembling  
in a current of air from a vent,  
browning leaves curling in the act  
of dying. I stood there bothered  
by their symmetry, too perfect  
for actual fruit, so I bent  
toward them, checking for redolence  
or a bruise. Their plastic smell  
gave them away, the telltale  
sign of fraud. I felt a sadness  
in their unbridgeable distance  
from the real, imagining  
their hollow desire, yea, longing  
to trade their everlasting beauty  
for even the transitory  
dirge of decay, or clank of the knife  
bounded against the stone of life.





## About the Author



Larry D. Thomas has published five collections of poems: **The Lighthouse Keeper** (Timberline Press, 2001), **Amazing Grace** (Texas Review Press, 2001), **The Woodlanders** (Pecan Grove Press, 2002), **Where Skulls Speak Wind** (Texas Review Press, 2004), and **Stark Beauty** (Timberline Press, 2005). His sixth poetry collection, **The Fraternity of Oblivion**, is forthcoming from Timberline Press (Fulton, Mo.) in 2007. Among the prizes and awards he has received for his poetry are the 2004 Violet Crown Award (Writers' League of Texas), the 2003 Western Heritage Award (Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma), two Texas Review Poetry Prizes (2001 and 2004), two Pushcart Prize nominations, and three Spur Award Finalist citations (Western Writers of America). His poetry has appeared in numerous national journals, including *Poet Lore*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Southwest Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Texas Review*, *Borderlands: Texas*

*Poetry Review*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Cottonwood*, *Red Rock Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, and *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

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