

To the Orange Trees on McClintock Road

by Alex Gerhard

I remember the orange trees on the way to my grandfather's house.

Once you hit Georgia the sunlight changes,
it hangs in the air like the scent of orange blossoms
that I think I remember, staring out of car windows,
visions of leaf-leaf-leaf.

We had to cross the railroads tracks (a quiet
bump) and in the mornings my brother and I
would hop rusted fences to pick
grapefruits. We weighed the lean of branches,
hanging crooked colors and spring of each pluck.

Late at night the juice train would run past.

The quiet shaking of that house feels
wistful now, while we live at the corner
where the rail passes by. Half a block down
runs the old freight track, an overpass I
can't help but gaze up at in this artificial valley
that floods when it rains. By my right arm
are the orange trees—

my ornamental desert transplants, how
could it be this way for both of us, that a kinder god
would have made us barren instead of useless.

You rest in raised beds, half with slashcut stumps, beer cans
empty of rainwater left at your roots, a cigarette, the snares
of irrigation pipes pulled out of the earth,
trying to keep you alive in this place and, of course,
streaking down the sidewalk melting into soil
are rotting black fruit. Even with this
we achieve nuisance, not disaster, flushed
back with the street sweeper and autumn rain but God,
I remember the smell of oranges.