

## **Tenderized**

*For M.*

**by Leah Dawson**

I told my lover the word tender was over

used in poetry, should only be used in highly specific situations, you know, ones where the moment is perfect  
– perfect.

So I've orbited around it, having now something to prove. I spent time tracing tongues over hills rolling  
palm lines stubbled knees, and read that tender often comes from bruised. Something soft because it's made to hurt.

Over time, the plum grows soft. Over time, the muscle calcifies unless cooling hands knead over and over smaller threads of pain. A needling until tissue moves to water, sacs of luminescent brine split from hot dead wood.

In the black-bottom slosh of ocean, say into a pocket your answers to me now.

Did you knead the bruise yourself? Will the hurt end here? Or has the shadow I stepped into stayed like oysters on your back? Let language bring relief. In another element – who are you? So tall in the grass. Arms wide with skirts of alien light. A body like cornstalks. Boy girl animal.

Suck the bruise, soft plum, until tender is the only word we know, until our mouths are full of language. Like the way you tell me and I don't believe it's real. So perhaps this is relief – truth is only the language we choose.