

A DECIDUOUS PLACE OF PEACHES

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If you've ever wandered off of your street, out into a land of shade and dirt-clods, then you may have known it. If you've gone down those parallel rows of hard, uneven footing and out into the mud and the dried-out mud—into the sweet-smelling world of grids and earth and trees, where it was irresistibly sticky-sweet and the ants feasted on all the candied rot—then you may have known a peach orchard. Warm and structured; the only place where gravity really seemed to come alive, where it had just waited an eternity to exhaust your every step. What a beautiful place, we could say.

California's Central Valley region is home to more than 250,000 peach orchards stretched some fifty miles wide, and four hundred fifty miles long, from Redding to Bakersfield. While the state is number one in the U.S. for peach produce, it could also boast the highest methamphetamine addiction rate throughout our entire country, but it rarely ever does. The peach orchards are a much more savory attraction than some of the hollowed out communities that surround them.

They don't advertise these places to travelers or immigrants. It's sort of a come-see-for-yourself kind of deal and we all know why--who would plan a move to a community with higher drug addiction rates than employment? Who would raise children in those cities with higher teen pregnancy rates than high school enrollments? Where one black child is the only colored face in a school assembly, and where his parents would never just go next door to borrow sugar. Where fights and drugs are readily available, where it grows in the backyard like gardens. Where parents snatch their children up in public and lock them out all night. Where pets are shot when they are sick or injured and cars left abandoned where they broke down. Where the best of school programs still can't afford instruments, and the school bus is heathen heaven. Where carpets are filthy and doors are broken off.

Where pillows are stained and the sheets have become curtains. Where certain colors and logos cannot be worn, where one in every hundred persons is a sex-offender. They just aren't right, we could say.

None of these things ever seem to find their way into the peach orchards, however they aren't without their own mess of problems. Peach trees are prone to many different debilitating diseases: Brown rot, jacket rot, green fruit rot, phytophthora root rot, peach leaf curl, powdery mildew, verticillium wilt... The diseases sneak up and affect the whole community of trees plaguing them from the inside. Disabling them, inhibiting their growth and reproduction. Without the use of pesticide, they can poison a whole orchard until the fruit becomes worthless and inedible, essentially killing the entire crop.

Meth addiction on the other hand, while de-wiring people's brains, disabling cognitive function, impairing moral judgment, inhibiting education, and debilitating healthy bodily function is a "disease" that flourishes here, outside the orchards, without any infectious properties other than choice. Its not that bad, we could say.

But I was born into the community outside the peach orchard—the one that didn't dream of higher-education, or birth control, or cleanliness. The one evaded by bookstores, dentists and Starbucks. That thrived on thefts and government welfare, racism and hate. The one where my only escape was playing "house" in someone's muddy, pesticide infested plot of trees. The one that hasn't itself any hope for pesticide, but there is always genocide—It must have been something in the peaches, we could say.

Each year peach trees deciduously release their leaves to the gravity of those loamy clay orchard floors, but every year somehow those same diseases find them all over again, infecting their leaves. I left that place over seventeen years ago, and still somehow it finds me. That city always lingers, rotting out my roots. It plagues my memories of childhood, and all those warm, sunny days playing in the peach orchard.