**To De-Pith an Orange**

Pranathi Durgempudi

mother wanted orange trees

citrus rinds

to prop against her crooked teeth,

pressing into her pink-black gums—

a smile of ochre and flame

she wanted mist-clotted California

and orange trees in the lush garden

of a pink-clay estate:

mine, if she could force my pardon

she peeled oranges and hummed

swallowed, rupturing veiny flesh

fingers reeking of syrup,

lay to rest the curls of their skin

to desiccate under mountain sun,

grind with white marble to powder

fine, a golden mask—

mother said it would make me glow

she settled for cold mornings

trembling with birds,

planted apple trees

withered and cracked

beneath the glaze of snow

mother wanted orange trees for me

when I lied to her my mouth was full

of river silt and my own cherry blood

from a bitten lip

for bartering a lifetime for a pen

yesterday, I swallowed orange seeds,

I pray they sprout roots in the

acid lining of my stomach