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## Falling

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## Caliri: Falling

### FALLING

Heather Caliri

Harry first saw the melon in the fruit aisle. He had come to buy tulips for his girlfriend, but found himself in the produce section instead. There, he saw its smooth roundness, the subtle yellow striping, the rough button where it had been connected to its vine. He could see its self-assurance while surrounded by so many copies of itself.

*It knows what it is.*

He picked the melon up with both hands. It weighed at least five pounds. Its skin pressed against his fingers. It was unbearably whole. He glanced up at the sign. *Only forty-nine cents a pound?* Harry headed for the checkout aisle, melon in hand.

Exhilarated, he got in a checkout line to wait his turn. He was not a patient man, but he had the melon's weight to ground him.

Then he remembered he'd forgotten the flowers. His stomach tensed for a moment. Then he ran his hand over the melon's smooth skin and relaxed.

His girlfriend wanted to get married. They had lived together for a year. Her shoes stood at perpetual attention in his closet, all the toes pointing the same way. At first, he liked living with her, liked divvying up his bed, his closet, and his space with a woman. He felt guided by sharing, like a child rewarded for playing nice.

But lately, when he came home from his job, she'd be sitting at their kitchen table, looking at him. Asking questions. At first, they were simple. What did he want for dinner? What color should they paint the kitchen? Then, she got more demanding. She wanted to know where their relationship was headed. What he wanted from life. This morning, she'd left for work in a huff.

"We can't live like this forever, Harry. We're stuck in a rut. On the way to nowhere."

He knew if he asked her to marry him, the questions would stop for a while. But marriage would mean someday holding a baby in his arms and knowing it was both of them mingled together, permanently. The image troubled him. A fuzzy head, a soft belly, and tiny fingers that would clutch at his.

Harry had a sudden image of the girlfriend slicing into his fruit, exposing the clear, pink flesh. He imagined her taking a bite, and smiling as the juice ran down her chin. He gagged, and felt the acid burn the back of his throat.

It was his turn. He set the melon on the conveyor belt and watched it move away from him. The cashier greeted him and put the melon on a scale. The numbers flickered, and then settled at the melon's weight.

"Paper or plastic?" asked the bag boy.

"Neither," said Harry. He paid the cashier. Then he lifted the melon and smiled to feel its cool, firm skin again. Was it just him, or could he feel its subtle pattern underneath his fingertips? The secret pattern of the rind revealing itself for him?

The exit door opened for him automatically. Outside, Harry saw a little girl holding on to her mother's arm, using it as a swing. The girl wore a blue hat and smiled at him.

Harry smiled back, entranced by her. *She knows her mother will hold her up.*

He felt a whoosh in the pit of his stomach. The ground let him go. He'd stepped off the curb without realizing it. As he came back to earth, he stumbled. The melon flew out of his hands and hit the pavement with a thunk. It rolled a few feet, and then came to a rest.

Harry ran over to it and knelt on the ground. But when he picked up the melon, it had split open. He could see its crisp center exposed, and imagined the seeds working their way toward the rind, like his thoughts did sometimes, struggling to reach the surface. The melon was ruined.

A car honked.

Harry looked up. A bright, lime green VW Beetle had stopped five feet away from him. Motionless, breathless, wordless, he

stared at the car.

A man leaned out the window. "Get out of the street, you moron."

Harry looked around. There were other cars aimed at him along the pavement in front of the store. People gestured. He stood, cradling the melon. A throbbing head rush almost toppled him again. He saw black spots swarming across his vision like flies over dead fruit.

The man in the Beetle leaned on his horn. "Move, you fucking asshole!"

Harry threw the melon before he realized what he was doing. He saw its smooth skin turning in the sunlight as it arched over the black pavement and touched the clean blue sky. Then it plummeted towards the green car.

Harry started running before the melon hit. He felt the ground thump against his feet, electric pains flare up to his knee. He was hurting himself, pounding his legs too hard. Over his shoulder, he heard a sickening, metallic thud, yelling, a car horn.

Harry didn't turn around. Instead, he followed the white arrows painted on the asphalt. They told him which way to run.