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Clingstone Peaches

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Haven: Clingstone Peaches

CLINGSTONE PEACHES

Chris Haven

I am eleven in early December
on the twisty road to Crescent OK
past the gated Kerr-McGee plant that killed
Karen Silkwood I wondered if our car
ever passed hers on the way to grandma's.

My father and his eight sisters divide
the estate he has strange authority
the youngest, the only male, and the eye
of a grocer he unstocks the freezer
at dusk he spots the unpicked peach tree.

He tells me to come on and I feel strong
hands me a basket asks catch or climb
catch I say as my father in black tie
black wingtips disappears into the arms
of the tree a peach falls to my hands.

I place them in the basket the skin stings
my palms when I catch it leaves no bruise but
the ones that hit my face do I can't tell
my father it's enough I can't see his face
I can't know this is a kind of crying.

That night in the hard light of the bathroom
I still feel the peaches on my skin my
mother takes a tweezers plucks the needles
from my cheeks like splinters hundreds of cling-
stone peaches lie in baskets they will rot.