

The Grape

by Jessie Campbell

There was a pleasant, chilly bite in the October breeze, sharply contrasted with the warmth of the citrine late-afternoon sun. It hadn't rained in more than a week; the grass was brittle and crispy beneath my shoes. I held a grape in my hand. The iris sphere was dusty with pesticide and slightly wrinkled from being clutched like a talisman as I ambled through the vineyard. It was fat and squashed. I regretted finding it after its prime. This one perfect grape had been missed in the harvest, seemingly alone.

I imagined putting it in my mouth; I would burst the tender skin with my teeth, allow the juice to spill over my tongue, not chewing until I felt I might drown. It would be slightly bitter, and the taste would remind me of my grandmother's cooking. I would dream that night of her, tell her about the grape, and wake in the morning convinced I had spoken to her actual spirit. I would tell no one, but fervently search for the next encounter. I would fail to keep appointments in favor of traveling from one distant restaurant or farm to another, trying to find foods that tasted like hers. I would lose my job and eventually my friends, having succumbed to obsession in finding taste memories to prompt spirit dreams. I would eat through my savings; I would be reduced to begging on the streets and hoping for a sign of her in soup lines.

I buried the grape in the dusty soil at the base of the barn. My fingernails bore a faint purple stain, the only evidence of my barely escaped future. Something so powerful and dangerous should never be eaten.

