

Crossing the Pear

The summer I turned twelve, my father and I
discovered a half-eaten pear
sprouting from the compost.
We tied it to a fence, watered and watched
two branches appear, then four.

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There are twenty-eight pages of Pereiras
in the Lisbon telephone book.

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All summer and fall I watered, then one morning: nothing
but bent twigs shriveled.

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In my parochial school History books
the Portuguese were beautiful men who dangled
gold hoops from ear lobes and sailed
the seven seas. They told nothing
of the days of Inquisition, when for refusing pork,
or changing linens on Fridays, over 200 Pereiras
perished in Evora alone.

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*... the pear was forced into the mouth,
rectum or vagina of the accused,
expanded by force of a screw
to the maximum aperture of its segments.*

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The venerable pear, my patronym.

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Scattered across continents,
expulsed from garden to garden.
If flight is no more
than an admission of guilt,
what was our crime?

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Youngest of five brothers, my father
stole bread from under the bayonettes
of Japanese invaders, attended
Catholic mass with his widowed mother
every day but Saturday.

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Twenty-eight pages of Pereiras:
the same as I would find in Rio
Sao Paulo, Hong Kong, Macau...

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I bask in the shade of a spreading pear tree,
laden with new fruit. The name of my father
is all that's left of him, a vague sweetness,
the taste of pear.