

THE QUARRY

Verity Oswin

Cherries

The trees had been spatchcocked (a violent act) against the trellis.
A wind broken with salt set the orchard a-hum.
The cherries fell plump, desultorily.
The baskets were lashed to our waists.

You were a treble clef— arms curled round the stave.
I was afraid of heights, men— the withered ends
of everything — I found you under a tree eating cherry money.
We were hungry— wanted flesh, sugar— red.

Did I say it was Tasmania, 1996? Did I say we hitch-hiked, pitched
our tent on an oval? That the pegs slid deliciously into the green
island town called Snug? Anagram of sung you said, of guns I said.
You said palindrome— rolled your eyes all the way back in your head.

At noon we woke to the honey thwack of the bat against leather cherry
bruised by those south Tasmanian boys, all clean and white, striped
against the grass peppermint morning, peered out of the flap; middle of the match
cheeks still glazed from the sticky gaze of the miners the night before.

We really were only nineteen.

We really did spend the summer picking cherries.

It turned out our twenties would be like the cherries—
splendid, unapologetic, strung on a wire.