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Quenepas

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SUNY Purchase

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Quenepas

After Christina Rossetti

“Come buy, come buy!”
Eased before the red steady light,
the man chants between rusted engines
Swinging a wooden pole with pounds of
heavy fruit, weighing him down,
he bounces with each step.

The fruits wrapped in plastic bags
glisten beneath the summer sun.
Sweat trickles down his face, darkening the line where
skin meets strands meets more strands that interlock,
fester at the nape of his neck,
the nape of my neck.

“Come buy, come buy--
Mangos and coconuts,
rich quenepas,
Good for the soul!”

Inside against the slackening leather,
my thighs are exposed,
I feel the need to protect them.
The window rolls down with a certain
seduction. The man bends over, licking his heavy lips.

“Fresh from Puerto Rico,
Come buy, come buy.”

I am hesitant when my father
slips me the five dollar bill,
old and crusted, bent and torn,
It rests in my hands like a paper doll.
I am reaching over,
my hand through the window,
sinking into the hot summer sun.
The fruits jiggle in their bags
Looming over us,
casting shadows,
perspiring with sweat,
dripping with their juices.

Come buy, come buy.

The quenepas are firm in my hands,
dozens and dozens of inch sized fruits,
hidden beneath thick green skin,
darkening around the edges.

I smell the island from here.
From the littered floors,
highway exits off the Jackie Robinson.
Where trees are scarce and
coconut trees are a thousand miles away,
a plane ride that shakes,
an island that isn't a home for me.

An instant, green.
Our metal skeletons are readying to slip away into the mid-day.
The man is moving on to the next,
his words sift between the vents.
“Come buy, come buy.”

We bite, cracking the shell
the juices pour out,
dampening my lips.
I am sucking,
chewing,

biting,
devouring all
the yellow skin down to the beige
seed.

This is what men do to girls like me.