

JOANNE DIAZ

## The Purity Instinct

Near the end, Ceausescu would only drink juice through a straw. Twice, he was convinced that his hearing had improved: once when he heard the sound of a distant train of his youth; another time when his long-dead mother sang a little-known song in his ear. Other times—orange was especially good for this—he felt his bones straighten, and once, after a tall glass of grapefruit, his arms acquired the strong sinews of his time as the village shepherd and shoemaker. With prune, his skin became impervious to cold. At a foreign banquet held in his honor, he went to the balcony, stood in the rain like a dog, and did not shiver once. On the road, his assistant kept all the straws in a satchel; at home, every drawer was full. On the first of each month, a crate went directly to the kitchen built with the blood of traitors and money from the West. After a childhood of pig fat and sheep's milk, the purity instinct was strong for Ceausescu. In those final moments, as he sang "The Internationale," his hands cuffed to his wife's, he must have admired how clean bullet in its chamber, the singular force of its straight line.

Note: This poem is inspired by the Dinner Party podcast "Studying the Food of History's Most Infamous."