

How to Peel Cactus Fruit

Abayey used to pick the fruit
bloodied and plump, thorns
sticking out between her fingers
and squeeze it into fat drops
in a glass bowl. Then spoonful

of cold shoved down the throat.
Sometimes it softened the heat
created after the soreness of a
long, silent cry.

The fruit comes inside handwoven baskets,
in a cluttered circle, thorns of one poking blood-juice
from the other.

If you stab your teeth in, it tastes like
honey and caramelized autumn leaves; its
meat a little window into light.

This is how you peel cactus fruit:

cut the small thorns adorning its coat, or snatch
them right out of the skin — some get stuck
in the bellies of fingernails, others nest in the palms. Squeeze
the body of the fruit until it is strained; its juice or meat
squirting right out, until a small pool of blood
inhabits the endless carvings in the insides
of your hands. Then, finally, sink in the teeth
with eyes closed, and the tongue suddenly
tastes seasons, winter, rain, dust, flour, cold,
and the acrid winds of Dahlak deserts.

This is what cures war:

the taste of watery fruit
in your mouth of fire.

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