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# Gathering Figs

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## Two Poems · *Amalia Gladhart*

### GATHERING FIGS

The photograph is of Rosario crosslegged at the border of a cornfield,  
the stalks already dry and bristling against the dusty breeze,  
her gauzy Christmas blouse clingy in the near-cold,  
a present offered without ceremony the night her father returned from the  
city,  
distributing his presents early because he had them,  
Gabriel, an angel's name, bearer of news, of prophesy.

I call her Charo, the common nickname for Rosario,  
for rosary, a name of beads clicking  
pebbles under worried, hopeful fingers,  
a name of repetition, which may explain the days so much alike  
the way all the figs we harvested were soft like velvet  
yet the sweet purple terry-looped interior  
seemed always to be holding something back  
as if the fruit were not quite ripe.

We gathered figs because they grew there,  
between the pigpen and the house,  
along the rise from which adobe walls  
could almost have been shaped by whittling.  
We made the journey every afternoon, dawdling  
over popsicles and soap operas in her aunt's front room.  
It would be hours before we finally doused our iron bucket  
over the animals standing head and feet into the trough.  
We stole black walnuts with slingshots when we fed another aunt's hens,  
shared between us the *fritada*, fried pork in chunks with toasted corn,  
leaving brown paper scraps translucent with grease.  
But what I remember are the faintly disappointing figs,  
even the best somehow bland beneath the sugar.  
A fig ought to be juicy, dribbling over your chin,  
pooling bubbles in the powder dust as you eat

leaning forward, away from your clothes,  
that freedom to crush your face into treasure  
because that's what it's for.

The fig, toned dark like organ meat,  
like the thick blood of the liver or a root,  
still no rival to pear or orange or mango,  
to the heavy melon ripeness of a Sunday in July.

Yet we ate figs all summer. Each day  
began dark with a fierce chorus of fighting cocks,  
their cries edging into days like the rosary of Charo's name,  
like gifts almost off-hand, as though to fuss, shredding colored paper,  
might anger that other namesake, that carrier of tidings,  
with the thought that hoarded presents could take the place  
of news, of observation, of eating what is close at hand.

#### HOSPITAL GIRL

I like flowers with many petals and watching bag-people on the lawn  
collecting bottles. I like Sammy when he smiles and the light moving on  
the river outside my window. I like biting my nails and the taste and  
smell of olives, green ones, on my fingers long after I've eaten them for  
lunch. I like the night-time and my dreams, if they are not too long. I like  
the early morning before the girl in the next bed is awake and starts  
gasping. I like telling my mother I feel pins in my buttocks when I move  
quickly, as though they had fallen asleep. I like her meeting the word  
buttocks, eyebrows high and eyes wide. I like the smell of the nurses'  
greenish rubber gloves. I like the small bruise on my hand when they  
remove the IV. I like watching it fade. I like the lounge because the  
window opens. I like visitors from school when they bring presents and  
talk softly. I like the gray haired nurse who comes in the middle of the  
night. I like rubbing the sleep out of my lashes alone each morning. I like  
the way my fingers move in the air. I like breakfast when there's yogurt.