



Lemons

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MY FAVORITE LEMONS ARE the kind I pick up from a fruit stand, and they fit snugly in my right hand. Two oblong ends peek out in rotund points over the edges of my palm. When I rub my thumb along the nearly smooth skin, the lemon runs its skin along my thumb; we feel each other's fingerprint.

Truthfully, all lemons are my favorite kind of lemon. They are all ovular, sometimes spherical but pointed, neon yellow, pleurably painful citruses. They sit there on the counter mysteriously rolling around when you haven't touched them. They force my mouth into the most ridiculous pucker face. They are powerful.

I taste that zinging undiluted juice and the $C_6H_8O_7$ (citric acid) is a punch to the face. My lips thin into a tight grimace. Invisible pins and needles prick the back of my jaw. Everything below my nose contracts. The sourness pulls muscles up, down, sideways, and around. I squint my eyes and furrow

my brows. For relief the only sound I make is a high pitched *oo-oo* as I try to shake off the tart. I have a pucker face fit for a cartoon.

And it makes my sister giggle, laugh, chuckle, guffaw, chortle, and honestly and most authentically just crack up. She laughs and laughs, so I eat them for her. I send her videos of my facial contortions because we don't live in the same state anymore. She can't just turn around in the kitchen anytime she wants to with a quarter slice in her hand, gesturing for me to take it, and then wait expectantly for my face to erupt in pain. So I record it and send it to her because together with our laughter the sourness turns into joy. Life gave us so much sourness in our childhood, which was harsh on our small souls, and so I revel in the magic of the stuff that turns sourness sweet.

During our childhood, when my father came home from work, my family and I would sit at the dinner table where he served up insults, anger,

and swear-filled vomit. He spewed and sneered and shattered self-confidences over and over again. I hid my pucker and swallowed all he gave, feeling entirely unlovable by age seven. My mother decided all she deserved out of love was bitterness, so she continues to excuse verbal abuse after thirty years. My angry father and my broken mother often left my sister and me alone, steeping in a home full of hiding places, and it wasn't until high school that my sister and I realized we had very similar scars.

My sister was a senior and I was a sophomore, and she drove us both to and from school. She dated someone with a turquoise Geo Tracker, she talked politics with friends, she smeared paint in abstract swirls in art class; god, she was so cool.

After school we sat in the kitchen eating our rummaged snacks, swinging our legs from the counter, and talking. That's where she taught me that what was going on was called abuse, and

it was not what regular dads did. Together we opened up those sour lemons our father flung at us, braved that zinging undiluted juice, and weighed and measured them, and then she said, "Let's grab a pitcher and add some sugar." We told each other we were worth something. We told each other we were good enough. We told each other that we were not our parents and never would be. We told each other, "I love you."

And now today at twenty-five and twenty-seven years old, we have one of my favorite things about my life—our sisterhood, a crisp, healing draft of sweetness.

My sister has never once asked for anything in return for her kindness, for her love, for showing me how to make this lemonade, but I know she laughs at my face contorting while I eat a small slice of lemon. Proudly, I commit to eating hundreds in my lifetime, maybe even thousands, because, simply put, lemons are my favorite fruit. ✨