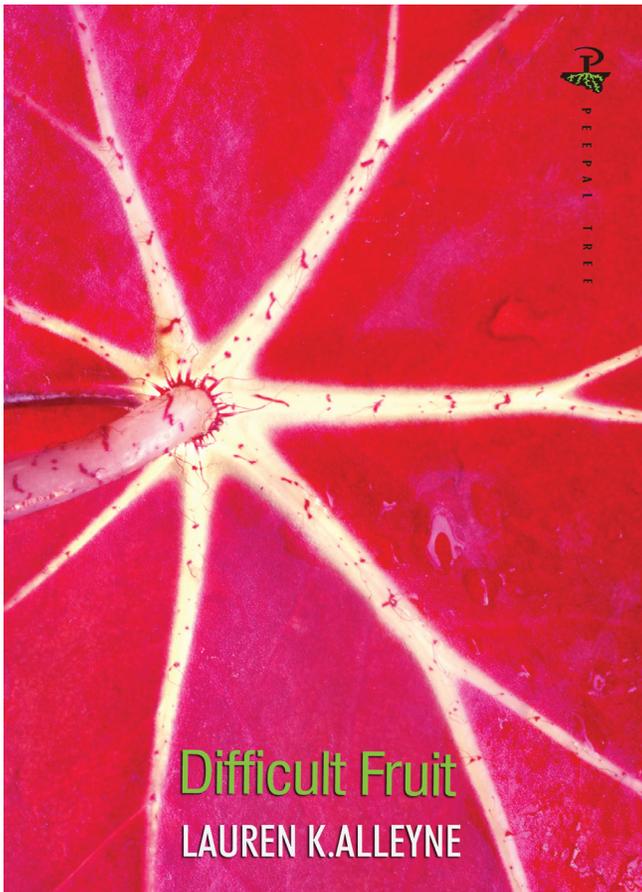


Difficult Fruit

LAUREN K. ALLEYNE



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*"let me answer with joy;
let me go up, let me go
dancing, ecstatic with flight."
from "When the Angels Come"*

Difficult Fruit, grapples with personal experience—with naming and claiming the “fruits” of Alleyne’s specific journey into womanhood, which includes coming to terms with violence and loss, celebrating love and connection, as well as standing witness in the world that shaped the journey. It is a collection of poems about self-knowledge—of fighting for and winning personhood as a woman. The speaker understands that “maybe older and wiser is just learning/ how to put yourself in your own good hands.” The poems of age scattered throughout the manuscript both chronicle and disrupt time—they look back into the speaker’s past as a way to understand the present, as well as to find something that the speaker needs in order to move forward. The many elegies within consider the ultimate price of life, which is death, and as the poem “How It Touches Us” comes to realize, “all laws of matter must hold true”. The poems are a movement through fracture—both necessary and unwarranted—toward wholeness and transformation.

These “lyrics lay bare the marrow,” examine an interior life and dreams, then turn their faces outward to the world with messages of celebration, cultural displacement, the transport of temporal sensation and the torment and regret of violence and self-destruction.”

—Allison Meyers, Executive Director of Cave Canem

Lauren K. Alleyne hails from the twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. She holds an M.F.A. in Poetry and a graduate certificate in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Cornell University. Alleyne’s fiction, poetry and non-fiction has been widely published in journals and anthologies, including *Black Arts Quarterly*, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *The Crab Orchard Review*, *Belleview Literary Review*, *The Banyan Review*, *Let Spirit Speak*, *Guernica*, *Growing Up Girl* and *Gathering Ground*, among others. A Cave Canem graduate, her work has been awarded numerous prizes, including the 2010 Small Axe Literary Prize, a 2012 Lyrical Iowa Award, an Atlantic Monthly Student Poetry Prize, an International Publication Prize from *The Atlanta Review*, and honorable mention in the 2009 Reginald Shepherd Memorial Poetry Prize and the 2010 Cave Canem Poetry Prize. Alleyne is currently the Poet-in-Residence and an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Dubuque.



Letter to the outside

Jentel, WY May 2008

It is magic here, outside the rule of clocks and scurry. The vast baskets of mountains overflow; the clouds clink like ice in a glass: I drink it all in, and it is enough. What a concept, contentment. Yesterday, where the creek tipples at the base of the valley, I saw a dead goat—stiff, ringed with flies, its face like a plate of leftovers. I wept, then I did not. I stood at the roadside until the wind wafted up its benediction. From this place I gift you the unoccupied air; the wobbly prancing of new calves; a sky so close the stars might be a chain-link fence you run your hands along as you amble through the night; your live and mutable body, its spark and spell and solitude. Write back.

The X-Ray

I feared and revered it,
this black and white portrait
pinned calmly against the harsh

fluorescent glow, the cryptic stare
of my doctor in her white lab coat,
her ball point pen briskly outlining

the skeleton of my wrist: the fragmented
carpals; the rivers of dark separating
the tiny pieces of the metacarpals;

the four long fingers, their bony white
columns; the nebulous lumps of each
knuckle, speed bumps on a curving road;

the comparative stub of the thumb,
the thick layers of adipose transformed
into a barely visible grayness.

It did not apologize, demur, or cower
at our scrutiny—it dared us, even,
to look deeper, to pick each tiny layer apart,

dig through the thick cartilage,
the grain of ligaments, the ivory-colored
coating, to lay bare the marrow, the blue veins,

the dark arteries, and thin capillaries
rich with plasma and blood cells
on their journeys to and from the heart.

I have longed to live like this:
to be held up to the light, naked
beneath any official stare—found whole.

Thirty

This morning, you start from a dream
seasoned with bourbon. Last night roils in your stomach,
funks your breath, aches. A message
lights your phone, asking, did you get home safe?
And as you answer, yes, you wonder
if this is all it means to grow up: you don't
learn sense. You still find yourself swirling
in a strange city in your reckless boots,
the hum and shudder of liquor driving your feet.
Still, your heart parades its glitter for would-be lovers,
dissolves as they install themselves
in other women's arms. What you learn
is how to exit with grace. Despite the dark,
the sputtering streetlamp that is your only moon,
you learn to believe the streets will unfold
in the right direction if you just start walking.
And when you find you can walk no further,
a man with a beautiful accent and a meter will appear
on his metal-hinged steed and whisk you towards
whatever
place your weary mouth conjures. Call it home.
30, maybe older and wiser is just learning
how to put yourself in your own good hands:
that you will wake up snug in your solitary bed,
your favorite pyjamas soft against your skin,
your hair tucked into in its stocking cap,
a glass of water on the nightstand waiting
to slake your morning thirst.

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