

RHONDA DOUGLAS

Figs

The day Dad calls to say  
Nan is dying I buy figs,  
not because I like them or she liked them,  
but because her mother-in-law,  
my Great Grandma Addie,  
ate figs at Christmas each year.

Standing in my kitchen  
I hold the soft weight of them  
in my hands, palpating the flesh,  
trying not to leave bruises  
on the already black-purple skin,  
waiting to be told what is coming—  
as though fruit would somehow know.

In the shower I dutifully run my hands  
over and around in circles  
concentrating, pinching my own  
nipple, arms over my head in silent  
supplication, cupping the softness  
in my palms like an offering,  
unsure now of what's inside.

The best way to eat figs  
is to slice them in half,  
pour a gentle honey over  
the exposed tissue and  
roast in the oven til warm. Serve  
with one white scoop of vanilla

ice cream, which will lose its shape  
soon and melt. You will notice  
how the seedy pulp slides  
across your tongue and leaves  
a fine grit sensation: flesh  
pebbled with history  
of the tree, the orchard,  
the sunlight, a light salted  
breeze blowing in off the Dead Sea.

I look in the mirror now  
and see my mother's face.  
Each month I search my breasts  
for the lumps she found in hers.  
So far, so good, but I know  
they are waiting, holding  
out for ripeness in time.