

It was fruit

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It was fruit

that bound us

naturally on a vineyard island.

We talked first of thirst-quenching apples, *Malus*, imported to New England in the beginning of the 17th century. Did Gosnold or Mayhew carry the seeds? Did they prefer round or angular?

Then pears, *Pyrus communis*. Their regular consumption brings a pure complexion and shiny hair. Happy Alcinous offered them to Odysseus according to Homer. Now with varieties such as Clapp and Bartlett, they could be named for West Tisbury farmers.

Then peach, *Prunus persica vulgaris*. The Chinese knew peaches two thousand years before Christ. Alexander the Great brought them from Persia to Greece, the Spanish to California, Fan and Don to Seven Gates. Clingstone and freestone, the Belle of Georgia. Peaches in syrup bring back the will to live.

And plum, *Prunus*. Endless cultivars evocatively called mirabelle, greengage, Damson, Santa Rosa, Reine Claude. Best preserved in brandy. Maybe one day a Tisbury schnapps. Take care for excess.

Of course cherries, *Prunus cerasus*. Their pits found in Neolithic ruins, cultivated already in Egypt's 26th dynasty, painted in Pompeian frescoes, mentioned by Virgil and Ovid. The cherry landed in America soon after Columbus. Heart-shaped, a thousand varieties with sweet pulp and less numerous with sour, with aristocratic cultivars like Montmorency but prized in Oak Bluffs for populist July 4th pies.

More exotically, quince, *Cydonia oblonga*. Portugal is the best variety, golden yellow, for *cotognata*, Sicilian quince paste. Azoreans say *dulce de membrillo*, supreme marmalade, unsurpassable with Gorgonzola.

And persimmon, *Diospyros kaki*, which came to America in the 19th century from China to build the railroads. A quirk of nature that while other plants disappear at the approach of winter, persimmons hang brightly from leafless branches, their tannic orange skin and soft water-sweet flesh.

All these on our land, together of course with their cousins, the berries.

Raspberry, *Rubus ideaus*, and their wild sibling, wineberry. Prolific, vitaminic, tasty and refreshing, made for Charlottes and summer puddings.

Blackberry, *Rubus fruticosus*, lover of hedges and untilled fields, eaten by Earth's earliest hominids, and described by Aeschylus and Hippocrates. In 1653 Nicholas Culpeper recommended them for snake bites and kidney stones in his *Complete Herbal*.

Gooseberry, *Ribes grossularia*, excellent for jams and preserves, shunned in the rest of America perhaps because the fruit is hairy and grows on spiny shrubs.

Of blueberry, we need not speak.

Fruit fear as well as love bind us.

Fear of red and black currants, the grapes of the monks, *Ribes rubrum* and *Ribes nigrum*, source in Massachusetts of pine forest disease.

And we are bound by fruit dreams.

Of nectarine, *Prunus nectarina*, the fuzzless peach, grown to be drunk by gods.

Of apricot, *Prunus armeniaca*, with 100 times more vitamin A than the average in other fruits.

Of fig, *Ficus carica*, drawn in the great Giza pyramid, prized in Babylon.

Of pomegranate, *Punica granatum*, painted with virgins, made into grenadine, someday on MV.

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