

RANUDI GUNAWARDENA

Girl Cousins, Pixelated

On days when my mother craved
ambarella for her bump, she drove

us to our cousins' place in Ganemulla
where the ambarella tree was always

waiting, and under it, you. The fruit
hung bending the branches, like a hundred

small stomachs, bird-eaten and naked
where the beaks had pierced. In the sun

sieved through the leaves, your hair
gleaming, a crow's wing mid-flight

and I, running into your small arms.
Evenings, after we tired of throwing

stones at high fruit, frightening squirrels
into temporary hiding, you taught me

how to kiss you like a boy from a new
Hollywood film. To run to you, waiting

at the foot of the ambarella tree, from the far
end of the garden, where in an artificial

pond, the saree guppy died every fortnight,
forgotten. I spun you, your dress filling

with wind like guppy fins trailing
in water, your bare feet floating barely

above ground. And when we kissed,
your lips tasted only of skin, smelled only

of ambarella—our teeth sinking in
through unwashed fruit skin to find

unexpectedly, like a buried tongue,
the insides. You cried *Cut—cut, cut,*

cut—so the retake was necessary;
my running, your spinning, our kiss always

not quite satisfactory, pixelated possibility
until you stopped me in the tree shade

and said, *Enough, now I will be*
the boy. Later, when we tired of this

too, we sat beneath the ambarella tree,
sharing a fruit crushed under your foot,

sucking in turns its vague tartness
until we were called home.