

Oranges **Michele Arduengo**

I felt honor-bound to eat every one of those oranges—
to savor each one as long as possible.
They were a gift from my mother,
mail-ordered for my 41st birthday,
and they would be the last gift that I ever received from her.

The oranges arrived while my husband, daughter, and I
were visiting my family after Mom's death.

I ate the first of those "premium" oranges immediately.
A couple of the oranges were already beginning to show
the signs of their trip from some distant tropical clime to Wisconsin,
where they had sat on my kitchen table for a week—
a few soft spots on the otherwise firm fruit.

I cried when I reached the last of the birthday oranges.
I'm not sure if I was crying at the loss of my mother
or at the juiceless taste of an orange that had succumbed
to a fuzzy white fungus. Still, I did not want to waste
anything as precious as a gift from my mom.
I can almost see her smiling eyes and hear her laughter as I sigh,
cut the last orange in half, and eat it, fungus and all.

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Editor's Note: With Arduengo's final approval, I culled and reconstituted these poetic lines from a succulent essay submitted by her, also titled "Oranges", which was published in the November 2007 issue of *Wisconsin Woman*. That essay, unfortunately too long for this space, goes into lyrical detail about the larger gift that the oranges invoked, namely, her mother's wise insistence on sending thoughtful thank-you notes—an early lesson in the importance of well-crafted writing.