

EMILY PACKER FROM HANDBRIDGE, CHESTER - WINNER

**Fruit-arranging**

She always placed fruit in the bowl like that:

fingers and peach nails poised

as she perfected the table decoration

we'd soon be coaxed to consume.

Occasionally an apple rolled off the top,

swaggered across the table,

and dropped into impossibly soft hands.

My earliest memory?

Walking with my parents in the woods,

tripping on hidden oak roots.

My last?

Eyeing the photo of the ones who never touched me.

Did *they* know the art of fruit-arranging?

All I could see were two shadowed bowls

the unanswered question sticking them

to her skin like sap.

But this lady's hands weren't so full;

if the fatherless can have God, then why not I

a woman whose gentle fingers picked me

to finish her own fruit bowl?

No trembling in those hands

when she answered that same question.

'Yes', she said, 'I'm sure.'