

Poem: "Opuntia littoralis"

By Moira Egan '92SOA.

Fall 2010

I'd never even tasted
one before I met him, but
it was August in
Malta and they were
everywhere, standing like fences
between houses, growing
beyond the city walls,

in the fields behind ruined
temples of cultures so long
buried we're not sure
which gods they worshipped,
but see in their fertility
figurines a love of
fleshiness, of the ripe,

not unlike the succulence

of these plants, in fact, whose
roots dig deep into
desert soil, finding
water and sustenance even
in the harshest climates,
the generosity

also to bear fruit. I watch
as he reaches carefully
over the barbed wire
tautology of
fence, protecting his hands with layers
of newspaper, and plucks
four spiky bright red pears.

At home he lays them gently
on the table, takes a fork
and spears one, then cuts
the outer layer
away, one practiced motion, one
intact, still-spiny peel.

He slices it, offers me
a piece, the yellowish flesh
only slightly sweet,
and the small black seeds,
perfectly round, seem to be safe
and so I swallow, and
ask him for another.

Moira Egan '92SOA has published four poetry collections, including, most recently, SPIN (Entasis Press, 2010). She lives in Rome, where she teaches at John Cabot University.



[Guide to school abbreviations](#)

TAKE THE COLUMBIA ALL-ALUMNI SURVEY

Complete the survey
by June 5.

50 randomly selected
survey participants
will receive a
Columbia sweatshirt!

Shape the alumni
experience.

alumni.columbia.edu/survey2026

 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

[All categories >](#)