

The Last Summer of the Kumquat Tree

by [Emma Galloway Stephens](#) in the [July 2025](#) issue

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for John

The tree bore fruit for one summer only.

A cluster of kumquats grew like a tumor in the heart;
the branches couldn't hold more than one year's yield,
each fruit as orange as the last morning
I held my brother's baby boy.

Some gravestones are no taller than weeds
blooming by the railroad tracks—one of them is his.
The wheel turns with brutality and haste.
One summer of hail and hurricane, and he is home,
though home for him is hallowed, ours a waste.

No coffin should be built that small.
No coffin should be built at all.