

# The Kumquat Challenge



25 poems by WCC faculty, staff, students,  
and former students celebrating  
National Poetry Month

April 2007

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Library

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## The Kumquat Challenge

☞ *by Norma Stevens*

Beneath the billowing kumquat tree  
I marvel at the glimmering  
Tide of tartness taking flight in me.

Maybe it's enough to know  
These sordid pleasures  
In life are free.

## She Sits by the Shore

☞ *by Peter Sotory*

She sits by the shore watching the waves,  
They billow, swell, and like boys, misbehave.  
It entertains her, giving her thoughts enough,  
About dreams she could do and other stuff.  
Across the ocean she could take some far-off flights,  
Visit Nippon to eat kumquats and other tart delights.  
Or like a sailor of old, sail with the tide,  
Guided by wind, stars, and currents worldwide.  
The horizon beckons with marvels that glimmer,  
Ideas of fancy that set her mind a simmer,  
Inspiring her to escape the sordid strife,  
Maybe tomorrow she can begin her new life!

## The Storms Billow

☞ *by Jeremiah J. Gillespie*

The storms billow in the tart tide flight  
marvel maybe at the glimmer and light  
enough to be said at the dawns red sky  
as ripe as the kumquat, this sordid night

*Kumquat Challenge Winner!*

## Beach Poem

☞ *by D. Riley Penaluna*

Maybe it's enough  
the way the tide  
rolls in and out  
around our feet,  
the tart marvel  
of her kumquat  
in the afternoon.

Beneath the flight  
of seabirds  
innocent and free  
we do our sordid  
deeds and laugh  
like sailors.

Her summer dress  
slips off  
into the wind  
we watch it billow  
like the sail of a ship  
returning home.

Maybe it's enough  
the way her eyes  
begin to glimmer like  
the sky above,

to feel the sand  
that lingers  
in the cracks of love.

Kumquat Challenge Winner!

## Enough

☞ *by Alex Florence*

Enough!  
Do you honestly think I want to study the billow of your skirt?  
Or marvel at the way your step seems to work?

Maybe...  
Just maybe we were meant to be lovers,  
Maybe kumquats will start a kumquat revolution,  
Taking flight in little eggplant bombers to conquer the United States  
And the National Guard won't be prepared to face the  
massive army of tart legionnaires, wielding blinding citrus  
acid spray guns

Besides,  
We both know that the tide turns with the moon,  
And apparently you do too

Maybe I should call you Luna (or Loona)

And maybe you will find someone named George  
Who is a looney too, and will worship your calves  
Yeah...

I think that the sordid love affair we may have had would  
have been like an opera;  
(More like a finely orchestrated tragedy, involving  
miscommunication and a generous dosage of unrequited  
love cyanide, and I'm pretty confident that it wouldn't be me  
gasping for breath on the stages killing floor)  
Too bad!

If the glamour and glimmer of gilded language can't get the  
point across perhaps  
I should state it plainly and punctually throwing, not caution  
to the wind, but tact:  
I don't like you.

## Not a Sordid Story

☞ *by Mary Mele*

This is not a sordid story; relax.  
Think kumquats: glimmering orange among the  
green  
on the tree, enough for you and me, my love.  
Pluck, taste...here:  
Tart on the tongue, a marvel of the sensual tide  
that billows on your touch, taste  
no flight here, but hold against a thousand maybes:  
I want you.

## The Feeling Below My Waist

☞ *by Tony Caine*

DEDICATED TO MARY MELE  
The feeling billow my waist  
makes me count my marvels  
two are enough  
maybe more would only flighten her,  
the tart who glimmered in the night.  
Nevertheless, I will ride her sordid  
tide of ecstasy until dawn,  
kumquat may.

## A Haiku

☞ *by Katie Jensen*

Sordid kumquat tart!  
Glimmer, billow, marvel, tide.  
Enough flight, maybe?

*Kumquat Challenge Winner!*

## **Sestina Written Late at Night**

☞ *by Donna Rushing*

Come nighttime, we have finally had enough —  
and so we offer up our daylight flight —  
just maybe we will marvel as we drift,  
so easily pulled out by some neap tide —  
but truth be told we'll likely stay asleep,  
without a glimmer of enlightened mind.

Tibetan mystics, travelers of the mind,  
found mind's own luminosity enough  
"Wake up!" they said out loud, on going to sleep,  
on waking up, "This is a dream." No flight  
from daily matters, they could turn the tide;  
with both the sordid and the pure they'd drift.

As wind can billow flags and build snow drifts,  
our thoughts create a dreamscape in our minds —  
a tart kumquat shared in some salty tide  
with tongue, with touch, this dream enough  
to ground an astronaut from flight,  
and leave her dreams of flying for her sleep.

When I was just a child, I fell asleep  
and to that other world would swiftly drift  
and whether dreamt of ghosts or dreamt of flight,  
on waking, all was real within my mind,  
until the day that I was old enough  
to know that dreams were just a sleeper's tide.

At least 'til morning, sleeping dreams can tide  
us over 'til we wake, again, asleep  
imagining we'll never have enough  
of love, or money—if you catch my drift —  
and walking somnolent, remind  
ourselves that once we dreamt of flight.

And death, of course, we think a cancelled flight,  
a postponed date, perhaps a misread tide —  
we start to look at it, then, "Never mind,"  
and snug with ignorance we choose to sleep.  
This "precious human life" we spend adrift,  
and though a dream, it all seems real enough

One final flight, although I'm near asleep  
Daylight and night, the tides, the moon, all drift  
And yet, the mind is luminous enough.

## **Luminous Lightly**

☞ *by Marty Sloat*

Luminous lightly, I, glowing brightly,  
a marvel to behold, I think.  
a glimmer, fading dimmer, a shade  
Below what I ought to be.

a cool blue, like a breath of shrew,  
tiptoes on my cheek at dusk.  
Twilight yonder, ever I ponder a Breeze  
To billow a breath so tart of musk.

I sank down, upon the ground, I found  
A sordid splatter, a chunk of fruit.  
Squash, nay, Kumquat, squashed upon my feet  
As young, so dumb, destroyed a youth.

Maybe I, with no fateful sigh nor wandering eye  
Should tide myself over to Fill my desire.  
So sad a food, and only it Knew  
A tree to be born upon and plucked so it should  
expire.

So ill enough a fate, a Hate that sated  
Itself from a cruel Flight down to Death.  
So it was thrown, and its innards blown  
And I, too, am shortened of Breath.

## **As the Swallows Dive**

œ *Anonymous*

As the swallows dive in gleeful flight,  
Over your acres of wild grass,

I fight for breath between sobs,  
Where I used to laugh in the wind.

My tenderly held hope,  
hushed away by the tide.

When I met you,  
My wild flag flew at full billow.

There was nothing sordid,  
about being untamed,

An astringent kumquat, pithy,  
among maraschino cherries, pitted and pink.

Gone is the set of my jaw,  
The glimmer of slow-burning pride.

Maybe someone else would have caught you,  
A green-eyed man, carefully chipping away at foundations.

Seven years later, I hang my head,  
not unique, but flawed.

How skillfully you've robbed me is a marvel,  
I helped you sack my strength.

I couldn't call her a tart,  
She's so much more regal than that.

But I'm sickened that you can't get enough of each other,  
In the bed I built.

## **A Tart For All Reason**

œ *by Guy Smith*

"Twas a sordid tale of a brightly shimmering tart,  
Whose kumquat filling was the pride of the Mart.

A bite of this pastry'd put your taste buds in flight,  
Its thoughtful crust made the slowest minds erudite.

Maybe an injection of perception, a glimmer that  
hopes Molded this marvel of a pie into the envy of  
ALL tasty  
tropes.

Bit the billow of the wind down south of the equator,  
Blew a tide of rancid air like a gas-spewing radiator.

Poor unsuspecting gourmands who visited the Mart,  
Discovered enough of this pie made the heartiest...  
Smart.

## **Inhale**

œ *by Hilary Engebretson*

Summer, low tide.  
Afternoon takes flight and  
I marvel at kumquat-golden skies.  
They shimmer against the last  
billowy clouds of day.

Ocean's flavor -  
salty,  
sweet,  
tart,  
cleanses the sordid from my soul.

I breathe in again.  
It is enough, maybe.

## Heart's Flight (Attendant)

☞ *by John Gonzales*

"Enough kumquat? Maybe more tart?"  
She's a marvel in motion, like the tide, with a cart.  
Then that ethereal billow  
Of re-fluffed in-flight pillow.  
(Sigh) Debarb at sordid LAX minus my heart.

## Mixed Metaphor

☞ *by John Gonzales*

A glimmer of glazed cumquat tart on the side  
Of the billow of her lip(sordid smear)doth abide.  
Enough marvel is this  
That maybe my kiss  
Sets to flight her passion's stemmed tide.

## Hollywood Café

☞ *by John Gonzales*

I find a kumquat somewhat sordid, but I ordered  
it anyway. Call it an impulse. I marvel at a larval  
starlet, sometimes a waitress, not yet in flight.  
Grounded here while she waits. . . on tables . . .  
on tables . . . and for her  
glimmer to shimmer and glow enough  
that her stuff is discovered by that mystical agent. The tart  
flavor of lemon tart whets my tongue tide  
with saliva, anticipating kumquat.  
Again the starlet shooting by, contemplating,  
I imagine, the billow of her blouse,  
"Not quite enough. Maybe a little more  
emphasis.  
Then someone will . . .". Kum-  
quat beckons. I yield.

## Midnight Picnic

☞ *by John Gonzales*

Beneath the muted glimmer of a maybe moon,  
shy behind a shifting, night spun veil,  
sordid deeds done recede slowly,  
like the tide.  
Moments gestate and hatch,  
take flight.  
Silences solidify, harden, encyst  
with brittle significance.

Beneath the ripening fulfillment of a new moon,  
(Having baked like a tart within a billow of cloud  
crust),  
bursting out in liquid intensity,  
the weathered hide of then and then sloughs off,  
dissolves,  
and fresh-born confessions evolve  
into enough.  
Intervals between words  
form islands.

A new and ancient marvel:  
a history in every breath;  
a story in every gesture;  
a universe in ever seed, and vine, and eruption  
of kumquat.

A new and ancient marvel:  
the past becoming  
the now bridging  
the future always in the making  
and never yet made.

## Too Many Episodes of Lost

œ by *Steve DeRoy*

Oceanic flight  
Eight one five into the tide  
I glimmer enough

Too many hours  
On my butt, watching....watching....  
My cheeks are quite numb

Sordid tart kumquat  
I marvel it, maybe...., but  
Intestines billow

## Hope Springs Eternal

œ *Sally Sheedy*

The sordid affair with the tart  
caused me to take flight.  
Maybe it was not smart  
but I thus avoided a fight.

I had a glimmer of hope,  
but I saw it billow like smoke -  
as from a hookah of dope...  
enough to make one choke

But I couldn't leave behind  
the kumquat. It, too, tart.  
Also *too* tart, to my mind.  
Now here's the interesting part.

I marvel at how hope and desire  
can set one's soul on fire.  
I shall recover, my time I will bide.  
I will go with the flow  
and go out with the tide.

## Fruits of a Fifties Childhood

œ *Linda Lambert*

Outlaw children,  
three of us,  
summertime brave,  
dashed to the outskirts of town  
to the small, forbidden orchard,  
contrails of dust  
billowing from our heels.

We hurried there,  
borne by a tide of adventure,  
in carefree flight,  
Innocent of the racism  
of my father's words:  
wetback migrants,  
sordid lives,  
alcohol, anger,  
maybe knives.

His love and his fear  
sought to contain us  
in our Dick and Jane  
neighborhood,  
but we belonged to  
daring and expectation.

Burnished yellow loquats,  
Japanese plums,  
not the kumquats of China,  
glimmered in the dusk,  
waiting to be  
stolen and enclosed,  
marvels of transformation,  
in my mother's tarts.  
We plucked them.

And then we ran.

## Forget Apples, Already

œ *Ara Taylor*

Forget apples, already.  
Are they marvel us? Maybe,  
but kumquats are  
worthy of foreplay.

Foreplay, you see, is  
not sordid—at least  
it is not when  
The subject is fruity.

Sweet skin, bitter flesh—  
What a tart, what a dish!  
Imagine the preserves  
And chutneys

glimmering in dishes of crystal  
and silver, on  
short flights from  
Newark to Albany.

Are those clouds out the window?  
Soft enough? How they billow  
and beckon, their  
whiteness beguiling!

Golden-orange citrus fruit!  
Come what may, I'll be waiting for  
you—meanwhile mangos  
Will tide me.

## Far Away Places

œ *by April Mauzy*

I marvel for a moment at the tide rolling in from far  
away places

The glimmer coming off the water hypnotizes me

Sordid memories of the night before billow in my  
head like low lying clouds

I thought she had moved away

That's what you said

But I saw you last night

With that tart

You were sharing kumquats

Just like the ones we pick off of the small tree in our  
back yard

Didn't your mom give us that tree?

Maybe this will be enough

Enough to get me on the first flight taking me to one  
of those far away places

## The Order of Such

œ *by Carol Wilkinson*

The clouds billow,  
When just enough: Flight.  
Oh, glimmer kumquat,  
And marvel, maybe,  
at the sordid tart  
floating in the tide.



## Bush

☞ *by Carol Wilkinson*

Billow: hot air  
Enough guff,  
Take flight,  
Get a glimmer,  
IQ of a kumquat,  
A microphone marvel,  
Hey, maybe Iran too?  
Sordid frat boy,  
yet didn't marry a tart,  
Wash out with the tide.

*Kumquat Challenge Honorable Mention!*

## Clouds that Billow in Asian Skies

☞ *by Penny McMahon*

*(A NOTE FROM THE POET: My name is Penny and I'm a former WCC student. I was a student at the CDC when I was 4 years old. My mom's name is Jean McMahon and she received your message about the poetry challenge. I'm now 13 years old and thought I should show you my mad poetry skills. Kind of. Here it is 😊)*

As I look out at the tide  
I see the glimmer of the sun  
The gulls take flight and then they glide  
With clouds that billow in Asian skies  
I taste the kumquat fresh from trees  
They are not tart, they taste like candies  
I marvel at the setting sun  
Not a sordid thought, not one  
The view's enough to make you smile  
Maybe, just for a little while.

*P.S. I hope you like my poem, and just so you know, I've never been to Asia.*



*Billow, marvel, enough, maybe, flight,  
sordid, glimmer, tart, kumquat, tide*

These were the 10 words that a few library staffers (Tami Garrard, Sally Sheedy, Ara Taylor) came up with for WCC faculty, staff, students & former students to include in a single poem. Our goal was to celebrate National Poetry Month and to see what poets would come out of the Whatcom woodwork.

I was surprised, right from the beginning. The first two poems I received were from unexpected disciplines: adjunct biology instructor Hilary Engebretson and testing center director Norma Stevens! When I saw Norma's subject line, I knew it was the title for this collection: **The Kumquat Challenge**.

Katie Jensen figured out (we hadn't) that our 10 words had just the right number of syllables for a perfect haiku. Tony Caine (a relative of Mary Mele's not eligible for a prize under our guidelines, but we liked his work) used kumquat quite creatively. **Donna Rushing** used the technical requirements of a sestina (yes, I had to look it up) with finesse.

English instructor **Donna**, and students **Alex Florence** ("Enough") and **D. Riley Penaluna** ("Beach Poem") were the trio of winners our judges, Margaret Bikman & Ara Taylor selected. They were also enchanted with 13-year-old **Penny McMahan**'s poem and her moxie in identifying herself as a former WCC student—"I was a student at the CDC when I was four years old." Penny, Jean McMahan's daughter, received an honorable mention.

I wasn't a judge, so no one can suggest that I influenced the choice of D. Riley Penaluna who identified himself in his e-mail as a work study student in the Financial Aid office, finishing it off with "I yearn for scones." I hope he enjoys the scones and I hope you enjoy the poetry.

P.S. If kumquats and tarts didn't seduce you into writing, perhaps next year's words will.

