



## Moldy Strawberries

**Caio Fernando Abreu**

**Bruna Dantas Lobato, Translator**

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Brazilian writer Caio Fernando Abreu shines light on authoritarian 1980s Brazil, giving voice to those who were oppressed and ignored during the AIDS epidemic, in his exuberant short story collection *Moldy Strawberries*. With a ranging cast of characters, these stories reveal the innermost thoughts and feelings of characters on the edge—heterosexual couples, gay men, and drug addicts who contemplate where they belong (or want to belong) in this society.

These eighteen stories are intimate, focusing on internal examinations of personal sacrifices and desires, desperate struggles to connect and survive, and honest moments between two people. They distill flashes of joy, despair, and lust into crystalline moments of flickering emotion. Long, vibrant sentences and powerful imagery ground their feelings.

“Photographs” features two transwomen, Gladys and Liege, who face the world with their different ways of feminine expression and their longing for love. Surrounded by people who don’t truly see her, Liege feels “quiet like an autumn leaf forgotten between the pages of a book.” And in “Pear. Grape. Apple.,” a bored psychiatrist listens to a patient explain, through fragmented images, how she ran into a funeral procession on her way to the appointment, after which he decides to commit her. “Sergeant Garcia” features crisp moments of discovery between a whip-cracking sergeant and a seventeen-year-old gay boy whom he exempts from military training, only to seduce him later. And in “Fat Tuesday,” the immediate connection between two men is shown through glittering, fleshy images: a man finds his lover’s mouth “ripe like a fig cut into quarters.”

This collection amplifies the lives of people who were often disregarded or dismissed by a Brazilian society in flux. Its stories vibrate with emotion and honesty, conveyed through distinct voices and strong imagery by a confident and deft writer.

MONICA CARTER (May / June 2022)

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