

Firstborn

You and I and grief are not so well acquainted, little brother. Let me impart you with my wisdoms here.

One (1).

Grief is our mother's bed, where we stay when we're sick and crawl out of gently lest our father let loose a roar as we tear at the well-made comforter.

Two (2).

Grief can be eaten.

By this, I mean, we swallow our sadness in case it burdens our parents.

By this, I mean, we shovel down beans and potatoes and spinach and beef from a yellow legal notepad where our grandfather wrote it.

That food carries his secrets, his aches. When someone cooks his beans, you swallow his grief.

Three (3).

Grief means me leaving.

You will learn all my secrets, my burdens, my fears. You will know the way I take my tea, how I like my tomatoes—*not at all*—and the way I scratch my arm when I'm in fear. I will spend all my time with you, teaching you grief, eating yours for you, only for you to see me gone before I can finish it.

You and I and grief will become well acquainted, little brother. Grief is your dark eyes and pink skin the day you were born, and grief is when you look at me leaving the way I looked at you first.

The Earth Overtakes Us

Split an apple, but it'll still have its seeds.

You cleave the mother earth between the breastbone and her heart; a slice of the earth skittering the last beats of life. The clean cut stinks of cyanide—concentrated; pungent; loamy. A sponge of sea salt and evergreen. Flowering buds barely mask it.

Air is left sick, sweet, tart like citrus: ketones of the sun. Sun cooks the mother earth like an egg, sulfurous pine tar and black pepper. The placid whites froth. You stare them down.

the teeth of heaven or the gates of hell? There is no knowing.

Something blooms from the cavity in the mother earth. Snaps ivy sutures. The great swell as waves crest on stony peaks, mother's limp and folded arms dotted with sprays of white. The wound snaps up soil; bark and lye; spits white wrath like Charybdis—the monster man has made her.

Soil, heart, intertwined. You are swallowed up by mother earth's cut. Feet, at last, sink into soil, pressing patterns into her skin, rotting, crunched. The final apple is crawling with flesh worms. You in your glory refuse it. Another monster man has made—you, the Tantalus here. You, the Eve. You, and the forbidden fruit. You, man.

You split apple, heart, mother earth. Your cut will remain long after you. It will eat you alive.

and here, in the shaft of the wound, lies the terrible truth:

Man is monster.

Test Tube Baby

When you have sixteen years behind you, you are a third of your father's age and a third of his life has been yours. Your mother is a father and your father is God, because you wonder if he's real or if he's a figment invented to control you. Your sister doesn't swim alone in your mind because there are two of her, except they are the opposite of one another and neither is fighting to survive like you, sister three. You have sixteen years behind you, and your body is telling you yes to the struggle but you pray to thy Father that there are no more than sixteen ahead.