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What the Dead Had Grown

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What the Dead Had Grown

Slow light hung behind the shaded ash groves.
My brother ambled awkwardly in overalls
I handed down to him last summer.
Behind our house, a gravel path stretched on
toward town, past a graveyard
where tall grass testified neglect.
There, the years drizzled commemorations
from the gravestones. Slate markers cracked open
like the pages of an unattended book.
I stretched out on the ground, and watched a chicory
hang from the weight of the dew;
my finger caught the droplets accruing
on its petal as my brother hurtled
through the garden that the dead had grown for us.
Wild strawberries swelled there like tiny rising suns
and my tongue burned sour as I pressed
each one against my palate.
A few weeks later, my brother ventured there alone
and when he came home with some berries before breakfast,
our mother washed them, sliced them on cereal,
and we ate them. The taste, she said, was unbelievable
and asked my brother where he found them.
I watched him explain himself, words falling
like rain. My mother coughed into a rag.

--Steve Kovach '03