

big man,
lean as a redwood tree
and with skin the color of deep earth.
keep walking.
if we make the slightest gaze back
we'll surely be turned to salt.

you whisper the gospel under your breath
and let your tongue hang on to every word
the way you hold onto a lover.
your voice quivers like a candle in the wind,
soft and sacred, longing to be heard,
as your faith and desire begin to blur.

big man,
do the lines on the palms of your hand form a map?
do they tell you where i have been
and where i am going
when your fingers interlock with mine?
can you feel my heartbeat
through the roots that run underground
and connect with your veins?

big man,
hold me softly. hold me right.
i am awful for you
and you are awful for me,
but we are perfect in every disturbed moment.
when the sun sets in the west

and the sky turns purple and orange,
will you protect me from the spirits
that roam this garden?

will you protect me from the eternal
punishment that awaits us both?

big man,
will you dress me in your tattered robes
when the cold gets to be too much?
will you brush my hair back with your fingers
and count the scars you put on my body?
will you flinch at my touch, assuming the worst
with every sideways glance?
we won't say a word to each other,
but we'll speak the languages of the old gods
and relay poetry with skin on skin.

big man,
there was a rumble in our Garden last night.
the ground growled with vengeance
and the sky spat at us with such bountiful rage.
i shielded myself in bramble and leaves
and prayed for the safety of your arms.

listen, did you hear what God said?
did you hear the anger in His voice,
how it shook the hills and ruptured the mountains?
have you seen His image in the flowing creek,
in the depths of the caves unexplored?
have you seen Him dressed in vine and silk?

have you prayed for Him to spare our lives?
or have you only beseeched the Savior for my benefit?
is your love for me powerful enough
to sacrifice your place in Heaven's court?

do you see Him in the mushroom circles
that hide the secrets we've left untold?
have you whispered nothings to the spirits in the air
and begged them to treat me better than you ever could?
tell me with your lips the ways in which you intend to sacrifice yourself.

i've never seen you cry.
could it be that your tears are mixed with the acid rain that burns our skin
whenever our sins are unearthed?
are you my public penance?
my three Hail Marys,
my desperate wail to an absent father?

i'll lead you out of the forest
with poison ivy sprouting from the roots in my scalp.
we will braid them together and face the consequences,
as Delilah did with Samson.
as Cain did with Abel.
as we do with each other.