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FIRST PLACE

### Elegy for the Poppy

*"The United States makes up only 4.6 percent of the world's population, but consumes 80 percent of its opioids and 99 percent of the world's hydrocodone." ABC News April 20, 2011*

It began with a flower, a field of them dissolving into a white cloud, the earth swimming under their shadow, waiting to come up for air. Each flower, a vision dying with its eyes open, vatic, waiting to be taken, untouched in its beauty. It began untouched until a blade loosened it, and it bled moonlight. People called it milk, milk that put men to sleep, turned their tongues into flame.

It began as beautiful, so beautiful it was consumed, body to body, fingernails dividing its unbloomed head, so real, we wept under its beauty, built temples in its name, in the words we could not remember. We gave it different names in each language, *soma* for moon, *hydra* for magic, *morpheus* for dreams, breathed in its white world until it wiped the world clean. Its dizziness made us tremble. We knelt at its altar, dressed it in silk, and gave it a heaven.

The angels began to stumble through the air like a thousand birds falling from the sky, their glacial-blue eyes melting into the sea until the ocean swelled at our feet, rose to our knees. But we did not care because the flower looked like a seraph and the seraph looked like a flower, and we had no need for the old angels.

It began as beautiful, so beautiful the sky held its breath and turned blue when no one was looking. The fields rose before us in smoke, voices burning: *more, more, more*, eyes lit, mouths numb, as we bathed each pod of seeds in our palms, dissolved each white tear, unclasped each white wing, wrapped the dust of its body in plastic, where we could keep it cool under our pillows, under mattresses, at the bottoms of dressers where nothing could find it, where it could last forever, until one day when a child asked for a flower, there was no such thing.