

The Gospel of I
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I grew up with Irish folklore and biblical tales. Well, more along the lines of staunch, catechetical moralism masqueraded in bedtime stories and morningtime rhymes. I was told that God thought all words were bad words, and that there was never any gold to actually be found at the ends of rainbows, rather, the magic lay in the chore of finding the ends.

I grew up not knowing my name, and being told never speak whatever version I thought it was. The namesakes of my siblings were veiled from me, too. For her first seven rotations around the sun, my triplet sister spent silent, vocal chords enmeshed in the knots of her feeding tube, and hands crowded with epipens and panic buttons, no space for pencils. My eldest sister is autistic, and even after twenty-four and so rotations around the sun, the weight of language still weighs heavy on her lips, and the words that do drip from them, do so like sludge.

I grew up being told that the greatest sin was wasted talent, but was instructed to keep mine hidden. My eyes were hungry to read, and hands were itching to string together a name for myself with letters and symbols I could not understand. But, one sister could not read, and another could not write, and our brother could not care to do either, so to exercise the ability to escape reality in ways that could not include them, was simply, immoral. I resorted to reading the labels of their pill bottles, and writing stories with razors on my skin.

I grew up with the guilt of generations speckled in the shit-brown of my freckles and hued in the abysmal blue of my bruises. When the triplets were thirteen, our father found a marbled notebook stuffed in the bottom of the girls' underwear drawer, pages tattered and damp, perhaps with tears, or perhaps with his sweat, the type of sweat that builds and drips when someone is snooping where they should not be. Inside it was nothing but empty pages of stories that could have been, apart from one, singular line, filled in with chicken scratch, words desperately seeking to seem legible amongst sludge that dripped from cracked lips and oozed from fat fingers of an author that could not.

I wish I was smart like my brother and sisters, it said.

I grew up under the guise that I was once dirt, indistinguishable from amassed ashes of perdition and rancid demon dung. A thick and disgusting nothing until God gripped my face from the gruel and puffed the breath of life into my nostrils. But I lived a reality in which loose leaves of scripture were stuffed into my lungs like cotton, labouring every inhale until I could no longer bear to breathe. I passed out every time I cried. Oxygen evaded me in the way we avoided acknowledging the notebook. It drowned in tears pooled from inadequacy, and absconded from tears slashed into tubes under my skin, the life flowing thick and disgusting into our sinks.

I grew up not feeling very grown up at all. I spent spare moments daydreaming in front of glass reeking of Windex, imagining a more-grown version of the thing that reflected back through the sheen of chemical cerulean, one that might garner the attention I prayed for. I thought it admirable to be successfully sick, and would intensely study the emptiness of the reflection's nostrils, picturing how much more mature and respected that phantom future thing might be if she had a tube that went down them, a tangible emblem of a struggle-to-success story.

I grew up when I sat across from my mother and asked for help. Granted, I hadn't much of a choice. We sat in the back garden, although it was much too cold to have been, one of those days when March is much too indecisive to surrender to any season at all. The wind pulled at goose hairs that had stood up defensively, my uniform tights torn off by her hands. The cold stung at the raw that decorated my thighs like shit-brown freckles, dried, caked blood re-dampening with the trauma of nylons not methodically removed. A concerned teacher had called, his attention alarmed by the sight of a bookworm gone limp, scratching through the pleats of her skirt with the frame of reading glasses that had found a new purpose. But the truth of my thighs spoke loud enough.

Can you hear us? They said. Do you know our name?

I grew up a bit more the other day, when I sat across my mother again as we sunbathed in the garden, unfiltered beams kissing our keloids. It was March, but not the dithering type. I haven't known God for a long time, but I thought I spotted Him then, two eyes gazing in through barely budded chrysanthemums. I could've sworn I saw those same colours in the March of back then, rainbow rays that refracted in seeping blood that cooled and crystallized, and in tears that pooled in eyes of a woman I no longer hated.