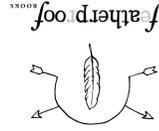


*Mammoth* will be available in  
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1

An excerpt from the novel  
*Mammoth*

2.

Years before he died strangely and horribly in his sleep, Father Mothers built Our Lady of the Blood with his own hands. It was a church that soon became known to everyone in Pie Time as simply Lady Blood. He built it in a field where he was met by a bear with no legs. It growled at him, fierce and loud like all bears, but of course it just stayed put. It was a bear in every way, capable of killing Father Mothers if it would have somehow been able to get his leg in its jaws. But Father Mothers didn't fear it. He just built the church right over the top of it, while it snarled and snapped and cried at night. Eventually, it stopped making noise altogether, and just watched Father Mothers build the

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Father Mothers was far from being an architect or a carpenter. Lady Blood was the only building he had ever built, and after a few months of construction, it became

Father Mothers had come from. In the distance beyond the valley were the mountains where, on the other side of The Cure, and the valley was to the east, river which circled the village. The woods were to the west, Blood at its center, built upon the banks of The Cure, the mind. At first, Pie Time was just a tiny village with Lady Time and he built it with only a few dozen parishioners in Lady Blood was the first structure to be built in Pie

four legs. of its most-feared natural enemies, a bear, had none of its Time would be particularly safe from its enemies, if the first church, and to build the town of Pie Time around it. Pie Mothers that this would be a very special land to build his A bear with no legs had been an omen to Father but then it died. the first people of Pie Time. They liked to pet it and feed it, church around it. It was a bear in a church. It got used to

clear that the church looked like no other church anyone had ever seen before. It looked nothing like anything except a drafty and lopsided white barn. But not a barn exactly either. A little like the pope's hat, if the pope's hat were flat, but with a sharp ridge down its center. Or a paper airplane. It was strange to see something so new look so old. None of his early parishioners had the heart to complain.

Lady Blood was built in the days before the plague known as God's Finger penetrated the town, gripping it with anxiety and fear, and sending it down into a terrible spiral of grief and depression. The cross at Lady Blood's apex was much too modest of a cross in the face of God's Finger. It was only the size of one man.

That is why Father Mother's son, Father Mothers II, climbed up on to its roof, toiling well into a late spring evening with a hammer and nails and two planks of wormy wood salvaged from the woods in the west hills. The new cross was much needed for these modern days riddled with sin. He planned a cross that would be twice the size of the original cross built by his late father so that more sinners

"You have a beautiful baby," he said.

they would move. so long, he thought. He wanted to blow on them to see if face. He counted all of her eyelashes from below. They were edges again. Mano looked up into Inez's red, half-smiling for Mano. The world's shapes had perfect yellow and green The lenses in the glasses were the perfect prescription curious smile. strange coming out of his mouth, and Inez cracked a "I am a man," he said overconfidently. It sounded men," she said.

## 2

Mano squinted at them, and then he could see that she was holding up glasses. They were plastic and black along the top, just the kind of glasses that Mano had always wanted. "They were in it?"

"Yes," she said between half-breaths, readjusting Baby Zuzu in her arms.

"Inside of it?"

"Yes, inside the hole."

"Are they his?"

"The Barber doesn't even wear glasses," she said.

"How..."

"I don't..."

"Can I see?" Mano held out his hand.

Inez handed Mano the glasses, and he tried them on. She watched him try them on, and tilted her head to the side so she could see if they fit him properly. "They're for

Lady Blood was the tallest structure in the valley. From where Mothers II was standing, he could see all of Pie Time, every house, and all of the fields. He could be sure that no one was watching him, except maybe some of the sheep. With the horizontal plank heavy in the grip of his large left hand, and the hammer in his right, he climbed the old cross that his father had built. With as much strength as his old-aged left arm could muster, he lifted the horizontal plank above his head, and hammered it into the air. He

could see it from further away. Mothers II straddled Lady Blood's roof, unrolled his drafted plans, complete with the proper measurements for the new cross, and nailed the plans to the old cross, which was to stay put until the new one was constructed. While studying his plans, he was struck with the thought of hammering the new cross's horizontal plank first, nailing it to the air before erecting the cross's vertical plank. He became obsessed with this idea—convinced it was delivered to him directly by his lord. So, he considered the logistics of simply constructing the cross in reverse.

hammered and hammered while he held it, until the nail passed through the wood. And to his astonishment, he could feel the nail take hold in the air behind the plank. He could feel the heavy plank begin to lighten in his grip.

"It can't be true!"

The plank felt so light in his hand, he let go of it entirely, and it stayed there, on the air. "It is true! A miracle has happened. Oh, lord, I must tell the others."

Mothers II was in such a fever to climb down and show the others the horizontal plank of the new cross nailed on its own into the air—his heart racing at twice the normal speed—that he turned around too quickly on the old cross, and his collar caught around a bent old nail.

His feet slipped.

The sheep were baaaaaing in the distance.

Little yellow flowers blossomed all over the valley.

"Oh!" She was suddenly awake to the world again. "these were in it." She held up a pair of men's glasses.

"Did you see anything in it?" Mano meant to ask about his organs, his heart, that sort of thing. The top button on Inez's blouse looked like it was about to pop off. Mano wanted to see just how her body would settle out into the open air if it did.

She tucked Baby Zuzu down into her elbow to be able to touch her middle fingers together and her thumbs together to make a circle while she cried.

"How big was it?"

"I don't know," she said. Baby Zuzu smiled and clapped once. "It was just there, in his chest," she said, "like a hole. It went all the way through. I could see the bed through it."

"Inez, where did the hole come from?"

he wanted to hear more about the hole left in her husband, without having to pry into the details.

### 3

reason to think that Mano was a girl—he had long hair, and wore a dress. Once, The Barber suggested a bob cut, something perfect for girls. Each time, Mano refused. He didn't quite see the point of cutting it any shorter. But the real reason was, like with anything else, he was just scared of anything that he had never done before. On this last visit, The Barber, convinced that Mano would never cut his hair, resigned to tell him, "When you grow up, you'll have to at least trim your own pubic hair." This was troubling to Mano, who didn't quite yet have pubic hair, so hadn't yet thought about having to trim it. He imagined the pubic hair growing wild, and overtaking his whole body. He'd have to walk around at all times, trimming the hairs down, to be sure that he wasn't mistaken for a large mammal.

Mano squinted at the soft yellow shape that was Baby Zuzu, and then back at Inez. Mano was no good in these situations. He didn't know what to ask, or where to look, or if he should touch her. He touched her upper arm with his whole palm, and then just his fingertips, and then he let go. He thought about his long hair, and if she'd notice it, if she'd wonder why her dead husband had never cut it. But mostly

On most mornings, on his way to the factory, Mano would walk past the butcher shop where Pepe Let apprenticed for his father, The Butcher. They would sit on the back steps of the butcher shop for a few minutes and talk. Sometimes they would touch hands while they talked, and that was Mano's favorite part. But Pepe didn't come out of the back of the butcher shop on this morning.

In his haste to think of a thing, a particular thing out of all things, and to leave home in time for his work at the Pie Time factory, Mano had forgotten his glasses. His glasses were a thing, cracked along the top and the prescription outdated. Also, they were a little girl's glasses, and Mano was just beginning to feel as though he was ready for a pair of adult's glasses, whatever that meant. A serious thing to look through. The kind of glasses that he could make adult decisions through. Still, he needed something, at least for now. The world in front of him was the same as always, but the edges of all of its shapes were soft. Those soft shapes made glasses into a thing he wanted.

3.

Mano figured he was too late, and that Pepe was already busy with his morning shop routines. The idea of missing any chance to talk with Pepe made Mano's stomach feel empty. Still, Mano waited there behind the butcher shop for a few moments, just in case. He wasn't quite ready to wade through the world with its soft shapes.

As he stood there behind the butcher shop, paralyzed for a moment by his indecision, he could see Inez Roar a few houses away across Last Street, on her front lawn, beneath a tree, holding her baby, Zuzu, in her arms. Inez was crying, but her baby wasn't. Baby Zuzu had been in the world for almost a month, but had yet to cry, not even on the day that she was born. She slipped outside of Inez's body, and blinked a few times into the light and at her father, The Barber. Sometimes, Inez and The Barber would poke her in the leg with a pin, or scratch her on the bottom of her foot, because they wanted to hear her cry and know what her full voice sounded like. But when they did, she'd only grimace, or grunt, or even growl.

Mano squinted to be sure who it was that he was

The Barber wasn't much of a talker, just a smoker. Mano visited The Barber to deliver him a box of Pie Times each week, and to say hello, but never for a haircut. In fact, Mano had never had his hair cut. The Barber had every

A few weeks earlier, Inez married The Barber in a private ceremony that only four people attended—themselves, Baby Zuzu, and Mothers II, who preferred that no one else was invited on account that Zuzu was born before their matrimony, which was in the wrong order for a proper wedding.

"Well, I don't know. But I can't see how he wasn't living right." Inez looked exhausted. She wanted to say no more.

Mano knew enough not to laugh. "Is that so? Do you believe him? Do you think that's what happened?"

"Mothers says God's finger is starting to come down to poke through the living who aren't living right."

"God's Finger? What's God's Finger?"

"I think it was God's Finger."

4

walking toward, then he walked toward them. "Are you ok?" he asked the soft green shape that was Inez.

"No, no, not at all," the soft green shape cried. "It's terrible."

"What's terrible?"

"My husband," she said. "He's dead."

Inez was twice the size of Mano. To Mano, she looked like a wedding cake. Her hair was big, curled around like frosting, and cascading down to her shoulders. Her legs were long and the size of Mano's head at the top. Her voice was smoky, and it sounded like she was always making an announcement when she spoke.

"Oh no, that is terrible," said Mano.

"He went...to bed..." she tried to catch up to her own smoky breath, "and didn't wake up...he had...a hole...it was..."

"He had a hole?" Mano clarified.