

## *Little Heart Attacks*

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*I don't mean to make you cry.  
I mean nothing, but this has not kept you  
From peeling away my body, layer by layer,  
The tears clouding your eyes...  
—Suji Kwock Kim*

My baby brother hated onions.  
Sitting next to Mom, five years old, he clutched his chest  
*I can't eat onions! They give me little heart attacks!*  
Years later, when we served onions  
With midwestern tacos or bratwurst,  
Someone would ask (and we would all wait for it)  
*Remember how onions would give AJ little heart attacks?*  
And we would laugh.

Nine years ago today,  
AJ was found in an empty parking lot  
On the south side of Milwaukee.  
I am not sure if the needle was still in his arm  
When the paramedics pulled him from his truck.  
Nor was I there when the doctor sat my parents down  
And told them *despite heroic efforts,*  
*I'm sorry, your son is dead.*  
But, I imagine Mom clutched her chest  
And wailed in pain.

Two days later,  
I identified his body at the funeral home  
Before they returned him to dust.  
*Take your time,* the director whispered  
While Dad waited outside.  
Behind closed doors,  
He lay heavy in a cardboard box,  
Draped in a blue hospital gown.  
Rotting like onions in a crate,  
I touched my hand to his cheek.