

Misbegotten

My father is made of gold and my mother is a dryad
with pomegranates in her hair and a peach pit for a heart.

Or my father is a mime in the night circus and my mother
sang the dark circles from his eyes. Or my mother sang

and my father loved and forgot he had a wife. I am orphic
am ophidian am orphan. When I swim the mangroves,

snakes climb my legs for refuge. I stretch the dead from
tongue to tail, shape seven silhouettes of my body and name

them all sister, trade my stolen Bible for romance novels
and dry myself with the pages. The lost have a paradise, too.

The first naked man I saw was dead. His body summoned
only indifference, his sex soft in his lap, a threat to no one.

It is shameful to love a dead woman more than the father
who braids orchids into your hair, and yet—I survive

the same lie twice, coax the serpent's forked heart
to ring the bells lonelier than elegies, *gone, gone, gone.*