

NOTES

The book flinches like a school of fish, a murmuration, a murder nation, my colonizer's baby handprint on a paneled wall in a farmhouse in Ovid, Michigan. The book unearths burial mounds and flattens them into fields. My ancestors removed the bones, and I removed arrowheads from the creek, and I held them to my heart, and I searched the grass for blood, but all I saw was a starling. She hid her eggs in my chest, and when I drifted to sleep I saw black-winged, nameless shadows.

This is the Book of Lily. Lily Rail was my great-great-grandmother. I stole her photograph because she looked like my mother. Lily's eyes stared through me. Who was she? My history is as blank as the cornfields.

After I was raped, poetry became a golden labyrinth, and I stepped into the color world. I cleaved to each beautiful thing. As the starlings began to hatch, I had less room for myself. I was afraid of my visions. I was afraid of the colors and voices. And now I walk as Lily, wandering through a forest I'll never understand, speaking to creatures I have only seen in passing, through a landscape that has been obliterated and tamed and slaughtered and patched and re-patched.

Armed with a Celtic tarot deck, I began to identify more with the nonhuman than the human. I imagined trees spoke to me, shadows flexed their wings, and gnats carried secret messages from the underworld. The Book of Gnats. Earthworks swallowed me at night, and I became an enemy of the farm. I became an enemy of houses, furniture, mirrors, makeup, mattresses, matrons, patrons, patterns. I became an enemy of myself. I tried suicide, but I was an enemy to courage.

The book flinches like a starling, like the gun that shook in my hand.

PROLOGUE

Lily:

So it begins with a starling
 who lives in my heart as it lives in my mother's
as it lives in her mother's as it lives
it grows round
 with night as it lives
 it grows a blood red beak
& its eyes cast a shadow long groove
over us living & dying the hatchlings'
claws scratch scratch scratching
the curve of skin on that pretty pretty
 drum silhouette lush
field where blood gathers in pools streaks
 sin & cinnamon some new shades of lipstick

I'm fourteen with long wet hair
the sun born in each wave swimming
drifting a few miles from my campsite
tired like when I sat on my bed
 & slid the safety off a .45
pressed it into my temple surrounded
by wallpaper cutouts
from magazines Michelangelo
Raphael the Ninja Turtle movie
 I saw with my father
I wasn't sure how to die
but I thought about it every
day

This time I beg Lake Superior
to swallow me nothing happens I turn
 to the shore see a black bear watching
& I'm afraid to leave the water
 drowning is clean the sea god
 waits in the darkness like a father

I dream over & over the bear's blue heart

beating open chest it slices

my face kills the girl I was

Sometimes you go in one lake
and exit another not a monster but a shed leaf
sometimes you lose the light in your fingers
it's cold not like a bombed city
not genocide starvation sickness the sadness
is my mother's definition for fog
clouds fallen from the sky

There are as many last breaths
as first breaths in the forest with my eyes
closed in the cornfield where I was raped
in the trash pit where my father burnt my poems
in the throat of my exorcist
in the cold air above the baptismal water

Sometimes the world
is created by sending one brave animal after another
in search of dirt

My cuts brush against my cut-offs
beneath my hair a bruise Hey West Wind
beat your feathers against my arms

Hey West Wind
make me thy lyre

Wren liar oak liar pupa liar
sitting on my bed with angels
I hear my own name echo
shadow hair skinless face
superimposed over cherubs hydrogen
liar helium liar carbon liar

stamen liar cilia liar xylem

liar something split

what if

my leaves are falling like its own?

At Hot Topic I buy pink

hair dye skip biology

walk to the cemetery

with headphones swimming Nick

Cave into gravestones spinning

we're already dead

sad people with flats of impatiens

Now shipwrecks lift up and up

so even my uncle raises his healed skull

from the rocks beneath the cliffs

of Lake Superior his friends laughing

drinking beer spelling insults with bottle caps

A red monster opens her mouth wilder & wilder

white black blue horses

disintegrate as the land

shrinks to a clump of dirt

clutched in a drowned muskrat's fist

**ACT I:
LILY & THE
BLUE-HEARTED
BEAR**

SCENE 1: OVID, MICHIGAN, 1994

Archer sees the buck, tabs his Western's page, and aims.

First Arrow:

Antlers hook pine
snake shifting shade
prism o teeth cave

spectral winter spine
bark dead now mine
red pine blade

bolted eye maze
blood leaf alive
wake cell hive

sun green rage
muscle bow brace
prism o teeth rise

Second Arrow:

Haze hot
archer
waste shot
whisper

take not
hotter
skull pot
spider

Buck:

Plasma amen
helios fire hymn

forests swim
crushed trillium

chrysalis, give me
aorta venom

lung dawn
dark stung home

Archer:

Sun in my hands I stalk
the sun in my hands I
stalk the sun in my
hands I stalk the sun
I am the sun Golden
Archer the One True

The Flower God, Crone Anemone, wakes.

Crone Anemone:

Buck, sink blood into earthworks, vine
red, twist into the shape
of a child. Stretch Lily's arms.
Split skin. Blue-Hearted Bear, restring ligaments,
sew fur on pulp. Limestone, harden
into hooves. Starlings, fold
your knife-black wings and beat
a syncopated rhythm.

Archer aims at the doe that was his daughter.

Doe Lily:

Red river
 pink leaf
sun sifts through branches
webs needles
yesterday's rain
 squirrels' sweat dust
stirred by cardinals' tails
 the wind carries
scent of human, old straw
 bow drawn
 the arrow grazes
 a ventricle's maze

Holy Mother of Pines
turn me to an evergreen!

Crone Anemone:

Fur, loosen. Skull, crack. Neurons,
snake. Frontal Lobe, fork into root-bundles.
Hair Cell, probe the dirt. Nuclei, spark.
Dendrites, stretch into xylem. Electricity, pulse
from underground. Drums, echo softly.
Brain-roots, grasp as leaves
sprout. Legs, harden
to bark. Hooves, elongate to tree limbs.
Blood, drip. Evergreen Lily, forget
that boy's hands and how he threw you down
among stalks, forget winged tennis shoes,
barrettes ploughed under in spring.

Evergreen Lily:

He said there was one door I couldn't open
a test so in the cornfield/castle-maze Chris said
"you can look" when he turned around to pee
 I did & ever after fingers stained
with red blooms tiny bitten hearts cedar roots
blood warning Ladies *O curiosity*
thou mortal bane fairy key or egg stained
 red with the guts of curious women
& red with their severed throats still questioning
why am I dead why am I dead & the moon
doesn't give a fuck silver dirtbag no she
won't sweep the field find our limbs rearrange
our bones breathe into us so we are whole again

