

# The Bloody Planet

*poems*

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Black  
Lawrence  
Press

For NB

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# Bluebird

To say *bluebird* is nothing.  
To say *bluebird* is saying *hello*  
or *hard* or *evening-tide*.

I think I could say *capsule*  
and mean it. I could say  
*climb* and mean it.

I could tell you about the mountains  
that form under your tongue  
and stream into the air.

About the violets and the golden  
eagles, the pine trees damming up  
the space between your tone

and mine until it isn't funny  
anymore. The way the light  
drowns in the cliffs

we make with our mouths  
and everything goes  
clatter and blindness.

How someone has always forgotten  
to bring or is it build  
the map. Or maybe *bullhorn*.

Think of the echo.  
I don't know any words  
better than bluebird.

My whole life is bluebird.

## On Mercury

Less skin than wrapper, less concrete than gauze,  
the ground crumbles—floats away, cools,

gray-brown dust tornados, magnetic, lost in tides.  
What does it matter? Broken ground folds

into plains and craters, fields mark  
the path of violence. Scars gather flesh—

fall apart. The ground writes, rewrites. I can't see  
against the sun and my weak eyes. Maybe

I can't bow from ridges—as if welcoming  
collision, as if collapsing in witness,

ridges to valley floors to circles. Maybe I don't breathe  
as the surface unravels crease, crust, and mantle.

Nothing guards. What does it matter? Below:  
the iron core, busy, liquid, the mountains coming,

the mountains going. I should gather old swords,  
wheels for the forge. Each spindle wilts into flame.

What does it matter? Maybe a rupture. Maybe a bridge.

## Medium

I listen for a pulse across the mattress,  
amplified as if through a river gorge,  
drummed along cliffs, coils,  
bodies, finally knocked against the oak  
headboard or the wick of my cheek—

somewhere in Oregon, waterfalls thunder  
fog and slick, and the language of isolation  
rushes by in interstate license plates.  
The echo, the void, the way  
everyone's hair gets wet

*On paper. Mixed media on board. Ink and blue pencil on board, on paper. Ink on paper. Ink, gouache, and collage on board. Handmade. Color pencil and pencil. Crayon. With acetate. Overlay. Marker on paper. Watercolor and air-brush.*

at the falls, even in sunshine, even  
from twenty yards away, bead over bead,  
raining through eyelashes, smooth over rock.  
Winter trees suggest the inevitable return  
of travelers, salmon, rain.

I do not sleep. I imagine I wait,  
covered in fingerprints as if I am shaped  
from wax and still hot, curled like a flame  
bends in breath, vibration written  
in muscle, in lid. I could appear

*On paper. Earthenware, decorated with colored clays. Glazed. French, about. Purchased with funds. Wool, silk, gold, and silver tapestry. Walnut. Sail boats so far away they might be birds. Oil on canvas. Porcelain. Limestone. Floral mixed woods. Yellow hat with sky-blue plume. Painted steel. Acrylic with resin. Lithograph. The first frost. Screen printing. Fleshy swans, wet grapes.*

in Singapore, where doves taught to sing  
spend their mornings in cages on stilts,  
up where they might feel the cool breezes.  
I could vanish in Nebraska, grasshoppers  
the size of my hand. I can fling handfuls

of prayers, hiss my own wishes. I have never  
been a god like this before: stomp, dance.  
In the canyons, rhythm wants a bridge and beat  
drums a flood. Pulse becomes the blue  
smoke of a candle, the flame too much.

*Paper. Charcoal. Pastel and watercolor. Shadow, stone, abstraction, paper. Partly red gloss. Mosaic. Blown in a mold. With paint. Difference. Sameness. Faces, fruit, jewelry. Mask after mask, hand multiplying hand. Stone. Muscle, bone, fiber. With paint. Man with saxophone. Gold luster. Self-portrait. With blues. Water. On canvas.*

## On Venus

All the excitement happens in the atmosphere. Sulfuric clouds, stingrays, terra firma beyond a bubble of heat. Air is blue-green bays, evaporated oceans, a mirror of the sun's dots and dashes across meteors and stars, obscuring any continents below. When a day is longer than a year, the two of us could be this same storm watering itself over and over, burning off and starting before being consumed by the ground, unable to dissipate among the rubble. Let us fling ourselves on the slippery backs and ignore below. Flash, flash, we fly lightning beyond the peaks of Maxwell Montes. Breathe in—everything before, see the pocked surface, and the impossible bottom pit. Our first or last “hello” might descend through atmosphere slowly, pressure crowding edges as letters push their tiny sounds together. Sea-sky electricity hollers cloud to cloud. As land comes into view most solid things will break apart, implode from air stronger than heat or volcanoes, though craters wait with open mouths. We will be drops that begin again. Myth may come thick like mosquitoes, but the sky has nothing to do with the ground.

## Growing Season

We move to Ohio in August,  
when Ohio is all husk and yard:  
chicken wire and metal stakes,  
shards of tulips, last night's bottles.  
We carve a garden behind the garage,  
let Ohio wedge under our nails,  
let Ohio crust over our shoes.  
We don't mark our cheeks with clay,  
but Ohio covers our eyes, gets caught  
in our hair. Bees nesting in the eaves  
get dizzy in the heat, get lost inside  
the window panes, noisily fling  
their delicate colors against the glass.  
We sleep through the static,  
let Ohio die in the living room,  
let Ohio crunch underfoot  
in the morning. We try to dream Ohio,  
speak Ohio, but our garden goes in  
too late for anything except oregano,  
rosemary, bushes that won't be good  
until next year anyway. We want to be  
rooted in Ohio, to sleep in its cradle,  
snug in the old steel and plywood  
and loss. We should stop,  
let Ohio bury what we plant,  
let Ohio take the herbs, next year's  
spices, let go of desire. We water  
everyday instead. Ohio doesn't mind.  
We sit on the front porch, watch

a hawk track a pair of finches, circle  
the same oak trees. We go inside before  
the finches falter, before the hawk seems  
to wait, tender with their fatigue, fat  
in the Ohio sky. Before the dive, Ohio  
lets us step through the threshold,  
lets us step between the dead bees.  
Ohio turns our eyes black and yellow,  
turns us into small bodies of white noise.

# On Earth

We light up our fields with fire.  
Tire tracks like teeth and small, wet arches.

The farm becomes a golf course becomes a subdivision becomes  
back home.

People want to triumph. To triumph  
burning the field. The islands  
about to sink in the south Pacific.

A sentence can not go on without foundation, without cinder  
blocks, without a large pile of clay next to the hole, which is  
not the foundation itself, but rather the record of it, yet not  
of the foundation, but of its construction. And this, too, goes  
flat over the yard before the frame rises.

We want to shape the knoll. Divert the waters.  
The story. Arrange vertebrae. Nails. The sound of it:  
island, island, island.

Bones and shadows. Cities of twins,  
everywhere islands of twins.

There is a you and there is another you  
holding clay hands, blinking clay-smearred eyes.  
Cracking, hardening in the heat. One of you runs  
to the firehouse. The other licks the burn.

The knoll. The waters. The knoll. The waters.  
The sentence. The island. To understand it

geologically. This is the goal.  
To burn out the invisible, to stand  
until the sea and the heat overtake. To swim.

Until the buildings build each other  
and all the books are broken spines.

Until the people eat clay  
shaped like punctuation. Until we try  
to leave. Until the people hunt for twins.

# Slip

*Where is the eye?* ask the women  
fenced along the shore. They study  
a wave that seems to blink.

Marsh orchids curl in the rain, toss  
their small, unspeaking lanterns.  
The women have stood here before.

\*

Perhaps they were once barbed wire.  
Perhaps they once bled  
moons and cattails and rivers full  
of rocks. Perhaps they remembered,  
forgot, and washed in the water,

the wave only a flutter  
of a thousand, no, a million, hands:  
water's wet fingers pressed  
into the backs of water's wet hands.

Water is made of touches: pearl  
after invisible pearl, a white palm  
toward shore.

\*

*We are leaving,* the women might say,  
as they scrape sand

over their footprints, fling  
pampas grass from their shoes

without grabbing the thorns  
they can see, the feel of blood.  
*Carry us*, they might ask the water,

yet they cannot get wet enough  
or float on gestures and bits of shell.  
Instead, they close their eyelids and turn.

## Map of Heesakker Park and Woods, Little Chute, Wisconsin

This is where the boy came back,  
in his garrison cap and crutches.  
This is where, with two hands  
and the one leg that was left,  
he learned to climb the silo  
again, as his brother winched  
down the basketball hoop  
with the claw of a hammer  
and the blunt end of an axe  
for good measure. This is where  
the brother wedged the blade  
into packed clay, as if he could pry  
the world open like an oak tree,  
touch the fibrous heart  
and each drought, each thing  
gone missing and yellow, each return.

This is where the mother thrashed  
the kitchen rug with a birch branch  
until everything bled, the red and dust  
and sap flung like seeds into the garden.  
This is where the screen door  
wouldn't hold its latch. Where the cows  
didn't remember he had left.  
Where memory is a sign and a plaque  
and a parking space. Where memory  
is an oak leaf in early November,  
its thread about to tear. Where  
the limbs mark the watch, and wait.