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
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
Crone Anemone:

Music, blue, rhythm unending, dissonant. Wavelength, vibrate, color, music, vision, wavelength, color, music, color, wavelength, rhyme in the rock-teeth, lizards in the rock-mouth, fossils’ vague death-stare crashing on rocks’ bloody incisors.

sky sk y
black see the i s le
river she will s ea l
river she will b e e
call her crushed un c l e
who the green c i r cle
sore open bled
notes charged crying into me
hands I am
she’s eternal now violet clover
graying passenger pigeon O
where do we go after extinction
my new body my first body
an a l e
j o v e
airy e v e r
flame s eam her e
in flooded ti me s he
is shorelines celestial graves ye s se e
bodies asteroids planets fire black until the dawn shakes the horns off her head viol (n) tly