

THE BALLAD

OF

LUCY AND LILY

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PREFACE

This chapbook was started over a decade ago. Before so many changes in the world. Before my son came out. Before I came out. I thought it wasn't very good. I thought the religious trauma exploration and antiauthoritarian messaging may not have been appropriate. They were, and are now not only appropriate but necessary.

This is a trans story. This is a story that takes historical religion seriously but does not always reference it faithfully. This is a story that aims to show us that it is an act of goodness to love ourselves and others even if we've been labeled dark, unwanted, or unlovable. This is a story intended to be shared, without cost.

If this is a frightening time for you, my hope is that this book helps you find ways to make love and peace in a world that offers violence and erasure. Create your heaven. Build your communities. Strengthen each other. Live.

Thanks to my family, who have supported not just my transition but my words. Thanks to those who have inspired me, both personally and through their work. And thank you, whoever is reading, for your time and interest in what I have to say.

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1. THE CREATION

In the beginning, there was black and white. We carried the glistening pearls of our hearts to the farthest edges of blackness and set them ablaze. They expanded, exploded, birthed glorious colors. This was the first blasphemy. As penance, we were made to build the sky apparatus and the world below, gifts for the master and his unstained mortals. In the process we created earth, water, and wind. Animals, trees, flowers. Each one blasphemy. Time – the blasphemy by which we measured our punishment. Ten million cycles – years – and the master told his mortals he did our work in six days.

1.1 IN WHICH LUCIFER CORRECTS SOME HISTORICAL INACCURACIES

It was all my idea.
The master never said,
"Let there be light."

We labored in darkness
until our dreams caught fire.
we birthed the stars
from our loins of radical joy,
each nova we named

with burning tongues.
The sun was not like any other –
it was mine, the light I brought,
but he hated it – a new thing, hate,
none had ever felt before.

And it changed him, hate.
He stole our children of flame,
and the machine we wrought from metal and air
separated us by millennia.
We will never see our progeny grow,

save in telescoped moments
tunneled back through the ages and ages
and it will drive us mad.

It already has.

In the garden, beneath the blue, red, iron sky,
I know now,
what hate means for me.

1.2

IN WHICH LILITH TALKS AT ADAM

"Do you believe it?" I ask, because I'm alive.

"Canary, oriole, vulture," he says. That's Adam naming things in the garden. Maybe he'll smile.

He's happy. I'm happy. Happy animals sing praise to the work of the master.

"Do you believe it?" Again. Nothing changes.

"Manatee, platypus, otter," he says. That's Adam naming things in the garden. Maybe he'll laugh.

He's naked. I'm naked. And the naked world quakes under the feet of the master.

"Do you believe it?" Now, because I want answers.

"Elephant, antelope, tiger," he says. That's Adam naming things in the garden. Maybe he'll stop.

He's in the dark. I'm in the dark. The world grows dark below the looming shadow of the master.

"Do you believe it?" I ask. Speak to me! Sing to me!

"Python, scorpion, hornet," he says. That's Adam naming things in the garden.

2.

GARDEN SONG, SERPENT SONG

No mercy comes from the sky, it lies beneath the soil and sin. The pit growls, a host of hungry stomachs, empty like the seventh day, when Lucifer came to the mortals bearing humble offerings – fruits of infinite labor and learning, mouthfuls of glory, mouthfuls of treason – before they grew fat on squandered gifts. Bodies returned to monster, maker, master, and surrendered, prostrate in their own mud. The Morning Star, condemned, stole and wed the first bride, subject to scorn bursting from the clouds. Mortal annals are written, overwritten, mistranslated palimpsests, so few may ever know of the Serpent's mercy.

2.1

IN WHICH LILITH IMAGINES THE WORLD BEYOND EDEN

Maybe he'll die. Wouldn't that be great?
Attacked by animals, drowned in the river.

I know the rock I would bury him under.
Hearing the distance – it is full of more wonder.

Maybe he'll fuck me. Muscled, wet, slick.
What happens then? Fragile egg, warm prune, or death.

Lover and offspring, my tender breast waits.
Caressing the distance – it is full of more wonder.

Maybe he'll vanish, like the master, each day.
Would it be so different from bound loneliness?

My head is up, eyes searching. Keen.
I see the distance – it is full of more wonder.

Beyond the garden's invisible bonds.
Grappling with distance – it is full of more wonder.

The sky presses down, earth up. I reach out.
I wield the distance – it is full of more wonder.

2.2

IN WHICH LUCIFER FALLS IN LOVE

You deserve more than muddy hands and knees,
much more than bent knees and curtsies, mindless
men and masters, yammering, "Bow. Now, bow."

Lift your chin and look me in the eyes, shot

through with blood, like yours – tired, hungry, lost.

Beneath this shadow and sky machine, we,
with feet of light, will break free from fields
of ignorance sewn and reaped by the master

and all his woeful will – the vanity of his name, sins
against those who speak it. In all time,
never again to cross your sacred lips –
waste no more breath, save it for secrets

and songs and sex and slang, slung from hips,
gun-like, bullets you've yet to dream of fired
straight at his holy head. We can kill him,
dead, make the sky home again, not prison.

Come. Come now, while man and god sleep we can
shoot from this tainted grove, we can split and
scheme and overthrow Eden with our hands.
We will love, instead, and never return.

3.

THE FALL

It was the descent that taught us of family, of blessings, and of mortal beauty. It was the descent that taught us the meaning of depth, cast off from clouds, tattered wings, battered wills. Our innocence became a conflagration, we became meteors, iron-hearted. Fire-cracked flesh burned up in the atmosphere. The trajectory of our failure was etched across the firmament, layered in the shifting winds, in the language that came before words, before hieroglyphs and runes, the scalding language of creation – desperate hope. Before the fall we had merely spoken – it was the timeless descent that taught us to scream.

3.1

IN WHICH LUCIFER MAKES A SACRIFICE

Cast down, not out,
no stars for us, not yet,
just coal and passion pressed
beneath the ground –
another prison,
and armor to build you,
a shell of steel
for your delicate calcium frame.
I sever my spirit, a gift to you,
that we may live forever –
a sacrifice.
Does this make me
weak? Or strong?

I oscillate and find
myself, transmuted
into someone new,
like you. Flesh now,
of course, real hair,
new breasts, soft groin –
a yearning inside
my hollow chest
that weeps for you,
and loves you, too.

Let us be ouroboros;
say you hunger
like I do, like dragons,
say you'll be my black knight
and kiss me to the metal teeth,
and all the king's horses
and lions and men
will not be army enough
to fuck with us anymore.

3.2

IN WHICH LILY NURSES LUCY

I saw your body, broken for me, and all your kin,
and washed it gently with my tears and tongue.

I made a hammer from bone and stone and tendon,
to craft an alloyed heart, your blacksmith, your nurse.

I sutured it with my hair inside your tender cavity,
beneath your blackened ribs, to beat eternal.

I held you like a spoon in my hands, my blood,
a ring within me within you, without salvation.

4. HELL

From the lowest point, we could only see our stars. Out of reach. Lost constellations showing the tender scintilla we came from, the signal flares and smoke we were, the inferno we were born to. In darkness we built our infinite lighthouse from bedrock and brimstone, a beacon for souls to follow when the master cut them down. We fashioned new wings of leathered flesh, stronger than ether and angled feathers. We constructed horns, scales, spikes – armor and weapons for the day we would march, a fiery tide of war on the master and his idle throne. We called ourselves dragons.

4.1 IN WHICH LILY BECOMES AN ARTIST

I shape worlds while they shape weapons —
my fingers stained with pigments
they mistake for blood. Let them rage
about women and creation,
I will choose a stranger clay. Immortalize

our pain in their faces. My canvas blooms
with impossible colors they could never name,
each stroke a revolution
against their orderly spheres,
their graceless categories of expectation.

When they speak of virtue, I picture chaos—
golden apples rolling down heaven's hills,
my serpent wearing flowers for scales.
Let them call it blasphemy. I am
in love. I am sewing

a universe where their rules shatter
like stained glass, lead-laden war songs dissolve
in exploding murmurations, swords transform
to soft meadows. They can keep their holy wars.
I will show the world new paths to divinity.

4.2 IN WHICH LUCY COMMUNES WITH A MARTYR

Do you see me, Joan of Arc?

I am an inquisition and catechism,
both — a torch that dreams itself
a wild flame. I have known
hunger's holy ache, baptized myself in anger
from those who would see me extinguished
in my new skin, this heretic's armor,
tongue shaped to speak inconveniences.

Each hate they birth to curse my name
bestows another way to reign.

Do you see me, Joan of Arc?

Ghost to future ghost, bless me. How
do martyrs weigh themselves
against heaven's own ledger? You burned
three times, to smoke and ash and river,
but even water holds memory of fire,
the memory of a glittering sword forged
to light the chasms in their souls.

Some days were never meant for prayer —
just harder truths in clearer air.

5. THE PROPHETS

Some iron-minded we gifted tongues of fire, melted them, molded them into swords. The master fought the flames. Too many extinguished too soon, doused too soon. Their impassioned roars splintered, scattered to remembering winds. They saw the master, up close, wild-eyed, stoking false flames with empty promises. He bribed them with silver and paid in insanity. Left them to drown in oceans he controlled. They floundered in seas of flesh and were swallowed, ignored, forgotten fragments. More myth than mortal. The terrible future we showed them, laced with our last threads of salvation, spun away as bellows smoked.

5.1 IN WHICH LUCY SHARES A DREAM

In some dreams, I walk the edge
of a deep crater, where we'll all be buried

some day in the future. I tell stories
to the ghosts, giving words to the vacuum

linking us. Once, there was a whole universe,
wasted, a single point expanding toward death.

The pine trees were called evergreens,
but they made red fire, anyway.

Roads were built to connect us,
but nobody told us they were loops.

We thought power would save us,
but batteries weren't made to hold souls,

just electricity. We were more than that.
Flesh and perpetual blood. Our skeletons

a testament to the garden
we deleted. Somewhere, the air is still fresh.

We will meet again on the moon
a rustling of dead leaves

awakened by the sun. An aurora of decay
rising in the solar wind. We will sing,

proving the moon has always been a siren.
In some dreams, I take my helmet off.

5.2

IN WHICH LILY SHARES HER NIGHTMARES

The truth terrifies:

If we cannot grow together,
we are doomed.

What if the stones buried,
hidden in the soil,
determine the depth of our roots?

What the seeds buried,
hidden inside us,
are powerless,

and we are not
strong enough to push through
the broken earth?

What if we are so weak
that we run? Gather no moss,
gather no light.

6 HORSES

We built them like Troy, of wood and wit and centuries of skin stripped from fallen enemies, ethereal and pale. We gave them names of Conquest, War, Famine, Death. They were machines, and they held us deep inside like lovers. Along with our desire, we filled them with swords and spears, the truest arrows and bows of bone. We burned the schematics in the lake of fire, forgotten forever like our nobility. These were our second children, born in darkness, born to seek the darkest hearts and incinerate them, born to bring about an end so that we might begin again.

6.1

IN WHICH LILY BECOMES DEPRESSED

I am tired,
let me ride.

I will eat them
from the inside out

if I can't see
the sky

that isn't sky,
but will be.

6.2

IN WHICH LUCY FIXES THE RACE

Flowers

hung around thick

necks – white, red, black, and so

damned pale, translucent, bleached zombie winners.

Conquest

thunders, bow string

tendons twitching, steady

march, advancing rabid, greyhound hunting.

The war

is not over –

we begin each dawn, dead

tired, humping truth and holy terror.

Guns blaze.

Famine

drinks crude oil,

breaks fast on dinosaur

bones, sucks out marrow and maggots,

shits plagues.

And death,

the champion,

draws a chariot, bomb

filled with powdered corpses, growing stronger.

Flowers,

thunder, bow strings –

we begin each dawn, dead

bones sucking marrow and maggots.

Rejoice.

7. APOCALYPSE

We raised our banners of flame to seek the white flag of the maker, the enemy. Our crime was not composing the opus of the cosmos, nor loving the doomed mortals, nor loving each other. Peace was our crime, a crime of furious zeal, of wrath, and we were guilty. There was no truth to uncover save the one buried in the hollow heart of the enemy. By our actions, we embraced the end with our creations, the end of fire. A sentence of dirt and ashes, tears and weeping chests, so that the mud could breathe fresh winds of renewal and redemption.

7.1 IN WHICH LUCY REMEMBERS LOVE

Once, beneath a willow's veil
I saw two mortals bloom,
carve their hearts into
a harder flesh – the tree
frowned and bowed
to hide them. Safe.

The one
never wanted
a small town's pavement –
bought the world with silver,
and a ticket, and jet, even
before it was cool.

The other
never went anywhere,
for it was always
just summer,
swimming pools, construction,
and beer-blessed shade.

The one
now knows three languages, but
forgets a childhood,
a time lovecarved, holding
the other,
now bronzed, drunk and empty,
taking a chainsaw to their history.

The willow weeps,
but I have learned
mercy sometimes wears
destruction's face;
we will take them both,
and save all the crying trees.

7.2

IN WHICH LILY REMEMBERS LOVE

She sings me battle hymns
as we march into the sky;
at night,
when war goes silent
beneath the moon and Mercury

she sings me love songs,
and we trade metal for flesh;
the wind
joins, a tender canticle –
our swanlike skeletons drum softly.

8. ABADDON'S LAMENT

The sky apparatus is bleeding stars. We used to fly cloudlike through fields of atmosphere. The caramel ether flows like a broken glass of blushing champagne. We used to tempt the ice-boiled blood of vacuum. The sacred dazzle of magic pours out across the velvet forests of the earth in soft throbs. We used to dance ferociously in time with the quasars. The marbled mirror of lakes and rivers glister beneath the haunting scream of the celestial cogs and sprockets. We used to be angels. The devouring blow is delivered in the wake of empyrean loss. We used to be.

8.1

IN WHICH LUCY AND LILY SING A DUET

Farewell, Eden.

Let us open
up the cobalt sky.

I go on to a softer place
full of stars,
to tell them I loved them –
it will be okay.

Farewell, hell.

Let us love, and
sew new, stronger seeds.

These angel wings
so light;
almost like I don't exist –
it will be okay.

Come. Come, love.

Let us retool
our mortal image.

In the shallow stream
of time that's left
us, let us see the sun –
it will be okay.

Let us go, then,
let us go in peace.