

What God Told Noah

“It is not more fully human to possess nuclear bombs than bows and arrows.”
-W. Reinhard, *A Short History of Colonialism*

There is an ecosystem between my lungs- a phylogeny between my first kiss and my first cat and my first fuck and the first time I had the dream about the dog that followed me home and watched through my window as I slept and three days later someone stole my bike. There is an ecosystem between your lungs, too, and maybe I am there like how you are in mine, categorized under “can’t shake” under “manifest destiny” under “agave sap.” There is an ecosystem made up of old lovers and new lovers and places they’ve sent you postcards of, of Costa Rica, of fields and vicinities and times you’ve felt haunted. You call this aerodynamics. You call this trajectory. You call this an eventual orbit. A collision. A dwelling. Expansive. There is an ecosystem that starts with the first time you cut yourself climbing the tree in your grandmother’s backyard and ends with what you said last night.

This is a story of scientific names and addiction.

This is a story about appetite. This is a story about holes.

Every Name a Lover Has Called Me:
A Taxonomic Record

“Hey there”
First date
Baby
Gorgeous
Honey
Sweetheart
“Good morning”
Girlfriend
Love
Chofercita
My light
My one and only
“I’ve been waiting for a girl like you”
Mine forever
But baby
But-forever
Bitch
Selfish
Cunt
Lapse
Mistake

You used to call me wild one.
I used to call you equator.

What I Should Have Said Last Night, Part 1

The night I first met you was the night that I first had the dream about the dog- brown, skinny, with a tail that hadn't ever wagged. It followed me through the streets of my hometown, which is a place I don't call home anymore. Regardless, I could still draw a map of Christmases, of communions, of first dates, of wax. The schoolroom where they drew the Twin Towers to explain it. The gas station when I heard about the stillbirth.

You wouldn't be any of the pinpoints on these maps. But you were there - The reason I couldn't sleep in the spring. The reason I once taped the spinal cord of a crow above my bed. We don't have maps for that yet. There's not a word for "a braid that came undone" a word for "that tangled into your sinews" a word for "made you start to hate the snow."

The dog sat under my window that night. I woke up with your name stuck in my teeth.

Since September 11th, 2001, the United States government has spent over \$90 billion dollars on security on the border between Mexico and the US; 165 truck x-ray machines, 650 miles of elaborate fence, a 24/7 state-of-the-art motion sensing camera system that alerts the on-duty Customs and Border protection officers (each with a salary of \$75,000, coming in over the average pay for associate professors in the US) of possible human activity.

More often than not, the detected activity that causes these officers to deploy is a tumbleweed.

A Short Definition of Colonialism:

An economic school of thought, a branch of mercantilism
Establishing a source for raw materials
Creating an external market for your finished goods
Cultural removal, replacement, pillage

See: tourism
Buying a Costa Rican flag and using it as a shower curtain
Admiring villages from your tour bus window
“the poorest people are the happiest”

See: online dating
Okcupid.com
Message from a man in Ohio
“I can tell that you’re a horny bitch”
Attached picture of penis
Assumptive

See: the fall of the Incan Empire
The fall of the Aztec Empire
The fall of any Native American empire
Manifest destiny
Small pox
Treaties

See: spanglish
Touring a coffee farm and calling the way the farmer feeds his family “adorable”
Golf courses with sprinkler systems
Indigenous populations bathing in streams
only after they’ve paid.

See: an extraction economy
Network of silver mines
Invasion
A hole

See: the night I lost my virginity

Ways to Kill a Mouse

It's called thumping
because of the noise
they make if you do it right-
which is none.
Just the thump of the hit
and the spinal cord disconnecting
right there on the back of the neck
which was his favorite place to kiss you
and he did that night,
before he slipped hands into your waistband
and you started to shrink like you were seven again.
There are those mice that go easy and quick and still and
then there are bad mice,
bad mice that won't sit still for the thump.

It's called gassing because
those mice you put into plastic bags
fill them up with carbon dioxide
like a child's balloon that won't ever float
and they struggle.
It takes a long time, even longer
than it took you to fall asleep in his bed that night-
the last breath is the deepest,
like a yawn or a howl before nothing.

But at least there is no blood
like with Yellow, the alley cat your mom let in one winter,
you never even knew you had mice
but he did, and he found every last one.
Like the man who drowned his ex-wife's dog Bingo
in the river because he howled after she left.
Like the 62 sparrows dead from the museums' gas leak-
they pinned them up by their wings to make pretend-
and it makes you start to catalogue
in body counts and blood loss,
makes you start to wonder:

When did you lose more-
the first time you fell off your bike
or the first time a boy looked your way twice?

It's called "trapping"

because some mice are quicker than others-
they'll live in your floorboards, they'll live in your covers
it will be work to set the bait,
to put their temptation on a spring-

know that these mice, sweetheart, will bleed.

And it might take you years to collect them,
years until you have them all.
Maybe you'll want to dissect them,
pin them up on your bedroom walls.
It might take you years to forgive them,
to realize it's not what you need to relive them,
to take them down, and wrap them
in that bloodstained bed sheet,
a pillowcase of careful corpses
to drop
at his feet.

What I Should Have Said Last Night, Part 2:

Exactly a month and 3 days ago, I woke up in your bed at 4:12 am and sat bolt upright because I had just had a nightmare. It took place in your living room. It involved a ghost, the dog, and a man outside your door.

A haunting, the bathtub filling up on its own. Our beds wet when we came home in the evening. The dog, waiting under my bedroom window. A man, never knocking but there, just outside, standing, always about to let himself in.

Bechtel, the largest engineering and construction firm in the United States was ranked 4th in the Forbes 2013 Largest Private Companies list. In the Engineering News-Record's Top 250 International Contractors list, our friends based in San Francisco placed 3rd. Historic is a word that comes to mind with Bechtel- the Hoover Dam, Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, a rebuilding of Kuwait after the Gulf War- they've been there, hammers in hand, for all of them. And they've been in South America- Brazil, Peru and Bolivia.

Cochabamba, Bolivia to be exact, to build a dam that would control the water flow of the region, a privatization of water called *Aguas del Tunari*. Every drop of water in the region, even what falls from the sky, would be owned and in turn sold by San Francisco-based Bechtel. Never knocking.

When I traveled in Costa Rica, the hotel showers all had the same sign:

Cada gota cuenta.

*115 Days or:
Instructions for Wedding Butterfly Release*

You might have bought a necklace at the shop by the beach
of the blue morpho butterfly-
a wing fragment in glass that hits
your collar bone just so,
a blue that you have always thought
would be the best way for a lover
to describe your eyes.
I will tell you that your shampoo-
the stuff that curls your hair the way he likes-
will drain into the earth long after you have checked out
by noon and will seep into the roots of the bromeliads
your morpho butterfly calls its favorite.

You might have bought a map of a
rainforest trail behind your hotel
with an informational inset that
reminds you that morphos are said
to lead travelers into the forest, never
to be seen again, might have remembered
that you once heard to have a morpho cross
your path meant a change in destiny.
You had always wanted to be a morpho
for someone, someday.

You might have found
a small curio cabinet leaning against a fruit stand's
plywood side, a morpho butterfly
carefully displayed against yellow corkboard.
You might have bought it, even after the woman
who sold you your mango told you
that if one caught a morpho, one could whisper
a wish, let its wings go, and it would carry
your secret with it.
Now, pinned behind glass, you only wonder for a moment
whose secret you would hang in your living room.

You might have bought a box
off boxedbutterflies.com for your wedding
with an instructional sheet reminding you
that these butterflies live for 115 days,
if the weather happens to be right
in an ecosystem they have never called home.

You realize that this would be the only time
you would see a morpho in person, a living,
flying specimen, not mounted in your living room,
frozen in your necklace,
morpho wings used as ash trays in gift shops-
a box of butterflies at your door with
115 days, if they were lucky.

What I Should Have Said Last Night, Part 3:

I always wished online dating sites had graphs on the best times of day to fall in love, columns that explain at noon is when most people meet the love of their life, at 3 pm any date you ever go on will fail and at 11 am is when most marriage proposals are rejected.

Maybe a line across axes that explain that at 6:08 pm I will think about your teeth, at 8:42 pm I will remember how you sound when you laugh really, really hard, at 2:03 am I'll remember that one time at a friend's house when you climbed the dogwood tree to get your car keys down and cut your foot on the bark. I found footprints of tree sap and blood the next morning on the linoleum kitchen floor, and they looked like you were dancing. These are things, like my nightmares, that I cannot shake.

But at 4:33 am, on your couch for the last time, I will not need a graph to know that here is someone who in some cosmological sense can keep up. Who can hold his liquor and understands that when God told Noah "save my animals," we figured out what we were put on this earth to do. Who can remind me that the world is more than a kitchen drawer with rusted knives you use again and again, more than smoke rings habitually blown on Sunday afternoons.

I have never used the word "love" and I doubt I ever will, but at 4:33 am I will realize slowly and then altogether that here's a person I could name the curvature of the earth after. That I could take to open ocean and watch drink.

I am supposed to keep things like this to myself. I am supposed to let you do all the lusting. I'm supposed to be at least a little well-behaved, but I might be drunk in a bathroom stall one day and have to write your name on the wall, carve it into bar stools across the globe for okcupid.com's statisticians to find, to catalogue and organize into a graph titled "Why I Will Never Forget You."

One Argentinean indigenous group of the Nivakle Indians tells this story:

The people were suffering from hunger, from pain, from love that was failing from a lack of water. King Buzzard, a terrible monster-like bird, was standing over the mouth of the river where the best water came from. He had realized women come from this river, and he meant to catch them when they came up for air.

“I wish I were a bird so I could fly above the trees and find somewhere else to drink,” one of the men of the village thought to himself. So he went to the Gray Lizard and asked to be turned into a bird.

“I will build a fire tonight,” the Gray Lizard said to him. “You and your people can jump into the fire and you will come out as birds and you will be able to fly away from King Buzzard.”

The man went back to his village and told his people about what the Gray Lizard had said. They started to pick what birds they wished to be- spoonbills, hawks, cranes- all with a diet of natural things they would always be able to find year round, with wings that would let them fly over the pampas until they could find water not guarded by King Buzzard. Wings that would let them see the equator.

That night they all went to the Gray Lizard and sure enough he had built his fire. They all took turns and jumped into the flames and emerged as the birds they had chosen. Just then, a young man who had not elected to turn into a bird came running and yelled and said it looked as if King Buzzard had died. The birds went to make sure this was true, and took turns picking his body a part so he could not possibly still be alive. Rolling in his blood and in the ash from the fire they built, the birds all got the colors that they have today, and were able to find water for themselves and their people for the rest of time.

“Cada gota cuenta,” I imagine. Every drop counts.

You Could Call it Cartography

I lodged a penny under my tongue
and it didn't fit because
you were already there-
the way you slept,
your bones-
and for the next three days
I was swallowing copper lust.

There's a reason blood tastes metallic:
Even the woman you were named for
would remind you that the goddesses of love
and the goddesses of fidelity
were never the same women.
One wears the dripping party dress
and the other stitches it together
with fingers of constancy.
I imagine they know how to do laundry
pretty well, too,
but I have never been able to get blood
out of any dress I've worn for a man.

Every saint who ever gave up
with an orgasm and a oh god oh god
was exiled to Cyprus
to mine copper out of the ground.
Poison is in everything, they knew
and they ate it to forget the feeling,
the taste of lemon that comes
when drowning in pennies
just to forget
how you were always there.

Never knocking, but there,
always about to let yourself in.

It was supposed to stay above 47 degrees last night. The lemon plants were supposed to be okay on the back deck. The cat was supposed to stop bringing home baby sparrows fallen from the pine. We told him it was wrong. Last night I was supposed to fall asleep early and keep to myself. I was supposed to drink Dragon Well tea and it was supposed to stop my dreams about the dog. You were supposed to go meet an old friend for drinks. You were supposed to come home alone.

The lemon plants were supposed to bloom this weekend. They were going to smell like my last days in Costa Rica, like that night in Arenal in the natural hot springs tucked behind the highway. Like a place strangers call each other *hermano*. Like a place where agave sap on your skin is all you need to start over.

But it didn't stay above 47 degrees, and that night I dreamed of the dog following me home for the first time in months. The cat brought home a bleeding sparrow. She asked to come back to your place. You finished your beer.

What I Should Have Said Last Night, Part 4:

I knew that this place was too small for you, that you needed to arc over continents. That you needed to wade into the Amazon eating Damiana flowers, the ones the Incan women used to tuck under the tongues, the jungle aphrodisiac no *conquistador* with his Bible could bleed out.

You used to call me wild one.

I still call you equator.

Wild ones, listen:

This is a poem for the 12 species of South American birds
that have gone extinct since you were born,
thorntails and sunangels,
flight feathers pinned to beige museum walls,
labeled and silent.

Wild ones, listen:

This is a poem for the author of the guidebook
you read on the plane,
who- roving, devoted- fell in love,
only to abridge this country
into a list of tourist destinations.

Wild ones, listen:

This is a poem for the kind of soul
who learns native tongues
only to get a job he never wanted
translating naval commands into Quechua:
“Qankunapa kachkanchu armakuna?”
“We must search you” and
“where are your weapons.”

Wild ones, listen:

This is a poem for the 96 languages
that have died on that continent.
You will never be told “I love you” in any of them.

Wild ones, listen:

I would glue back every feather
I have ever cut off any wing
if it meant I could bring back one little bird-
thorntails, or sunangels.

Wild ones, listen:

This is a poem for the 12 species of South American bird
you will never hear sing.
Take them and catalogue them carefully,

let them perch in the spaces between your ribs.

Call it a penance.

Call it a promise.

Epilogue:

You've been gone for a month.

He and I met online. He needed me, he said. He shoveled the driveway for me. He tried to make rice and beans for me because I said that all the snow made me miss Costa Rica. He used too much cilantro and instead it tasted like dish soap and the Midwest. Like how the water in my house began to taste like copper after you left, every bath flooding the floors no matter how I tried to stop it. Like how the jungle fish recipe you learned in Peru tasted when I tried to make it myself. You had been gone for a month. I forgot to add the lemon.