

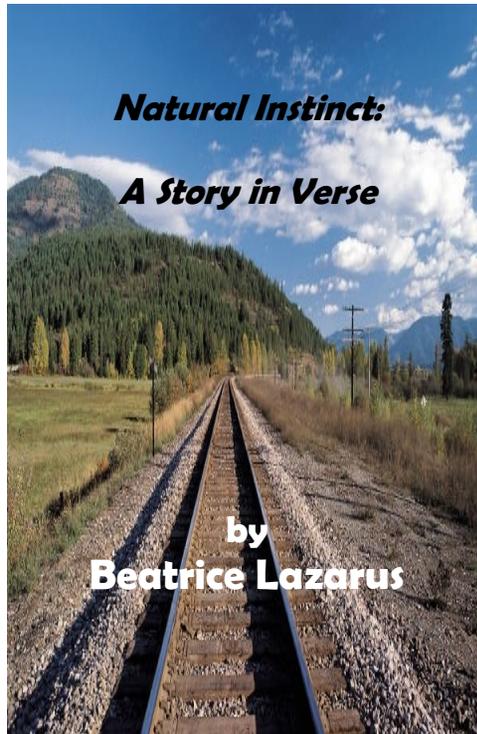
Origami Book and Poetry

**Natural Instinct:
A Story in Verse**

by Beatrice Lazarus © 2009

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***Natural Instinct:
A Story in Verse***

by
Beatrice Lazarus

i.

She leans flaccid into the crook of my elbow,
a stranger's sheltering arm, her head flung back,
bearing the weight of her young muscles,
their faraway yoke, their mitochondrial mourning.
Her limbs enflamed with the untranslatable,
a phantom memory of escape, of being tossed.

Her eyes always on me, she searches anything,
everything, for an inexplicable vanishing. I want to
understand such solitude spilling out of sorrow, how
she is always close to falling, tremulous at the edge
of some unnavigable tracks, crying *love love love*
up against a strangers' brown faux fur.

!!

This is her house now, clapboard white, its bridge
of struts and candles. With hair of dark silken
chords sometimes too heavy to carry,
she phoenixes around the room, the books,
the bags, forgetting for a minute where
she is going, or perhaps she is mapping out
the ashes of a housewreck. Abandoned hull,
small quiet rooms, haunting promises.
She thinks *don't cry*, remembering
a young woman running, the press of fingertips
to the velvet of her child's cheek.

Then it happens: the unbuckling of backpacks.
The quick stopping to kiss, loose curls falling
long across her face with the scent of flowers,
their sudden opening, fields of them. On a dusty
road they press in one final touch, toward some
other blast of light, some foreign sky.

!!!

I ran with them, mother and child,
steady and certain as soldiers' boots
gathering along the fence where women
fainted in the hottest middle, stumbling
toward the tunnel, groping in dust-choked
clouds, the mountains coiling dark,
and this train approaching, its steel teeth
clenched on hungry rails.

Someday she would die to go back
where a small piece of her was left behind.
One day she will be waiting for the bus,
flashing to the young woman with the
black glassy curls, her mother at the edge
of the tracks, in the darkest of times.
And the words she said again and again,
"Keep her safe for my return."

iv.

How could she have known
what she'd lost
on that grinding train, her baby-light
shoved into the rail car,
the air suddenly altered,
the train's whoosh like an axe
so loud it hurt.
A tangled skein of strangers,
all stranded, all lost,
sucking her breath,
Bodies whizzing by,
drifting beyond recognition.

v.

Or the slow way she leaned into
my stranger's arms, rocked and rocked,
thinking of bike rides, purple-painted
eggs, and the woman
in the dim kitchen light.
Knowing only how she wanted
to stay at her blue painted table
with its patient sadnesses.

That these were not her mother's
eyes, nor her coral smile.
Not her mother's pink-shell arms
around her small thrumming
bones, as the lost self
she could never reach
twisted around the bend.