

# ATLAS OF ROOTS

Poems

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*Story, for me, is a thing to revel in,  
even when it ends in sadness.  
Even when it's made of your own pain.*

—Anita Lahey

## **I Write Fictional History**

to fill in the blank lines drawn on my skin  
across my forehead and around my wrist like a band  
of copper wire, tensile, drawn out.

I write history that is fiction

and interview everyone sideways. I talk  
and they talk and I try to finish their sentences  
and then I stop. Because that is rude.

I write what's spoken

then I write it again on a second page. I dream  
of government forms that arrive in the mail. And  
I read them out loud.

I write my future and present

but mainly my past, making it up as I go along.  
There's the grandfather, the grandmother,  
the villages their grandparents left and

I think of the chorus of stones  
that sing in my blood, stories written  
in lower Edwardian script on my genes.

I write history.

Enough to fill a book, fill  
pages with facts  
all made up.

I am child of

I come from

## How to Pronounce Me

I entered the world  
headfirst, my name embossed  
in the white vernix  
stretched across my back.

My name waited for me to claim it  
but hands towelled and swaddled me  
that name was wiped  
onto hospital linens and washed away.

I have never loved my given name.  
It feels wrong. I hate saying it.  
I can't change it.  
This burnt mouth name won't let me go.

Her first name.  
His first name.  
My real name.

I cannot properly be summoned.  
Call me with your eyes not your mouth.

Conjure me.  
I still wait for my name.

## So-called

*Names have the power to summon. All witches and poets know this.*

—Ana Maria Guay

You were named for your nana from Iceland.

The men on the boat loved her,  
braids waist long, thick as her arm.

You were named for a girl I loved in grade two.

You were named after flowers in a cottage garden.

Your name was so popular, there were three in your class.

Your name came from God, He told us.

You were named for your birth  
month, your birth day, your birth gemstone,

for the sound you made in the night.

## How Does a Baby Come to Be?

You, baby, were brought to us by three crows. One carried you, one carried your blanket, the other carried your name.

Fairies dropped you in the basket at our garden gate where we usually find berries.

Floating on a lily pad.

There you were, playing with kittens in the pet shop window.

We dreamt you.

Your mother couldn't take care of you.

She loved you so much, but she couldn't take care of you.

She wanted you to have

us. We wanted you.

sold, bought, traded, given, gifted, borrowed, owned, passed off

## **Different. But Better**

This is the first story you're told. You were  
chosen, from beginning, it's your story.  
You are special and wanted.  
Different, but better.

There are picture books to explain, where  
the baby is white and eyes are blue  
like the mommy and daddy  
who took you home.

Your mother knew  
when she saw you.  
You were chosen.  
And special. And wanted.

You're adopted. It's different.  
For someone to choose you,  
you were "given up"  
by a birth mother and father, unformed  
shadows at your shoulder.

## **Why Look for a Mother?**

My mother left me. Mom left my side, disappeared

I was five, looked up:

    don't remember

    if she found me

    if she announced over loudspeakers

    if I was crying

    if I found her two aisles over

    if she grumbled at me to pay attention

    if she noticed

Which mother left me?



## Cold

Search to find comfort, then, child.  
Follow a forest path

salvage a nest, meager and mossy  
torn from a branch in high winds.

Tuck the shredded remnant  
into your pocket.

Hold to your quest.  
To a distant mother

knowing some comforts are cold.