



Books

A Review of Quick Kills by Lynn Lurie **Nicole Capó**

(Wilkes-Barre, PA: Etruscan Press, 2014)

The expert hunter kills quickly, precisely. With enough training, the hunter can cause death to his prey in ten seconds or less. These wounds are called “quick kills,” and are thought to be a form of ethical hunting for those who approve of the sport. Of course, the prey didn’t ask to be killed, and what happens when those wounds are imprecise? What happens when the hunter lets himself fall victim to his own dark desires?

Lynn Lurie’s second novel, *Quick Kills*, is a jagged wound that refuses to heal. The wound is reopened time and time again; it

bleeds itself dry and scabs over only to be picked at by the clumsy hands of the hunters who make the young girls of the story their prey. Though short, *Quick Kills* is rich with tense, foreboding material that crosses the lines of consent and violation, need and want, dread and desire, love and the dark, nameless thing that pretends to be love.

A young girl grows up in precarious circumstances. She watches as the girls around her become women, suddenly aware of their more devious inclinations. She watches as her own older sister is visited nightly by their abusive father, and her observations are coated with a thick layer of jealousy. Following a description of her sister's nightly ritual in preparation for their father, she explains:

I wasn't born yet when she waited for him, but I was there (...) when she let him rub her back or reach under her shirt to straighten her bra strap, when she rested her head in the crook of his neck and sighed.

This main character — whose name appears so infrequently as to be virtually nonexistent — becomes a fly on the wall of her own life, and her often detached perspective stands starkly against such evocative themes. She carefully examines the fragmented details of her life: blood that seeps into her sandwich bread and covers the driveway after her father guts a kill, moss and algae that grow along the water like an unknown disease, death that bookends nearly every story of her childhood. It is that lack of touch, that need to feel something concrete, that permeates *Quick Kills* — as the narrator rubs her hands up and down her mother's fur coat-covered back and is pushed away; as she hates her father and yet desires his attentions so fervently; and when she finally, as a child, begins her own sexual relationship with a much older photographer who photographs her nude before forcing himself inside her. This, she believes, is what she needs.

“Even the newscaster couldn’t say if Patty Hearst was kidnapped or if she had gone willingly,” she states within the first few pages of the book. Certainty that is uncertain and memory that fades are constants throughout Lurie’s book, and the photographs in her story that once froze pockets of time eventually become ruined; they are lost, found, and discarded. “I don’t remember” are the words that stick throughout the story and in the years that follow. As she attempts to come to terms with the events that are lost, or that she’s in the process of losing, memory becomes, for Lurie’s narrator, both a crippling and empowering phenomenon.

The need for identity has a similar duality, and the power of Lurie’s work is present in the idea of transformation that is persistent in her novel. In one instance, the Photographer melds together photos of his young lover and turns her into a “garden hose of coiled snakes,” where the last one faces back “as it tries to swallow itself.” The narrator becomes the ouroboros — that same symbol of rebirth and change that she attempts to capture in her own costume-based photography projects. She becomes everyone and no one. She becomes Eve and revels in her nakedness, owning it as her own even as she presents it to the Photographer.

Throughout her pain and her struggle, throughout the neglect and the abuse and the feelings of futility and, most of all, self-blame, it is these moments that shine through and lend a unique voice to Lurie’s novel.

It’s not the first time – and certainly not the last – that these difficult subjects will be broached in literature, but it’s interesting to see how each author chooses to tackle it. Nabokov’s *Lolita* was seductive and strange, enduring through time as something that entrances us through its morbid fascination with the taboo. *Quick Kills* is a harsher work, less fantastic and more approachable. Lurie’s words cut deep and force the reader to reexamine and reevaluate the truth of their own memories.

There are some wounds that never seem to stop bleeding. *Quick Kills* is one of them.

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Nicole Capó is Puerto Rican by birth and a resident of Washington, DC by choice. She's covered tech, science, and pop culture news, reviewed plays and books and attended local events for The Daily Lounge, K Street Magazine and Sabotage Reviews.