

REBECCA LILLY

THE ORCHARDIST

1.

“Every soul evolves by spectrums of brightness in the cumuli and hourly geometries.” The dwarf was wild-eyed. “For centuries it’s been a holy war. All *sorts* of vermin threaten our livelihood.”

His intensity frightened me a little, for he acted as if I were assisting him, but in what capacity I couldn’t guess. With stubby hands, he pointed to windfalls on the grass. He had a forked beard and droopy hat, this dwarf with the looks of Rumpelstiltskin.

110

I was about to introduce myself, when suddenly he leapt up like an acrobat, stamping the mud with his boots. “Crush that nasty devourer!” he yelled, wagging his finger at an apple.

A black and yellow caterpillar crawled across an apple skin while the dwarf hopped about, his stumpy body shriveled as a gourd, issuing orders as if I were his henchman.

“That *isn’t* a snake,” I assured the little man.

“It’s a snake in miniature!” he spat, his beady eyes boring into mine.

“Snakes do not morph into butterflies,” I added, my bare heels sunk in weedy grass.

“Thank the Lord!” He scuttled off, muttering how no “philosophy of growth” took adequate account of pests devouring his apples.

The trees reminded me of scaffolds with their gnarled limbs. Tagging along, I kept my distance. Fog settled on the mountaintops and along the horizon.

2.

The dwarf’s cap jostled as we crested the knoll; then abruptly he stopped.

Cloud-shadows rolled down the slope like a snake-handler’s gloves; the apples were blood drops. I saw a caterpillar vanish in one apple hole and burrow out another.

111

The dwarf stumbled and cursed, his boots stomping caterpillars through the soil, muttering of vermin. “In the dark, it’s hardly *noticed* under your boot sole, chomping in the dust...”

3.

When I woke, my window was open. Fog bearded the full moon, a haggard old man coughing smoke into the suburbs, a covering of leaf-fall on houses and roads under frost.

It was close to dawn. The mystery of the orchard was a wind rising toward windows of the house where I was born, offering its song without words for my insomnia.