



I've Heard the Vultures Singing

Lucia Perillo

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When her doctor asked if the pain in her legs was like pins and needles she replied, "No, it's more like rubbing against a hot driveway impregnated with broken glass." Her doctor responded, "Oh right, you're the poet."

It is glimpses like these that fill Lucia Perillo's memoir. She is unabashedly honest about her life with Multiple Sclerosis (MS), an autoimmune disease that affects the central nervous system. She talks about being a "cripple in the wilderness," her obsessive bird watching and listening, hating her dependence on others, sex, and many other aspects of life with a debilitating disease.

Perillo is the author of four other books of poetry. She has received several awards for her work, including the Norma Farber Award, the PEN/Revson Foundation Fellowship, the Kate Tufts Poetry Award, and the Kingsley Tufts Award.

On describing her image of herself, Perillo says, "Now I am: *bag lady on a cart jury-rigged with lights and crutches*. Know me slightly, and I am...a kook. Know me well, and I become merely an eccentric."

Her chapter on sex is startlingly honest. She opens with a discussion she and her husband had about including their sex life in her book. "No one wants to read about sex," he told her. "Everyone wants to read about sex!" she replied. "Not about you having sex," he said.

Later in the chapter she asks her husband "...how he can stand to make love to such a freak..." and he replied, "That's what eyelids are for." She seems to enjoy his honesty and humor in these delicate situations.

Once a park ranger and athletic outdoor enthusiast, Perillo has difficulty reconciling her need for manmade accoutrements to partake of the wilderness. "...My presence at Kennedy Creek requires a hundred pounds of plastic and metal and toxic chemicals... I know I am only one small woman trammeling the wilderness. Still, it grieves me that I do trammel. What I would embrace, I crush."

I've Heard the Vultures Singing is an insightful look into one woman's journey with nature, her physical struggles, and her thoughts on life as she experiences it. The prose is poetic, a reflection of her life as a poet. Beautifully turned phrases are sprinkled throughout the book, adding an extra element of enjoyment.

Lovers of poetry, people with MS, writers, and memoir readers will enjoy this well-written, honest, and entertaining book.

Perillo's words bring uncomfortable and curious life experiences to light in a way that many can relate to. That makes sense though, since after all, she is a poet.

LAURA MUNION (June 7, 2007)

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