

Lies From the Space Gods

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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by
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Mini artist statement

I strive to write slightly odd, lyrical poems that examine loneliness and queer perspectives. I draw from the tone of Marty McConnell the most and also enjoy Ada Limón, Anne Carson, and T.S. Eliot. I try and push experimental details and thought patterns even within more traditional narrative pieces.

Lies from the Space Gods

Mother used to tell me that all good things came from spaceships.
Laid out on her splintered Adirondack chair,
Black and Mild dangling between teeth, I wondered
if she was waiting for her fleet to return
from a hazy, purple place. Celestial dust
peppered her skin. Her eyes bore
through my body. Did other children

of ethereal mothers collect black holes in their stomachs?
Did children come from spaceships too?
Lavender and ash, my mother, a bore,
rolled out of her Adirondack, raised
a mild hand to my belly and whispered *you are a bucket of stars*.
Celestial dust on my skin, I shone. For Mother, to be fleet

and as strong as gossamer,
was fleeting. At recess I told the older children that if they spun me fast
on the carousel, I would throw up
celestial cereal-marshmallow stars and rice Chex spaceships.
As they whirled me round and round. I pretended to be bored,

told my gut to be as strong as gossamer. In rebellion, a bore
of water and bile fled
my body. A puddle of Milky Way
and laughter at my feet. A mild
case of the spins kept me
near a bucket all day. The children
whispered *weak* and *full of shit*.
Only space is full of stars

and celestial bodies. I hadn't had breakfast that morning.
Just sucked celestial dust off my fingers. Bore hunger
on my hipbones and dreamed of spaceships, full
of tea and dark meat chicken. And of a fleet
coming to take me from Mother and the older children.
They would zap me up in a haze.

I walked home that evening under a lavender sky. Screams of children and dogs
bore through the streets as I slumped into Mother's Adirondack and waited
for the fleet of spaceships. I smoked a Black and Mild. I was bored, wanted
to fill my lungs with ash. No celestial dust or bucket of stars or fleet
of delicate children could make me believe that good ever came from spaceships.

Diet Versus

In the grocery, waiting for sliced ham,
my mother would tell me about the chemicals

in ready-made pizza
crust, and how we bought
the expensive kind because
I would eat it
and kids need to
eat, but one day it was going to kill me.

Just kidding. My mother rarely talks.

She's trapped somewhere between Texas
and divorce, standing on two bum knees

and, occasionally, my body. My mother taught me
about silence. How to use
it and how to break it so it hurts.

Her knees
are screaming, but she has stopped
buying me pizza crust in an effort to be better.

Arms

Yesterday in group
June said she liked to make models
of all her lovers' left arms.
Duct tape an empty Pringles can
to a paper towel roll
to a rubber glove
then carve their names
into the cardboard
using a bobby pin.
June said it was her life's work.
Her eyes rolled like blueberries.
June said her mother pushed
a steak knife
through her bicep
when she forgot to grab
the whiskey on the way
home from school. Her mother
let the wound fester.
Now June's always got an itch.
Do you ever try to put them on?
The fruit fell from her eyes.
June said none of them ever seem to fit.

You're not wrong. My mother hates you.

On the fifth of July you gave me a jar of pickles.
Your dad made us pancakes for breakfast, said they would have
tasted better with a honey drizzle. I built a beehive
in my backyard when I got home. My mother wasn't pleased.

The bees arrived and I gave her the empty pickle jar.
For the wax. Make yourself a candle. Unscented. She put it in a cupboard.
You're going to get hurt. Slick in summer heat, slide, click, a comb, a kiss.
The bees asleep in an apple haze. You told me you bought a ticket to
Connecticut when you thought I wasn't listening.

The bees woke up. I wasn't wearing gloves. They swarm to skin.
When a bee stings, it leaves two things behind: a body and a scar.
Once when I was six my mother was stung while we were eating
lunch in the ruins of a castle. She couldn't walk for days.

My mother filled her jar with formaldehyde
and dead bees. They each have a name like Disappointment.
She keeps them in the bathroom next to the baking soda and gauze.

Sweet Dreams

I want to bake a pie. Dad says he'll help. He went looking
for a pan and some sugar. I need to get the berries
but it's snowing. I'm not wearing shoes. My hand is lost
in a bush, basket dangling from my elbow. The branches
have been picked clean. There is a piecrust in my basket.
Birds are bickering on a wire. My mother bangs pans
to shoo them away. I hear a song of feathers and brass.
I can't find any berries. I shuffle over a dirt brown carpet,
through a thicket. In the clearing my mother stands hunched,
blue juice dripping from her fingers. A bird smeared at her feet.
June, honey, go back to bed.

Waiting for Money from the Hands of Dolls

My closet floor is riddled with the bodies
of dolls. They carry birthdays in their palms,
leave porcelain ears in my shoes as gifts.

My grandmother and I used to spend nights
dancing on gravel, spinning until blood
covered our feet like sunrise.

*You have got to listen to the body.
Let it scream. Let it smoke
cigarettes. Let it give back*

to the earth with ecstasy and bruises.
Then she would leave, throw
pillows reupholstered with nicotine,

an orange box on the counter covered
in Sharpie saying she hadn't forgotten my birthday.
Here was another doll for my collection.

One year she stopped coming.
The dolls began to wear. I put
them in the closet. Now

my grandmother lives in a blueprint
of a house. The walls are to be made of bone
and old money. I want to visit and leave

her an orange box of dust that says, *listen
to the body. It is time to settle down.*

Fringe

Border Collies keep watch
over the salon. Men and women in
orange velvet robes smoke
hashish from dark mahogany pipes.
Through the ash they discuss the parties
of summer and the post war boom as if they were equal
gifts from God. With blood shot eyes and
dizzying limbs, the host tries to lead the group
in prayer. He calls for the blessing
of poppies and mustard, condoms,
automobiles and all things
that rest on their side. *Crab legs do not
belong in the mouths of sinners.*
In the corner, a woman,
arms raised, begs for more
passionate tongues.
The host gets sick over the floor.
Under the eyes of the dogs, he is the first
to lay face down
in vomit that smells like soured crab.
Not fortunate enough to pass out on his side.

Happy Birthday Katherine

where it says tessellate read
freak death from falling down stairs
where it says Chapstick read
my intestines have been leaking
sadness into my belly for years
where it says peaches read
any three lines from "The Love
Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock"
where it says shit read shit
blue like the ocean you see
when you read loneliness
crawl through fences and get
stick 'n' poke stories written on your body
drawn between the lines
are stick-figure bodies
but still you can only see
the traces of ghosts and
hear the screams of the girl
across the hall
as she gets fucked
sideways.

Midwestern Goats

People say the Midwest is all corn
and unfavorable averages. People say
corn tastes like military bases
and snow. People say the Midwest
is just fly over states. People say you could fly
military planes using corn oil.

Corn oil can power lawn mowers, weed
whackers, and the spare electric generator.

People say keep a generator
for when the hurricane
hits in September. Pigs will take to the sky
tearing down power lines. Grade school
kids bathe in their grandmother's
pools and pee in the yards
so they don't have to flush.

People say spare the mow and get a goat.

Get lots of goats. You can order them
on Amazon. It's not your responsibility
to keep the goats warm. Put them on
a plane to the Amazon or Syria.

People say in ancient times
Syrians took goats to the king's wedding
and put silver around their necks.

Sent the goats out of town to drag
bad luck away. People say
it did not work, the same way goats
serve as very bad lawn mowers.

In the Midwest, people believe
in the lawn, in the average salary,
and corn. You take care of the yard
by giving it a flat top and a flying pig
statue. You pray to Butter Jesus while riding
around town on a sled pulled by goats.

A History of Rubber Ducks

January is always an ice age.
A small cut and slow drag
melting to the songs of birds.
A river swallows the bathtub.

Glaciers drop granulated hope
into peat mineral soil. A girl crawls
out of dirty water froth in March
onto a beach of tile and moss.

She plants a garden, which blooms
an asparagus city from copper and vitamin K.
She settled near the river
on the spines of horticulture books.

Each spring, through the chill,
the girl waits to worship the ducks
as they float by on the ice green water,
buoys of nostalgia.

Phantom Pains

Once in the forest we found the body
of a deer leaking red from a hole
in its liver. You said even with the
shotgun's shock, she would have gone
quietly. The way you blanketed
her in leaves still makes my belly ache.
You were only carbonating
soil. Rich lines grew from your throat
and dropped at your feet like chestnuts.
I watered them and watered them but they
did not grow. Spoiled. You said you wanted
to raise trees together. But dear,
you went quietly. I wish I had sawed off
the doe's soft antlers, ground them into
powder, and caught your ghost in the dust.

Wine Is Not As Delicate As You Would Think

I.

a corkscrew stuck
down my throat.
ribbons of flesh
etched out of my insides,
fresh tilled land for
funest seeds that
trick me into thinking
they will heal my wounds

II.

my body is a greenhouse
absorbing sun through
the pores in my skin.
wading through puddles
of gastric acid humidity,
red blood cells with
green thumbs arrive
in my belly to garden.

III.

veins become vines pumping
chlorophylloid envy into
my fingers and toes. i prick
myself with my thorns.
i bleed not blood but
a sticky green sap
that attracts bees.

IV.

glass splits sprouting
baby green twigs.
my crop is not ready for
harvest so i sew raw shoots
into my dry, cracking skin.

V.

no one has come to pick my fruit.
i am full of overripe grapes.
they rupture and ferment
turning my organs into wine.
i am a vintner, an internal vine
and ribcage cask. i crack myself
open and bleed.

VI.

the bees swarm
in a yellow haze,
picking up leftover seeds.
make sure to keep your mouth
shut when they pollinate.

Hive 59

Every two months my landlord
tells me the fleshy patches on my walls
are not mold. Rock expands, bellies
rolling out filled with summer rain.
Keep the dehumidifier on. A hum
like my grandpa's sleep apnea machine
sucks the other sounds away. The washed
out dishwasher spin cycle. The Sunday
night stranger drunk on the couch.
The shower sex. The two holes
in the particle board across the hall.
Someone told me to keep bees
in there once. Keep the dehumidifier
on. Yawning kitchen tile. Maintenance
men. The dehumidifier beeps three times.
There is mold under my bed. Liquid
condensed noise will echo in the tub
when I pour it down the drain.
There are bees in my walls. We do
not have a tub. I do not have allergies.
I do have mold. Buzz. Buzz. Black.
Julia Nunes hums
I fall asleep on the floor.

“I hope you explode into a pile of guts and don’t apologize for making a mess.”

I hate talking about the seasons
because I want it to be okay
that I am always cold. Apparently,
there is a medicine that will stop
my toes from turning purple, but will it
tie my veins back together
after I shiver so hard I split like firewood?

Probably not. In a linoleum sunroom,
grey scale blood rests on a hot pink
desert. I try to watch a Tampa sunrise, but one eye
is under the table
and the other is glued to the TV.

How to Make the Moon Fall in Love with You

Cut open a bag of tea.

Spread the leaves over bathroom tile and parking lot black top.

Light candles in old soap dishes

Write messages to Artemis in lemonade and chalk.

Arrange a marriage with the moon for the third Sunday in April.

Make sure to invite your parents.

You are Folly the Hunter.

Eat a peach.

Only wear skirts.

Practice confessing your love for the girl down the street to photographs of Sylvia Plath.

Dry sliced figs on your windowsill.

Never time how long they bake.

The batteries in your watch must always be dead.

Folly, please, do not grow old.

Chopin Lives In Our Mouths

I used to drop pennies in the corner of a room
for the girl whose boyfriend, a little stoned, got lost

in stringed lights and Oreos filling, forgetting to talk to her.
She ignored me for two summers, falling for vodka
blackouts and a poet from Connecticut.

I grew a peachy sadness. Almost bed
another one. Woke up with an unused condom

in my pocket and my head in a toilet filled with pits.
In June I came home bitter and fleshy. She called

me with a half finished stanza stuck in her teeth. I washed it out
with a handle of margarita mix. It read something like Chopin's
Nocturne in C-Sharp Minor. As we laid in my childhood
bed, she split my lips apart and pushed a coin purse

into the back of my mouth. She said she could not spend
the night, but she'd always look fondly at my shine. I cannot play
the classics anymore. I rattle with change, a broken music box down the hill.

On A Limb

Every time you take a selfie your eyes
dim like almost dead flashlights,
the dull light that keeps me warm
like seat heaters in a Subaru hatchback.
There is a comfort to sitting in jazz with you.
Old with smoke, with semi-dry mead,
with turtlenecks that say something
like *I used to be more pretentious*. Like
love hatching under a light
in a classroom aquarium. Young like
it's warm and knows something.
Our backs pressed into a stranger's
sofa, my finger in your mouth.

And the Mountains were Blue

Slow moose nibble at pond lilies that float
in shallow basins collecting
in the wreckage of Russian planes at the base
of blue mountains. Loose snow falling onto split upholstery
and antlers, inching like the moose, up the mountain.
Thread and steel, the plane – a shit town
buried in white – cuts
 a moose
 lily stuck to his nose
as he wanders into the blue.