

# **God Appears Only to Disapprove**

*poems*

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*not for god*



I've eaten my heroes: they go down so sweet with wine, no fighting, only that crystalline tang in the back of your neck. The pressure against your heart as they slither past, whispering through my throat better than I the words back there.

Yesterday, I froze out my demons. I let the snow in on the orchids, and I stood as all the water froze in the back of my phone, cracking the black screen wide open. The freezing hit me like the bodies on Everest. I spent hours looking up every one of them, imagining Snow White's face turning into porcelain. If I ate meat, that could be a plate for my mood these days.

Tomorrow, I go for god. I light this up. But first, I must pull the meat from the bones of the poet – you know the one – her electric lightbeam adjectives. She's been ink for years. No one can get you for killing a legend, because they're unprovable.

I picture my heroes failing better than me. They don't spend as long thinking about the best way to die. They don't spend hours practicing not putting their fears out there. My heroes were better than me, and now they're bettering me.

When I become the thing I fear the most, I'll have to eat myself too. You know the way, knuckles first, a soft jelly, defrosting what I left buried by the orchids, the roots I'd tried to leave behind.

All anyone can really do is wait. It's like the fairy tale goes: a man leaves out bread every day and asks for a house. Then God comes down and says: You had all these fields and you grew wheat when you could have been planting trees or squaring up walls. What were you thinking, that I'd pull stones from the ground for you? You have to build the damn fence yourself.

I could use a visit from God these days, you know? I could use a clear sign, and when they come I cling to them like they're not in old Armaic. I pretend they're saying, Bryce, you're gonna be just fine kid, instead of asking questions. I'm like the fairy tale: I could have room for a house, but I'm baking bread, I'm worrying about these plants I stole from outside. I'm plucking off my fingernails for fun.

This is not yet giving up. But it could be  
Even your lover is forgetting the sound of your  
breathing. You think a lot about that old story:

There's a man on the other side of the world  
who picks up broken animals with their  
clockwork joints tick-ticking irrationally.  
They don't show the next part, camera shaking,  
where the thighs get sewn back together by  
time. They don't show the recovery, or that  
you know, in your heart, they died anyway.  
Right after the cut screen. Right after the black.  
It's all reaching muzzles and the crescendo of strings.  
It's all too much for you. The story is, he's a good man.  
He's a better man than you. You, clockwork broken.  
You, a black curtained animal.

The moral of that story is: the summer sun  
is coming for us all. Somewhere on the side of the  
road, there's a dog who moves like a six-legged spider  
shuddering. You want to be the one who saves it, even  
as you pluck spider legs, even as your boot  
crunches down on that sternum. You want to be  
the easy good of his edited videos, but instead you're  
the people who pass by in the back of the shot  
and stare backward like they remember dreaming  
of doing what he's done.

My mother cracked safes so I wouldn't have to. She'd leave their wrecked bodies open on the front porch, afterwards, her technique not a thing of delicate metal strips. I think she ripped them open bodily from on high. I think she felt asleep with the gospel at her feet on nights the door would not open and then she'd wake up possessed. She'd float above the sheets. Maybe I unpicket the fences of her youth for her to do myself a favor.

There is the mother who took to the woods too. I am the child of all these mothers, monstrous. Underneath my glower I'm statue made. The children of monsters have seen the broken beyond and five years later we will come for you. Our hands are becoming swords already, a subtle transformation. I'm not saying my shielding is safety pinned together for effect. I meant every word I memorized by heart.

In the small chapel of my heart, I'm always standing in front of my mother yelling back at them when they come for us. When their batons are at the ready and I guess you could say we had this one coming. The safes are still there, open. She had a boyfriend for a while who would take them to sea and drop them into the ocean. Underneath his left elbow his father had left a knife blade for him under the skin. He looked at me once and said, you're sharp too kid and my mother smiled like she hadn't told him about our platinum bones.



Even half hidden, still a god,  
half broke, two quarters stained  
glass and too breakable.  
Will god move? If she paints a broken  
self-image, still a god. Forgets to clean  
the dishes, still godly, necks breaking godlike. Or more  
god willing. That echo of the self right behind, self-proven  
image of Satan himself - not so much evil as lesser.  
Scraping the wall with his back teeth.  
Unforgiving, she, a god. I know because I saw  
the lanterns light when she spoke, that church  
that rose out of the old swamp on the edge of town.  
The noise it made wasn't so much wailing as  
the inside of a volcano licked clean. Like godliness,  
like the word 'clean' when you describe a broken neck.  
Showing herself like this, limbs shook and consideration,  
she could be crying, screaming, coming, but you know  
she is a god by the way she breaks that vulnerability  
open, by how you can't help but lock your eyes on,  
your neck broke back clean just to catch  
the last glimpse.

I.

My lover and I are taken to a field. There are two smooth dishes made of tiles facing each other. We cannot turn to see each other. My tiles are made from our bathroom; under the sink. Hers are from our sunny kitchen. We go back to back and then take 50 steps. We take 100 steps. I forget how long it took to walk away.

II.

If we sit up straight and talk to each other it's like she's right there. It's like she's whispering into my ear. It's like we haven't left home and I'm doing the dishes, it's like she's in the garden and I just came in the front door. Her blonde hair is still plaited I presume. Unless she left it on the plane on the way here. Again. I have started to go to rotten. I have forgotten what it is that I look like outside this grouted reflection.

III.

We run out of things to say on the third day. It's easy to confess when I don't have to look at her face. She had kissed her coworker. I had run away for a weekend. Underneath my fingernails I'm ripping up this bench. When she goes quiet I don't know if it's because she's turned to look at me. I imagine she's stone or worse, she's gone.

IV.

At night the owls come and bring me food. It's asparagus with garlic or pasta. I don't know who cooks it. I know my lover

doesn't know how to whisper into my ear anymore. I wonder if they're not bringing her food, if they claw her eyes out.

V.

I start to tell my silent lover about jokes and my favorite ones. Not the jokes themselves, but why they worked. My standup routine goes death is coming, and then I can't stop laughing.

VI.

If they had offered her to leave I couldn't blame them. I don't know if I'm a better one to stay. I like a lot of the sky now. I wish I had a camera or some hiking boots but I can walk real far into the distance near the skyline. Since this is mythology I know echo is just over the hill her eyes are shut maybe I can tell her what to tell my lover when I've gone past her eyeline. Maybe she can whisper back to my lover all the things I can't say.

The mountain splits open and there we are. That's where all the fog comes from in the mornings, the outlines scraped away to become crystalline clear. We're all measured out in the greys on greys, the exhalation of air. I woke up yesterday and God spoke to me as I tried to disappear into the mossed out trees. God said, just because the visibility's been down for days doesn't mean it's not gonna come back. It, we knew, meaning the sun. Meaning the unbroken mass of stars with the closest one blinding. I said to God, I'll give it three months and then I'm back in there. I'm building a fucking treehouse. I'll go deep down dark until it's hard for me to pull back. God said, I don't take bargains anymore, but three months.

The last bargain being the flood, I guess. God didn't think to say to me, just shuffled off in that way. The light went darker again, the sky nowhere to be found. I sat down in the dirt that was to be mine and cried into my meals. They became: hamburger, fossilized fish turned scaly again, toy truck grown up. And then they all left, and the fog cleared up just enough to make it back to the other home, and then I had to wake up early so I just left a bag packed. In case.

Or, we're the other ones.  
Not that we call ourselves

the bad guys. Not that we're even  
guys. Not that I wanted to hold

them hostage. Not that they were  
held against their will. Sometimes we like

being held to the ground. We're all just  
yelling, "more weight" but we don't mean

rocks. We mean the good stuff. Less  
holidays and more of the connections.

We mean the moment the bullet unchambers.  
We're not good at picking our own presents,

don't realize that the best moment isn't the cash  
It's we have you surrounded and then negotiating

for food on those days when the sun straddles low,  
squints in your face, then compresses your spine

to the pavement.

## Lovebot

Mrobot forgot my name within the first day. My robot fell in love with the plans I've been killing for weeks and then died. My robot found love with sandwiches. I try not to teach my robot that I don't know what would eat him and therefore don't know where he should stand when facing his lover.

He writes quite bad poetry but I trained him to do that. I don't know why I get so mad. Everyone loves my robot until it stops talking to them when I sleep at night. It turns out I spent a lot of time thinking about myself. It's not hard to build a robot that loves when you are practiced in the art of giving but not receiving. My robot doesn't know what it's like to be loved but I'm trying to teach it.

He's small enough to fit on my shoulder for now but I could give them legs maybe if I could figure out this walking thing. He's so handsome in a robotic way. I need to find him another lover maybe another robot because I don't like his flowers, I don't like his gestures I could unmake him but that seems unloving. I'm building him a girlfriend out of old hair. I'm building him a girlfriend in this wet suitcase on the beach. The passerby are looking at me like should robots bleed like that? Should they cry? His girlfriend is a wet rat too. It's true love.

Tell the boy, my mother said,  
and I remembered slamming  
my little brother's fingers into  
the car door in December, those  
little phalanges crunching,  
the type of thing you never meant to do  
in retrospect.

God appears only to disapprove. Not that I was welcome when the door opened all those years ago. I'm stuck out here trying to open up the family glass house store again. I'm trying to teach my friends' children what it means to have six toes & to have wanted wings when you were six years old.

God, inside, leads with a point about flowers, saying that's not even the worst part. I had my chance since god sounds just like my mother. I'm not in a ghost story but I guess I could be. The only thing a morning is for is to stop waking up in the middle of the night and walking out the door and screaming to wake up your neighbors. It's like having a broken ankle every time you get the urge to run home. I leave my friend's children at the door to tell god I disapprove back.



My mother said, when the time comes I want you to eat me whole. So I stopped eating meat. So I forgot how to eat. She said, this is the part where they're going to break me open. She said, I loved you.

I have never loved a thing enough to let it eat me from inside out. It's like we got our idea of love from watching spider births, nodding, that seems good enough. It's like we heard about those strange undersea creatures that you don't see very often but sometimes come up on the beach and we thought yes, that's how it's done.

I never gave my heart for my mother, but I also never ate it whole. I think she still loves me because sometime she tells me that and in dreams we're eating a meal. I can't quite look under the table. There is a dog that is a fox that is a deer. Underneath the table I'm rooted in like my father all those elderberry bushes that I never ate from because I can't tell which fruit is poison.

What you need to know about Pennsylvania is they hang the deer from the tree the blood comes out first. And then you take out the vital organs I think. I never had a stomach for it you know. My mother never had a stomach for it you know. My father said I never had to land a gun because I wasn't a little boy.

But I know that the deer are gutted first. Like pharaohs their organs parceled off. The blush of blood underneath them embarrassed that the hook went behind their Achilles tendon like that, smooth on the first try.

Turns out you really do only get one chance and I spent mine at the bottom. I spent mine with the wishing well rising above..

Turns out I should've turned into something more concrete. I should have been small bird, fuck the eggs. All this time I spent trying to be flightless just failed.

And I sleep with my eyes shut the tea water still brimming with the mug that I inserted right to the left of my heart to hold onto the good stuff.

She expected me to say I was half horse or better yet a past life. Instead I decided to be the lampshade I turned into the streetlight.

I turned into the one that watches all the pretty ladies on the worst day of their lives. They don't know I'm there but maybe they're glad to not be alone.

Me, their unwanted locket, filling both sides of the gold heart.

Enter that messenger with two heads and a hand

but one conscience. Our mother said we could have had more or less but not this, both either. We are tragicomic in our stumbling around. My sister is the one who is evil, we'll both tell you, hair cascading. Or instead, the day you sold her out and the magic man comes, we're both evil. Enter a messenger with two heads and one hand.

The messenger brings one message in one hand, though not a letter. Smoke signals in small tea bags that you have to drink at midnight. The messenger comes with a warning, shuffles to the spare bedroom, eats your peaches you'd been saving for a good day the rot of them golden in your nostrils. He dies. There's a knock on the door that night after.

Enter that messenger with two heads and a hand.

The peregrine dreams descend with their claws.  
Under the coastline, all those skeletons sleeping so peacefully,  
like Pompeii lovers crowded the floor.  
You remember the days when the stars dripped  
dropping the future into our ear?  
The past lulls around behind us, and in our dreams,  
we tiptoe right past the edge of that old mill and slip  
upwards. Mine, they're all Pennsylvania skies.

Twenty minutes into self-loathing and chill, the armchair gains a second life. It pushes itself around the room like it's never seen the sun before. Lays itself in sunlight. Still smelling of cigarettes of course, Marlboro menthols, a taste like secondhand smoke still worth chasing five years later.

My doctor wasted the best years of her life trail running, she tells me. Her arms are sinewy and she must have ankles built from steel. At the top of her favorite trail, overlooking our hometown, she would stop and stare. Now, she says, she would waste it on picture taking. My doctor's emphasis is on waste as she peers carefully into the exact back of my throat, taking in my self consciousness and the infection I've been fighting off.

I'm wasting the best years of my life on fox hunting. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and hide in a forest midwinter, let it snow on top of me. Other times I'm chasing the red tail through the swamps, barefoot because I hate the inside of my shoes wet. I carry these three things: keys, id, page ripped from the Bible. When the Bible runs out of pages, I run out of time. That's the deal, I whisper to the foxes. I don't bring dogs or guns, just name them and try to see where they burrow. Sometimes they are Jeffrey. Sometimes they are lifeplan. They are always, in some way, out of my reach, breath blossoming like they're about to speak, and tell me what I should already have known years ago.

The truth is I swore to be the type of man you dreamed of. Bionic even, with a head that broke open at the seams. Under the moon, two moths fluttered into the trees where a man was hung, where an elephant was hung, where above the moon twirled on a string.

You know the truth, cut bitterly with old cloves, cinnamon so strong that you threw them up, stick-whole. You pretend to be impressed by my ability to walk straight toward oblivion. I don't fear god, you said, meaning me. I haven't met him quite yet. His sons I have these chosen words for, I carved them out of some strange stone my moonwalker father gave me after he built me that robot who was my only friend.

You know the one, her picture perfect eyelashes, that name I christened her rolling off my tongue. I made her sleep close to me with her whirring chest, hovering over the bed, even for the occasional lights. I woke up less when the world was muted like that. My mother said not to be angry, no one else has died since in quite the same way. I was too busy angry at these scrawny arms for that, too busy falling asleep with your head on my chest even as you startled awake with someone else's name trembling off your lips.

Underneath the skin of the moment,

there's a small war going on. The knowledge:  
that you have been here before, that others  
are suffering, the small pangs and webs of the  
world giving you music that makes you bop even  
as you wonder at the ability of blood to be caught  
in the brain after the body is dead, a 1980 Toyota  
acting as a galvanizing factor for a four-year old's  
head.

On top, there's a sense that the world  
is just another factory built out of ants  
and the dirty things your grandmother  
pretends she doesn't know you know.  
It's hard to get excited when it's another  
Bullshit day and you can look ahead and,  
without a doubt, tomorrow you'll  
be bored and hungry and waiting for  
something to happen. Instead you're  
scrolling through someone else's  
pictures to watch as they live that dream.

But underneath that vague and cool boredom  
there's the full-blooded reminders that you  
don't earn another day waking up the love of  
your life. Sure, you knew everything would  
work out, or that other option, which doesn't  
seem so bad until there's a dog walking by like  
it hit the jackpot, wiggling out of its skin, unable  
to believe it gets to be cooed at by someone like  
you. Underneath, there are orgasms that ripple  
through bones and the reminder that the moon  
wasn't hung for you but long walks home it leans  
down and pretends, like it had for Cleopatra even,  
that it's yours. Full lunged breath: yours. Skinned  
knee, small swimsuits and new notebooks lined  
with that new book smell.  
These are your small miracles.



The days are built to be plucked like guitar strings. Built with strong spines and limbs like redwoods. Each day is flammable and burns all the way down to the root. Each day is just an old lightning rod that gets played over and over again. Each day unrelated but to the layman similar: they undulate through every possibility but really this is just one long moment stitched together and together with silk string and knots on each end. Each day is a man with his blindfold half assed, listening to the cocking and the cocking and the breaths just before.

So you meet god at a crossroads.

You're never wearing your best dress  
when the conversation's about to begin. You're  
old school. You're in your worn windbreaker  
the one you'd outgrown years ago. It's  
October. Everything is getting ready to die –  
all the leaves changing colors, and bedding down  
underneath the mud are the toads.  
You had been thinking of doing the  
same with drier ground. You don't believe  
in the afterlife, so you're spinning knowingly  
into the universe. Even the fresh baked bread  
on your tongue not enough. Even the crinkling  
of the windbreaker. Even the bench that god  
sat on, or maybe just a pigeon. Hard to tell  
at times like these. god's mouthbeak opens.  
And the words are



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