



2021

Papa: “The Awaited Guests Arrive” and Other Poems

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Recommended Citation

Bullard, Lisa (2021) "Papa: “The Awaited Guests Arrive” and Other Poems," *The North Meridian Review*. Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 28.

DOI: 10.7825/2769-5115.1064

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/thenorthmeridianreview/vol2/iss1/28>

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Lisa Bullard has written ever since she could. She was raised in Montana where she was once bucked off a horse and didn't get back on. She now lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband and two children. Before having children, she travelled around the globe on a shoestring, and since children she has found a new appreciation for packing snacks and a change of clothes for all excursions. Besides writing, she enjoys snowboarding, hiking, canoeing, and binge-watching shows while folding tiny items of clothing. She has taught writing courses at colleges and universities in Washington, Montana, and New York.

Papa: "The Awaited Guests Arrive" and Other Poems

Time

I used to think of time as flowing forward
relentlessly marching forward
never to be snatched back
or bargained back
even with good deeds or repentance

but in my own mind time travels backwards
again and again
to times I crave forgetting
to people who hurt me
even to times I feel deep in my DNA
but cannot place on my tongue

at night especially I fall backwards
tumbling through time
in the wrong direction
back through history that is my own and is not
behind closed eyes and closed doors
bending the laws
of time that were laid out
that say time moves in one predetermined direction: forward

You've Got to Have a Plan

for when your burned-out flame finds you
because he thinks the stars you wished on
together
the dreams you whispered
to one another
meant that you were meant for each other
forever

he thought the poems he wrote
would be the only poems
you would get
from a lover

you loved him

you've got to know what to do
if he shows up
and thinks you owe him

you once nurtured him
the same way you nurtured
a new kitten who lost his mother

you've got to know
how far you would go
you've got to got to got to
have a plan
have a plan
have a plan

A Flashback

time clutches me
with a sudden grip

one second I wait for sleep
and the very next: ***NO!!!***
but I can't stop the assault
on my mind as he looms over me again
and I am powerless again

raped
again
terrified paralyzed
I leave my body again
and return again

seconds pass trapped in the memory
but the anger stays raging
and the shame
I want so bad to shake

and I lay awake
feeling betrayed
by time and my mind

You, Papa

Standing by the bank of the Birch Creek
I stoop down and
dip my hand into its icy current
and the water moves past me
I can't hold onto it
I think of you, Papa,
I struggle to grasp you
but again you slip away
and I knew you more in my mind
than not, you always left
away to Texas, away to Nevada,
away to Alaska
you look different from every angle
and when you arrive
you slip through my fingers again
and the slap of my expectations
sting
and I try
to please you, to be your girl
and oh how you are proud of me
but you forget birthday after birthday
you miss most of my plays
you aren't there to screen my dates
but you took me fishing
and we laughed together
and you baited my hook and gutted my fish
and fried it on the fire for our dinner
and I cling to that memory
rolling it in my hand like a smooth stone
but then you leave again and again
you're always leaving
then you drink too much again
you come late to my wedding
and you leave early
and we don't dance a father/daughter dance
but you give me a plaque you made
when you were a little boy
a homely looking plaque featuring a hand-painted hunting dog
and I hang it, cherished, on my wall

I. Papa: “The Awaited Guests Arrive”

doop-doop-dee-doo

A little tune for you, dearest dear dear dear
dear daughter . . .

oh, okay, so I'm a little just a little drunk . . .
hee-hee-hee

but just hang on, sit tight
and CHECK THIS OUT!

Wooo-eeee! Jeff gave me this harmonica
tonight! See! We drank a little whiskey
to celebrate YOU coming for a VISIT!

Oh you know I miss you kids!

doop-doop-dee-doo. Ha ha ha.

And here's a little tune to you
my son-in-law, son-in-law

doop-doop-dee-doo

Can you tell I just played harmonica
For the first time in my life TONIGHT!

Wooo-eeee! Am I glad you're here.

I LOVE you two! You know that
don't you? Woweee! I love you!

doop-doop-dee-doo. Ha ha ha.

II. Daughter: “Cotton Candy Land: It’s Where We’ve Always Lived”

the words are
stones in my belly
stuck in my throat
sand in a pipe
and damned if I’m going to let them out now

*I feel like I’m three years old again and I don’t want to be!
This brings back too many memories. I can’t laugh because it’s not funny to me.
I love you, Papa, but I can’t be around you when you’re drunk. I’m leaving.*

we don’t do that in our family
we carefully look away
we forget what we saw
when we remember, we pretend
that we don’t

it’s all cotton candy for us
everything is okay for us
sweet soft and fun for us

if we can just stuff enough
cotton candy in a volcano
maybe it will turn into a candy land
if we can just get it right

and damned if we won’t try

and damned if we won’t go crazy trying

I tell myself to lighten up
it’s *just* a fun time dammit
I can laugh myself back to cotton candy land

“Ha Ha Ha! That’s so funny, Papa! Ha Ha Ha! Wow!
What a *frickin’* musical genius! Ha Ha Ha!”