

FROM THE AUTHOR OF
A VIOLENT HOPE

Songs About God

Ericka Clay

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SONGS ABOUT GOD

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“Among my people are the wicked
who lie in wait like men who snare birds
and like those who set traps to catch people.

Like cages full of birds,
their houses are full of deceit;
they have become rich and powerful
and have grown fat and sleek.
Their evil deeds have no limit;
they do not seek justice.
They do not promote the case of the fatherless;
they do not defend the just cause of the poor.
Should I not punish them for this?”

declares the Lord.

“Should I not avenge myself
on such a nation as this?”

“A horrible and shocking thing
has happened in the land:

The prophets prophesy lies,
the priests rule by their own authority,
and my people love it this way.
But what will you do in the end?”

Jeremiah 5:26-31

SONGS ABOUT GOD

Some of it is right I guess.

Married with the kid
and the dogs that vomit
on the carpet
and the AC that went out that
one

time and unspoken
letters to the ex-
life I once lived.

Is this how it's
captured for everyone?

Is everyone in love
with the suffocating
energy around them
or do they keep

a small sliver
of their brains
to write the songs,
to spit out their
small truths to God
and then to thank Him,

Like David,
for kindling
the fiery breath
that keeps the
ends of me burning?

AN EYE FOR ALL THE EYES

How much

They don't love

You.

And how can I scoff

When my right

Eye smirks

And my left hand

Has hardly suffered

To pluck

It

Out?

THE WOMAN STARED AT THE FRUIT

When Eve
Hid
Her face
And
The world
Ate its
Flesh,
I wonder
What she
Thought
When she
Sunk
Her teeth
And became
The thing
Not worth
Becoming.

SNEAKIER THAN ANY OF THE OTHER WILD ANIMALS

I've written

everything
for God
and nothing
for the braided
spine
linking
my past
with this moment.

No. Lies.

Because everything
snakes
from the beginning
to end and
Even when you
cut off the head,
the body still thrives
if only for
a
heartbeat.

THE UNKNOWN END

My life

Is crossed lines

To the unknown

End

And each time

I finger a string

I'm left

Palm deep

In gutted wires

Because ends

Are only

Real

When

He

Authors

Them.

THE DEATH OF MIRIAM

So little

And a tiny

Knot

Was the life

Of

Miriam.

Skin eaten,

Bleached white

When old

Ways blinded

Her eyes,

And I often

Wonder

If Zipporah

Was like

Watching

The want of

Everything

You've ever

Wanted

Being handed

To someone

Else.

OF SACRIFICIAL LOVE

I know

You

Of the

Old

Testament,

Of the

Old ways

Of gun

Against

Forehead

Abraham

Moving in

On

Isaac,

Of sacrificial

Love

No matter

The oxy

To that

Moronic

Logic.

But what

If there were

A point made

That you

Can't put

Faith in human

Flesh,

That losing

Your only son

Is a hurt that's
Deeply defined,
That giving
Blood
Offerings
For sins
Yet forgiven
Is working
With language already
Conceived.
That maybe You
Were giving inches
We could turn into miles
If we'd take a minute
To stop choking
On the
Dust.

YOU'VE COME UNDONE

There's a bar top
where my feet danced
and vats of vodka
that my throat drank
and tons of men
my hips danced
against
and the cool devilish
calling of a fallen
world in the
crooks of my elbows
and swing of my hips
and never a day
goes by that I
don't think about
the vodka,
the dancing,
the sweet smell
of smoke entering
a soul,
but that's only
because I'm human.
That's only because my
eyes see only
what's in front of me
and not the quiet
God-like pull
numbing the canvas,
wiping it clean.

BURN YOU AT YOUR EDGES

Clean hearts

Surround you,
So surely you'll
Be burnt edges,
Fried toast,
Overdone meatloaf,
A camp-fired marshmallow.
And if my heart hopes for that
Then my thumb will surely
Strike the lighter,
And up, up, up,
I'll go.

SEVEN FOR BALAAM

God puts bits

In my

Mouth

And

I offer

Them to you,

You in the dark,

You with the red wrists,

You with the bruised

Throat,

You with the bad man,

You with the good heart

And reckless ways,

You with the lust

And wandering

Hand,

You with the other

Version of yourself

You've kept

Tight lipped

In the basement

Of your heart.

WHEN THE SPEAR STRIKES

I took my heart out
Unwrapped,
Let you eat from it,
Watched you burn on it,
And everything is okay
When you turn your face
From me,
But how long can you go
Without knowing
The sun?
How long can you go
Without knowing
Yourself?
How long can you go
Without knowing
My pain?

THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD

No sons.

Was it like having
a son
and then watching him die?

No.

Not that.

But maybe it was like
waiting for your future
with nothing around
you but the pure
syrup of simple voices
and small hands to work
out your expectations,
leaving you
blank slated
as God begins
to write.

ON A THRONE MADE OF GLASS

I saw You as a hand holding

mine

and the breath that

drew my daughter

into existence

and the voice that

told me not to drive

off the bridge

and a hardened

king throned against

us

But,

But.

Maybe more

like spirit and song

and feet beautifully

carved and hands holding

the world, or no hands at all.

Maybe the inside of an emerald

hovering on its throne made of glass

and insight to all things as we dwell

in a world,

tiniest

of neurons

trying

to make sense

of it all.

HEARTS CARVED FROM ROCK

There is
always
a
tiny version
of love
we give to
those we don't
love.
A guilt-driven band-aid,
for all the times
your moments
together don't
add
up.
And I don't
want to do that to you
or to anyone
but sometimes I think
my heart is carved
too deep from the rock.
And I don't think I can love
You
until I remember
You're the one
who carved
it.

LIKE THE BEASTS THAT PERISH

You grow fat and rich
and boast
with no understanding
and never again
will light
lick at
your
veins.
I could have spent
oodles
and
oodles
of time
flicking bits
of this truth
into a coveted pile,
moving towards
it in the evening
to console
my
sad
heart.
But now
all I see
is your doomed wreckage,
a house with no legs,
a mouth with no substance,
a heart for no God,
And all I can muster are
prayers about you

and the hoard you have
gathered that will one day
be taken
from two
unwilling
hands.

WHATEVER CANNOT STAND THE FIRE

There are things
that don't make
sense,
you know,
and you have to know
because my brain encompasses
a brief space within
my skull.

I think of the Midian
women and
their children
and their wickedness
but their wickedness
was like their scent—
it was the only thing
they knew.

And then came the sword,
the death plunge,
the final straw,
and what do you possibly
think about
when the secondhand stops
and the face of God
is sorry more than
you could
ever
possibly
be?

THE WILDERNESS OF SIN

I think

about the
stench sometimes
and the groaning
and if any of the children
lost themselves
to the idea of walking forever
and the restless hands of
an untamed heart.

I blame everyone
human,
even my own face
looking in the mirror,
and I always blame You
most of all.

What am I doing here?
Am I doing this right?
Why are they looking at me?
What is that smell
and how can it roam
free through history
and yellow papered pages
into my lungs and deeper
down still?

This momentary march towards
death.

This everything
I can't
define.

BARBS IN YOUR EYES

There's been a whole
feast of people,
barbs,
flint,
sticks,
poking and jabbing,
and making me feel
more human
than the heart
that tirelessly
works my blood.
I never sought
to cast them out
until
You broke my spirit,
and in return,
sacrificial lambs,
all the people
who were something,
sometimes,
long ago,
when Your name
was just another
card upon which
I built
my house.

LIKE A GREEN OLIVE TREE

I don't know a lot
about other women,
but are they twinned
in the mirror,
eyes combing through
every year this or that
just didn't work out
but thoughtfully left
its initials under an eye?
The other day, I caught
my photo from years ago
and thought about You,
what it's like to take in
such a magnificent creature
although, I admit, I have
no wings or a lion's head
that might turn some heads.
But what about now, day
in, another day out,
my face still stuck to a piece
of glass, my face simultaneously
falling through cracked earth,
and a man still loving me,
calling me beautiful,
even though the voice
in my head rolls its eyes?
Can You love a little
lump of clay, crumbling
from time's breath,
from the stubborn this's

and that's that all had
other plans?
Can You love a "me"
that no longer knows
where to look.

AS NUMEROUS AS THE STARS

We were to fold and unfold
seven times a million times
and looking around,
we listened well.

It went deeper than Israel
and now judges are fat-faced on TV screens,
spitting into microphones,
texting and calling and emailing
and tweeting, all noise emanating
from restless fingers.

I imagine this isn't what You
had imagined,
but I suppose you roll around
inevitabilities in your hand like
a multi-faceted crystal, feeling
for the potential absurdities
and knowing exactly how to shift
it in your hand for its light
to reflect face up.

THE WILDERNESS YEARS

We were drunk,
in love
and fermented,
cheaply boozed
and happily
unaware
of each kiss
and each sip
salivating,
breaking down,
ruining what
we thought
would never
be ruined,
simply
because
we built
it.

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD

I can look down like David
and see a scattering of fools
with bleak mouths
and bleaker hearts
and ears for no use
other than listening
to each others'
worthless drivel
and the worst
of all are the ones
who say God's
name as if they've
known it,
played it with
fingers across
their breastbones
and hold the whole
syllable against
the roofs
of their
mouths.

IDOLATRY FORBIDDEN

If it were that simple,
I would kiss my kid
to bed
and sleep my eyes
to dream
and hear my heart
to beat
and no more
claws into
the coulda
woulda
shouldas
so my hands,
freed
but tethered
birds
soaring
through
the present,
the past deeply
flooded
and gone.

IN THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

Forty years for everything,
the mortgage,
the two dogs
that vomit on the
carpet,
the look in your
eyes
that will be lost
with time
and our girl's
voice,
once little
now so big,
bigger than me
and you
and the moment
we first met
when all the other things
swept up around our ankles
and God discarded
them
among
the
stars.

LEST THE WILD BEASTS GROW

And they already have,

thicker
around the
middle,

no amount
of carb-free

anything
dwindling

the space
above

the hips.

Numbers?

Sure.

But then

keep looking
at the middle,

the soft,

thick,

fatness

that cakes

the organs

and squeezes

them tight

like a father's

arms hugging,

a father

they've never

known.

NEW TABLETS OF STONE

Here are the rules
of your whole
life, and I will
waste my time
wording them
for you so that
you can lose
the pen
and craft
an exit
even
though
you will
never
find
the
door.

TAKE CARE LEST YOUR HEART BE DECEIVED

Fickle is everything

Else

And not

At all your

Own world,

Hair high up

On a spoiled

Head.

It's like

Looking at

Myself

And regretting

What I could

Have been.

EVERY PLACE ON WHICH THE SOLE OF YOUR FOOT TREADS

You will be like

Musk and shoot
rockets through
the moonbeams
and the whole
universe will
be your head
and heart
but if only
you could see
you from Mars,
a tiny distant
nothing thing
longing to be a
something thing
and how all
other gods would
laugh at you,
strike you dead,
except for the One
who gave
you
life.

JUST AS THE GAZELLE IS EATEN

He puts my
tears into
His bottles
and I
promise
not to
eat
the life
inside
dead
meat.
Contracts,
binding words,
strange ways
but no stranger
than the time
I gave my life
to man
and his fingers
snapped
me
shut.

THAT DREAMER OF DREAMS

How odd,
fifteen-some
years down
this road
when my breasts
yawn
and back
aches
and You with
Your forever
eye,
the whole time
knowing I'll
rest my head,
defeated,
but Your hand
bumps along
the braille
to the moment
I rise
and keep
walking
toward
the dreams
I selfishly
nurse.

ABOMINABLE PRACTICES

Tell me my
fortune,
and I'll
laugh
no matter
how tight
the turban
and sleepy
your smile.
My future
is a dotted
path
and worn-
down
feet.
My future
is God's
breath
and the
unknowing
known
of flint
and rock,
sparking
light
for others
if not
myself.

HAND FOR HAND, FOOT FOR FOOT

I feel lonely,
as lonely
as that time
nobody
was there to listen.

SICK PEOPLE DO

The world outside,
it's fire,
no ice,
melts my skin
and comes for her
and swipes at me,
but I'm beneath
the table,
Bible like knife,
and I keep the prayer
behind my tongue,
in my brain,
thoughts of everything
old,
cleaned away,
and the only
new is hunting
the hunters.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

Who is yours,
and nobody asks
because they're
too busy liking
the lie
that life
curls like
a comforter
and keeps
you warm
for the good
girl
you
are.

ATONEMENT FOR UNSOLVED MURDERS

Who were you
before this
and is this
only
everything after
you murder the good thought,
the planted seed,
the host divine
and raise up
the belly driven
urges
because
because
they love
you?

A REBELLIOUS SON

It's all

Okay
When we
Get to Jesus,
Like the suffering
From a million
Pages before
Is ironed out
And gently
Spread against
Our bed.
And as we thumb
Through the earrings
And the bracelets
And maybe find a
Lipstick that matches
The shade,
We unconsciously
Braid the lesson
Like loose hair,
Knowing God
Only to not know
Him
Because we
Convince ourselves
It's just easier this
Way.

A MAN HANGED ON A TREE IS CURSED

Wicked for
wicked
ashes for
ashes
dust for
dust
Cursed
for cursed,
no,
blessed
because you can
only undo
the bad
with the good,
the temporal
with the God-lined,
the inferior
with the awestruck
fear
of all you've
never
wanted
to know.

RISEN

Her favorite
is Mark
and sometimes
she lies down
face flat against
pillow
Eyes shut
to all
the soft
talking,
heart abandoned
to everything reasonable
and thinks about the greatest
story,
a cut short ending,
a question
asked:
“Believe?”
And she does
because she’s
never felt
more hope
than when
she’s walking
away
from the
crowd.

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