

Praise for *Daughters*

“Brittney Corrigan is a sorceress of voices. Never have I read persona poems as deeply true and wholly convincing as the ones gathered in this stunning collection. In poem after poem, Corrigan shape-shifts—now the daughter of a magician’s assistant, a surgeon, a seismologist, the Medusa, the Yeti, and more—mining history, myth, fairy tales, and the professions to explore the conceit of daughterhood. By the time I got to the end of this gorgeous book, with all its richly imagined lives, I felt in the presence of a great daughterly chorus, one that tells us ‘the story of [our] own longing.’ Revelatory, authentic, and moving, *Daughters* tears off the masks, taking us to the heart of what it means to be female, human, and alive.”

—ALISON TOWNSEND, author of *Persephone in America*

“Before we are women, we are daughters, clothed in the superstitions of others and shaped by beliefs, talents, interests, and traumas that are not our own. Brittney Corrigan knows this. She knows how much the present depends upon the past and knows, too, that the truest work of growing up for a girl lies in sloughing off that which does not belong to you in pursuit of that which does. The poems in this stunning collection delve deeply into the highly empathetic gesture of persona, embodying the daughters of characters from history, the headlines, and mythology to trace how we are formed and how we, in turn, shed and gather into our own unique selves. With luminous language, arresting imagery, surprising form, and a marrow-deep knowledge of love and loss, the poet shines in this excavation of context and identity, this praise song for the stretching of limbs toward the light—and for the irrepressible essence of girls becoming. A beautiful, unforgettable work of artful love.”

—STACEY LYNN BROWN, author of *The Shallows* and editor of *A Face to Meet the Faces: An Anthology of Contemporary Persona Poetry*

“Beyond the cleverness of these vividly specific, playfully imagined persona poems—which draw from the language of professions like taxidermy to time travel to the Minotaur—are Corrigan’s deft insights into human emotions, and the array of ways we understand ourselves and who we come from. ‘We sing / for the same reason cranes sing, / or the deepening whales, / or a whole fierce chorus of wolves,’ Siren’s Daughter says, correcting male hubris, in one of my favorites. Corrigan creates an original and brilliantly fierce chorus.”

—ALEXANDRA TEAGUE, author of *The Wise and Foolish Builders*

OTHER TITLES FROM AIRLIE PRESS

- THE EDDY FENCE *Donna Henderson*
LAST APPLES OF LATE EMPIRES *Jessica Lamb*
GARDEN OF BEASTS *Anita Sullivan*
OUT OF REFUSAL *Carter McKenzie*
ENTERING *Cecelia Hagen*
THE NEXT THING ALWAYS BELONGS *Chris Anderson*
CONGRESS OF STRANGE PEOPLE *Stephanie Lenox*
IRON STRING *Annie Lighthart*
STILL LIFE WITH JUDAS & LIGHTNING *Dawn Diez Willis*
SKEIN OF LIGHT *Karen McPherson*
PICTURE X *Tim Shaner*
PARTLY FALLEN *Deborah Akers*
SETTING THE FIRES *Darlene Pagán*
THE CATALOG OF BROKEN THINGS *A. Molotkov*
WISH MEAL *Tim Whitsel*
BORN *Jon Boisvert*
RIDDLE FISH HOOK THORN KEY *Kelly Terwilliger*
STONELIGHT *Sarah McCart-Jackson*
ORDINARY GRAVITY *Gary Lark*
AN EMPTY POT'S DARKNESS *José Angel Araguz*
SAVAGERY *J.C. Mehta*
WONDER TISSUE *Hannah Larrabee*
LEARNING TO LOVE A WESTERN SKY *Amelia Díaz Ettinger*
AGAIN *Jennifer Perrine*
THE ANIMAL AT YOUR SIDE *Megan Alpert*
JESUS COMES TO ME AS JUDY GARLAND *David J. S. Pickering*

DAUGHTERS

DAUGH

TERS

Brittney Corrigan

Airlie Press is supported by book sales, by contributions to the press from its supporters, and by the work donated by all the poet-editors of the press.



P.O. Box 68441
Portland OR 97268
www.airliepress.org
email: airliepress@gmail.com

© 2021 Brittney Corrigan

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in whole or in part without the written permission of the publisher except in the context of reviews or critical writing.

First Edition

ISBN 978-1-950404-06-3

Library of Congress record available at
<https://lcn.loc.gov/2020951058>

Printed in the United States of America

Cover and book design by N. Putens

Author photo by Nina Johnson Photography

Cover artwork © Andrea Kowch, *Marsh Hare*, 2010

for my sister, Tess

CONTENTS

Bigfoot's Daughter	2	Surgeon's Daughter	28
Scarecrow's Daughter	4	Clockmaker's Daughter	30
Alien Abductee's Daughter	6	Mortician's Daughter	32
Ghost Hunters' Daughter	8	Astronaut's Daughter	34
Bogeyman's Daughter	10	Time Traveler's Daughter	36
Magician's Assistant's Daughter	12	Dorothy's Daughter	38
Lion Tamer's Daughter	14	Horse Whisperer's Daughter	40
Siren's Daughter	16	Beekeeper's Daughter	42
Amelia's Daughter	18	Medusa's Daughter	44
Cartographer's Daughter	20	Snake Charmer's Daughter	46
Minotaur's Daughter	22	Swan Maiden's Daughter	48
Falconer's Daughter	24	Alligator Wrestler's Daughter	50
Lepidopterist's Daughter	26	Gretel's Daughter	52

Unknown Daughter	54	Big Bad Wolf's Daughter	80
Fortune Teller's Daughter	56	Goldilocks's Daughter	82
Tattoo Artist's Daughter	58	Dulcinea's Daughter	84
Werewolf's Daughter	60	Matador's Daughter	86
Vampire's Daughter	62	Pied Piper's Daughter	88
The Hatter's Daughter	64	Pandora's Daughter	90
Surrealist's Daughter	66	Death Row Inmate's Daughter	92
Taxidermist's Daughter	68	Active Shooter's Daughter	94
English Teacher's Daughter	70	Cellist's Daughter	96
Not {Daughter}	72	Sandman's Daughter	98
Storm Chaser's Daughter	74	Yeti's Daughter	100
Fire Lookout's Daughter	76	Acknowledgments	103
Seismologist's Daughter	78		

DAUGHTERS

BIGFOOT'S DAUGHTER

You want to believe in the bulk
and brown of him reeling through
the thicket, that flash you thought
you saw, the eyes that spun. You want
terror to walk beside you, you want
the wild rush of escape, you want the story.

You want to be alone with your fear,
all of it true, your heart loud like
a woodpecker striking the trees
that seem no longer peaceful, but
sentient and poised to uproot. That cry
in the woods that swallows all other sound.

But listen. What I want you to hear
is birdsong, the lifting that comes from
such beauty, the way the trills and warbles
sift through the stalling rain, alight
on the ghosts of our breath, congregate
and hover as the forest hums.

My father, he is fine-furred and tawny,
eyes green as fiddlehead ferns. Tangled
and swift with his stories, his laughter
sweeps through the undergrowth, bends
you aside. I place my small footprints
in his footprints, leave you stunned.

If you watch the edges of his heart gentle
forth through his body, soft and blurred
and glowing, will you change your mind about
the monster? Witness the glisten and tremble,
the moon gazing down on the pause of the lake.
Like that, the dark not so complete.

My father, I ride on his shoulders,
bring the sky down with my singing, fill
your chest with a joy you can't explain. We can
make you believe what you saw in the woods
is something fierce and secret. The story
of your own longing, but not yours to claim.

SCARECROW'S DAUGHTER

What I need him to understand
is that I love the crows, the sheen
of them, the crowd of their voices,
the way their wings make that sound
like a field mouse running for its life
through dry grass. The blur of the fox.

At night on our twin posts, he feathers
his straw hand on my straw cheek,
plumps his shirt a little, stares down
between the rows of corn. Stars ignite
in the autumn darkness. I lean
in the wind toward the hem of the crop.

I could rustle in my red-flowered
dress to the edge of the cornfield,
reach up my husks to the branches
bent down to meet me, pull myself
up. There, I could see beyond
the farmhouse, the span of the road.

I've had enough of scaring things
away. Startling hungry eyes
from every stalk, when what I want to do
is tear back the green so the sun smacks
full on the yellow meat of the cobs. Offer
up ears for the feasting. Whisper, *stay*.

I want everything to land on me, dig
into my straw-stuffed shoulders,
and carry me up into the blue. They
would look beautiful, the crows, kernels
balanced in their beaks, whirling
close to my father, then peeling away.

The sunrise is lovely. October
is lovely. I can hear the harvesters
waking at the edges of dawn. I could
climb down, husks crackling
as I landed. Weigh the unbearable
options. Settle on which way to run.

ALIEN ABDUCTEE'S DAUGHTER

My mother isn't a sci-fi-movie-
1960s-housewife-drying-her-hands-
on-her-apron-as-she-half-sleepwalks-
into-the-yard-where-there-is-a-bright-
beam-waiting-to-levitate-her-through-
the-whipping-wind kind of gal.

She makes grilled cheese sandwiches
sensibly, with butter on both sides,
and pickles, and tomato soup. She
reads novels of literary merit, maybe
a little magical realism thrown in,
but not enough to make her moony.

She believes in ghosts, it's true, the same
way she believes in mathematics.
The beauty of theories and formulations,
the attempt to enumerate all things:
black holes, gravity, planetary orbits
and tides, weather, dark matter, energy.

What I'm saying is, I believe her.
If she lost time, it likely was because
of the UFO. I mean, she's not
an invents-bedtime-stories kind of mom.
There's nothing impossible about it.
It all comes down to simple math.

Listen, my father's not really my father.
That's what I'm trying to tell you. When
he's gone, we know exactly where
he goes. You can smell it on his clothes,
sour and sloppy. My mother was returned
only slightly disheveled, and carrying me.

See? My skin has a shimmery gray undertone.
Just look at my whopping green eyes. We don't
need my father anymore. They're coming back
for us, I can feel it. That's why my mother stands
in the yard every night, crying, holding my hand.
We're certain. We know the lights will come.

GHOST HUNTERS' DAUGHTER

Don't ask me if it's true, if they exist.
I'm not sure how to tell you what it's like
in the shadows of each house,
the other hum beneath the appliance hum,
the way the walls lean in at me,
the vibration everywhere I put my feet.

Mostly I like to stand still, listen
to the clicks and knocks as my father
adjusts the knobs, holds the padded
headphones tightly to his ears. I watch
my mother sway with her eyes fluttered
shut, her fingers gathering the air.

My father sees in green, sifts through
the static, rounds corners with his lens,
his metered tools. He walks right into cellars,
basements, attics, untouched rooms, his eyes
on the pull of the needle, the digital rise
and fall. Right past as I inhabit doorways,

press through the paneling and lathe.
Sometimes I blow a kiss to my mother, send
it out as a cool, spectral puff across the hallway
to her ashen cheek. Or reach my lucent fingers
up to pull at the hem of her blouse, encircle her legs
with my body as she balances in the dark.

They are always looking for the others:
the ones who throw spoons or creak
floorboards, nudge faucets or upend chairs.
The ones who lift children from knotted
bedclothes, whisper in sonar-ping echoes,
frighten by putting on their fiendish skins.

My parents bottle and banish, exorcise and incant.
Smudge and cleanse and burn and cast away.
I hide in far corners, latch onto the screens
of windows, so they won't send me over, too.
I want to stay where the electric air surrounds us.
Where the light doesn't flicker and call.

BOGEYMAN'S DAUGHTER

After the night of frightening is over,
when my father has fallen asleep
at the back of the closet—the shadows
of his limbs smudging out from beneath
the crumpled clothes—with the girl-child
at school and the house closed up and still—

I spider my gangly nails around the door frame,
tilt my head into the empty room. I roll
and curl up in the bedding, suck in
the smell of the youngling as the birds outside
the window teeter and veer. The climbing sun
is uncertain where to cast its light.

I crouch and hunker down beside the tea set,
lean in close to the bears and dogs on their
haunches of beans. How I spill my umbral
hands into each cup, lift them to the bestial
mouths, stitched neat and prim. The glassy
animal eyes eclipse and shine.

I ooze myself into the wooden box of toys, nest
with the dolls and their molded hands, their silky,
twisting curls. Lines of ceramic horses watch me
from shadowbox stalls, my eyes reflected in
their eyes, the crests of their fragile, carved manes.
I press my head to the doll cheeks, sink farther in.

I like to slip into the corner by the bookshelf,
crack back the spines and balance my breath
so the pages flutter and rise. How the alphabets
shiver and whirl. Bewitching, the pictures of flowers,
the drawings of trees. I rest my darkling face against
the paper, close my eyes and imagine a din of leaves.

Dear girl-thing, I do what I can to make sure you won't
waken. My lullabies are only a whisper in my father's
black wail. But someday he will leave us behind, darken
the window and abandon this tender room. Then, I will
lie down beside you in the moonglow. Nuzzle and kiss
your warm eyelids. Blow into your ear a sweet dream.