

PAUL HLAVA

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## INTERGALACTIC LOVE SONG

The child tore chunks from a half moon  
of yucca bread, familial salt-smell  
diffusing in vapor.

He crouched behind the wooden leg  
of the bed-frame tucking bread into his cheeks.  
10 o'clock news. Car wrecks. Voices  
banged drunk-like up the stairs. Between

the broken slats of the fence he crawled back  
to the cracked bank of the reservoir.  
Something struggled against the dull light  
of the city. He thought he could love

those stars. That they might whisper,  
Hush child, we burn too  
in this strange system,

this dark and sudden machine.  
Or they might flicker out  
as an audience of frogs began to chirp.

—

I spoke to the Galaxy  
but it did not answer.  
I got down on single knee  
and confessed my love  
but it wore a black veil  
of silence. I reached up

with both hands to hold it  
but my stance was one of surrender.  
It retreated. It pulled me away  
from me. My body too  
is mostly empty space.  
In the evenings, I go to the movies  
alone. I trade particles  
with the man beside me. I leave  
my electrons on the seat. Galaxy,  
you are the expanding carbon orbs  
of my sweet fountain soda.  
You are the warm coins  
I finger on the cab ride home.  
You carry me across  
the threshold of morning.

—

You are my change purse,  
my film, my spinning reel. I am hypnotized  
in the wash of your projected light.  
You are the beaded rosary in the hands  
of an old mother, you are the string  
of grapes whose tender skin I peel  
with my teeth. *Thy will be done*  
*on earth*, how your gravity ages me,  
how I fall into you again  
and again. I am a chipped tooth in your  
tiniest ticking gear. I am a rusty fastening,  
a frayed wire pressed between your silver nodes.  
I am melting, I am throwing sparks.  
The woman in the movie cries,  
a hand upon her forehead,  
black mascara asters growing beneath her eyes.  
At parties I worry people are secretly talking  
about me. I guard the cake table,  
frosting in my beard. I eye the

sprinkles with a colored greed.  
Even your tiniest of cells is beautiful.  
I put you in my mouth.  
You shine beneath my tongue.

—

We lay beside each other,  
the hem of my sleeve touching  
its slender spiral arm.

Dew beaded the folded  
flower petals. Night closed us  
in its pocket. The Galaxy sighed.

We are so small, it said. Soon  
we will disappear.

Wind lifted itself from the yellow grass  
and stole moisture from our hands.

I think it's not worth it  
to love anything this much, I said

but it wasn't listening.  
I am drifting slowly apart, it said.

The wind took hold of a stray hair  
from beneath my collar  
and stumbled forward through the grass.

—

Galaxy, I find your stellar parallax,  
the gold freckles of your spinning body  
dizzying. The distance between us

is not objective. My gaze is inscribed  
in you. Your gaze is inscribed in me.

—

It misses fresh blueberries,  
wet boughs smoking in a campfire.  
It misses the salty crust  
of yucca bread, how my mother  
brought home fresh honeycomb,  
the tongue's learned familiarity  
with those cold and waxy cells.  
It longs for the touch of  
beautiful women, to be more than  
the soft stray hairs  
woven into the fabric  
of this fitted sheet. Can it still remember  
when all matter was pressed  
into a single, hot point?

—

My orphan Galaxy, my star-painted body,  
where do you go to sleep?

*I am in the grove of cedar trees  
where the wind plays the frozen reeds.*

My frayed Galaxy, little frightened blowfish,  
will you remember me?

*I am going to another place.*

—

Sidereal time swings its hypnotic pendulum.  
Dark matter pulls all things toward its invisible bones.  
The velocity of large, stellar bodies pushes me around.  
Momentum pins me to the ground.  
Gravity has its way with me.  
Time has its way with me.  
I tripped running up the stairs.

—

A watch must be disassembled  
to be understood as a whole. The Galaxy  
shines from a distance, dark inside.

One radial arm mimics the spin of another.  
Its winks are reflected in the runoff  
of a shattered bottle in the street.

Mirrors are creepy  
because they frame miniscule things.  
I trim my beard in the morning. Space stretches

in front of me, behind me.  
Steam rises from the sink, my breath  
the glass. The Galaxy whispers,

Between another star system,  
another frigid moon,

between the floating motes of dust,  
I have chosen you.

—

At the onset of my journey  
there was a voice.

I collected twittering stars,  
I shook my paper sack  
of smooth stones and shells.  
Galaxy chirping with a tree-frog  
in its heart, with a tribal band  
of dust and ice.  
Galaxy my instinctual pillow,  
my perpetual feast, I gobble down  
the fear of being forgotten—  
I wake to swallow  
strips of cold, leftover steak  
in the dark, exerting  
such feeble mass. Galaxy  
with churchbells,  
with the eye of a purple phlox,  
which by being is both perfect  
and flawed. Galaxy with the  
head of a moose, Galaxy moaning  
with glaciers, the force  
which compels matter to gather  
is not enough, your grasp  
on astral bodies is slipping.  
You hide this truth  
in your collection of stones:  
the mode of all systems is  
diminution. Diminution, who whispers  
me each night to sleep. Lie down  
with me, Galaxy, my cold, severed doll.  
Someone is at the door.  
We must be quiet and still.