

From the Moon I Watched Her

Emily English Medley

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Emily English Medley's heartbreaking novel *From the Moon I Watched Her* is filled with secrets and lies both about family and God.

In 1977, though Daddy Black thunders from his Church of Christ pulpit about the evils of abortion, it's Mama Black who decides what to do when the couple's teenage daughter, Lily, gets pregnant. Her decision ripples through the lives of the family's women for generations as they struggle to conform to their rigid religious world.

The novel focuses most on Lily's daughter, Stephanie. She has boyfriends, uses drugs, and struggles; her mother, who was broken by her grief, is no help. Dark secrets pervade, including regarding what really happened to Lily's first child. But Stephanie's world is most defined by the family's faith, which only heightens her confusion around her burgeoning sexuality and difficult home life. Menace and fear are common in her home; Stephanie's daddy has his own special bathroom where he keeps a pile of *Playboy* magazines, with a gun placed on top. Lily cautions her daughter not to seek special attention from her father, but this, like each new burden Stephanie assumes, comes with its own emotional weight.

Medley presents complicated family relationships—mother-daughter ones, father-daughter ones, and those between spouses—well, exploring the motivations and histories behind each with revealing details. Across years, Stephanie learns to navigate these relationships herself, finally coming to understand their implications better.

The coming-of-age novel *From the Moon I Watched Her* suggests that family bonds are stronger than the secrets that threaten to pull them apart.

JEREMIAH ROOD (January / February 2021)

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