Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jen Karetnick: Three Poems

Jen Karetnick · Wednesday, April 7th, 2021

Congressional Complex

I could not sting like a bee or float like a butterfly
though I did learn to throw a punch from my trunk,
not my wrist, after our father taught my sister. A shadow
boxer, a flyweight, I followed her from the split-level house
to the Little League where she was the first girl to play, another
way for the other gender to spend a lengthening spring afternoon.
Formed from former gravel pits, the fields were shielded to the right
by hills of shale and river rocks rising over the stand of pin-boned pines
we generously called “the woods.” We were warned away from here; horses
wouldn’t be able to drag us out were we to fall under an avalanche of these stones.
But no one advised a boy not to toss them as flirtations, which is how one landed on
my lip; struck dumb, it spurted into a bucket, empty of baseballs, that I brought home.
Even after surgery, I swallowed his name like blood to wear the fist he made me for life.

(Previously published in *Prime Number Magazine)*

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My Husband Shoots Me

with Botox, 31 times
in my forehead, the shallow dish
of my temples, the nape of my neck
where as a younger man
he’d touch his tongue,
a fencer’s foil.

He does not hold
the syringe like a love letter
or wield it like an apology
although he says a quiet
“I’m sorry” every time

the needle pierces

the cartilage under skin
with an audible crunch;
fat, a loosely guarded prisoner,
has long since escaped my face,
muscles pulled tight
from migraine after migraine.

I follow his directions
to look up, down, wrinkle
my forehead like a chow
so that he can measure
where the nerves are,
avoid making my eyelids

droop more than they
already do. He assures me
the puncture marks will fade,
the medicine diffuse, block
the transfer of pain, lengthen
the staccato of light.

Three decades ago,
he practiced tapping my joints
as if they were ice
with a rubber hammer,
thumped my ribs, dug
under bone for my organs

and lymph nodes. Now I reap
expertise, fanned by
his trajectory as he wasps
around me, and I wait, still
within this vortex, to be stung,
and stung, and stung.

(Previously published in *jmww)*

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I’m Nothing Without Blood

The vessel that tied us together was filled with thrombi, tacked
to the sides, building in. Each cruel word was a weed slowing
the river, every argument a gnarled stick for the dam that grew

like an olive tree in the garden at Gethsemane. These are the kinds

of knots that bad sailors and stubborn Jews make: those that can never be
undone. What was stagnant began to fester. Only nit geredt could wiggle

through. It’s easy to guess what happened next. Excavation failed.
The walls broke free. One of us was buried, one of us dug out.
But the whole, sticky mess occluded both of our eukaryotic hearts.

(Winner of the 2015 Anna Davidson Rosenberg Prize,
sponsored by *Poetica Magazine* and published in its anthology)

Connections:

Jen Karetnick’s website:
https://jkaretnick.com/

Link to *The Burning Where Breath Used to Be*:
https://www.davidrobertbooks.com/karetnick.html

Jen Karetnick’s Amazon author page:
https://www.amazon.com/Jen-Karetnick/e/B00I4ZXIMU%3Fref=dbs_a_mng_rwt_scns_share

Link to *SWWIM:*
https://www.swwim.org/

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