

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jennifer Givhan: Three Poems

Jennifer Givhan · Wednesday, July 13th, 2016

Jennifer Givhan is a Mexican-American poet from the Southwestern desert. Her full-length poetry collection, *Landscape with Headless Mama*, won the 2015 Pleiades Editors' Prize (forthcoming 2016). Her honors include an NEA fellowship and a PEN/Rosenthal Emerging Voices fellowship, the Frost Place Latin@ Scholarship, The Pinch Poetry Prize, the DASH Poetry Prize, a Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop fellowship, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Best New Poets*, *AGNI*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Rattle* (where she is a poetry prize finalist), and *Southern Humanities Review* (where she was a finalist for the 2015 Auburn Witness Prize). She is Poetry Editor at *Tinderbox Poetry Journal* and she teaches at Western New Mexico University and online at The Poetry Barn.

Machine for Second Chances

Here we've tried blessing
 the trauma, the fire to our skin
 in which I've awoken crying *who held the matches*
 into the matches of my hands.
 What can I tell you? Love
 held an iron's cord to our necks, balanced
 us atop a chair, tied an end around a metal rod
 wedged in a doorway. Here
 there is bird noise. Here, a muted desert & a murder
 of crows.
 I've heard of a machine that makes
 meaning, like stardust. I've heard of second
 chances before siphoning back into primordial
 nothing: the stars in our bodies, fastening themselves
 to breathing machines & beating
 machines & spinning firing synapse machines
 the way everything is weightless on the inside
 of an unmoving body far
 from any other body
 like in space, like in nothingness.
 Hawking says even black holes

are not completely black—
 Here snakes in scrub oak
 rattling. Here petroglyphs, & climbing
 the lava rock mountain & the footholds steep
 & the footholds careless—here,
 where we step into our lives.

In the Shower with Sunday After Watching *Lost*

I panicked. Closed my eyes & I was
 the shipwrecked woman who'd struggled ashore
 to birth infant twins in the sand while
 a woman already of the island
 acted midwife long enough to pull
 the screaming boys from the narrow canal
 then murder their mother to steal them
 for her own. I believed you capable of turning
 smoke, turning monster. You might've needed
 something of me I was not willing to give.
 Shampoo stinging my eyes, you reached
 to wash my face clear, but I flinched, then
 slapped. It happens every time. You'd censor
 my imagination if you didn't believe in love.

Rosa Travels Back to the River, Becomes Her Mama

Full force she goes like star-tipped marigolds to the water
 like blood, cold coffee, 1944: memories looping
 holes in the one who sent her. He'd gone
 to study Science. In the eternal city she'd bear babies—
 she'd use her considerable brain, will them into existence
 —they'd rise like cabbages from her mama's garden
 at the edge of the ridge where horses trot circles
 & the Scientist taught her to stack her loves like elements,
 to line them up mathematically by atomic weight, blocks
 of light, blocks of wild brain chemicals, reacting.
 He was gone, the Scientist who loved her badly—a violent
 washing machine in her hips, tumbling. She suspects
 a need for the dark memories the way mice who've lost them
 in the cruel experiment return to the triangle electric though they once
 knew better. (It goes away, the love, overfed & birthing time
 travel. It led me to the girl in star marigolds, afloat in the water.)

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