Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lauren Camp: Three Poems

Lauren Camp · Wednesday, June 29th, 2016

Lauren Camp is the author of three collections, most recently *One Hundred Hungers* (Tupelo Press, 2016), which won the Dorset Prize. Her poems appear in *New England Review, Poetry International, Slice, The Seattle Review, World Literature Today, Beloit Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. Other literary honors include an Anna Davidson Rosenberg Award, residencies with the Gaea Foundation and the Mabel Dodge Luhan House, and a Black Earth Institute Fellowship. She produces and hosts "Audio Saucepan"—a global music program interwoven with contemporary poetry—on Santa Fe Public Radio. www.laurencamp.com.

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Incomplete Wish

In the midst of cold, I begin
at the back door and wander out
to learn dunes. To keep myself warm,
I recite prayers, linking susurrations together
as I walk down the center of each street
with everything I am wearing. I walk through
extensions and conclusion, then back again.
Catalpa trees script a sky pale as cheap tin.
I spill idle chatter onto a few people, explaining time
before it happens. From a glass jar on the tall
counter of a small store, I buy three sesame
cookies — pleasure in the handed over, change
taken back. Down the logic of roads toward
the dark eyes of ocean, waiting for distance.
Small ships slip away. I am content with such
retreating. I incant my breath as the sand
shifts to lyrics. In later versions, I am left
with a derivative of the ocean pouring out.
I am sitting on a bench, on bristle
and desire, turning blank pages.

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The Most Beautiful Waiting

Many things are better in retrospect
(the craving, the tempest) but it’s good being compressed
into the sweeter now
with your beautiful hair in half-marks
of gray, while outside, crows grope at the ground
in their dark garments.
We can see what is pure in what is
collapsing, relish the new noise
of our secondary selves. Already our bodies seem close
to grimace, we who awaken with wrinkles
and dots. You show me a hunger hemmed
but unfinished,
the same way you dance,
loose and unafraid of the earth.
The geometry of our lives has pushed in,
so we’re in bed before 10, but we’re still
wisdom and tabernacle, still morning smear.
Even if I sleep sloped too deep into night, you murmur
love, and my tattered flight back
carries the lick and purr of your voice.

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Cream Puff

What must have been her play-
act, the money
wadded up and slid across the span
of table, the aim of cash
and show of leaving
past the tortes and strudel, the meat-
filled empanadas, past all the beaten
egg whites; those sweetnesses baked and topped
with butter. (But this is not
about the court of sugar
and the spongy pastries so let’s get back
to leaving where we had entered
more than two
hours prior. Or to the table
where I leaned across, reading
backwards her manic
text to help her
winnow the quotidian
apocalypse of life—the dates
and losses). We talked of two pieces
of a mind and how circular
her thinking, how the exterior flaked

into the soft inside
you never want to show
and how, in writing, you shudder
and then show it. As the room
got louder, my chest and throat went pasty
from shouting
guidance. I may have aided her. Maybe
pulled her through enough
raw syllables
on writing. But the money–this was
the miracle. She gave me
a little hump, a palm
of bills I didn't open; I pushed it
in my purse, and followed her to the glass
door already smothered with the sun's
sharp cutting. And when I pulled away and spread
the money out, I realized why
it felt so slight, as if the center
wasn't deep enough. I didn't need
to know what didn't
matter. I was ashamed for her, for how
she rolled the good into what
was ruined, and how I would
always wipe my hands
and count the truth
of every other thought I'd keep on giving.

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