

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Karen Lillis: Two Poems

Karen Lillis · Wednesday, October 22nd, 2014

Karen Lillis is the author of four novels, including *Watch The Doors As They Close* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2012) and *i, scorpion: foul belly-crawler of the desert* (Words Like Kudzu Press, 2000). Her poems and stories have appeared in *Evergreen Review*, *Everyday Genius*, *Free State Review*, *Guide to Kulchur Quarterly*, *Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology*, *Sensitive Skin Magazine*, *Toad Suck Review*, and *Trip City*, among others. Her writing is included in two recent anthologies: *Wreckage of Reason II* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2014) and *From Somewhere To Nowhere: The End of the American Dream* (Autonomedia, TBD). She is a small press advocate who blogs at [Karen the Small Press Librarian](#) and runs [Small Press Pittsburgh](#) and [Small Press Roulette](#).

The following two poems are excerpted from Lillis' recent chapbook, *The Paul Simon Project* (Night Ballet Press, 2014).

Some Folks' Lives Roll Easy

He's known to play the Lotto twice weekly—
always the MegaMillions, he never fools around
with the scratch-offs. A thousand here, a thousand
there, *too little too late*, it would never be enough
to buy back her affection. He comes home and tells
her what he'd do with the jackpot, she sees his face
light up with that fiction, that pipe dream. Really
what he'd like is to dig himself out of the mistake
he made years ago now, once she lets him in on
the specifics. Wednesday night's drawing
is \$36 big ones, which should cover it,
no matter what.

She's got a soft touch and a sharp tongue.
It's true that she saves her actual opinions for
special occasions and she doesn't recognize this
wicked rage in her belly, where her love and
craving for him used to live. What if this is just
another phase of aging they don't tell you about,
or worse, a curse on women who refuse child-

bearing? The thought of it—some stranger who commands your whole attention from the inside out. But here she is, her unhappiness growing legs whenever she turns her back. She ignores the signs until it rears its head, tears through everything in its path, all damage aimed at him, her better half.

Another tongue-lashing, another all-out passion fight that started with the dishes, or I forget, some mention of an old resentment. They stumble into separate beds, spent. Next day, the way home from work, she falls into the open cathedral, saints painted, candles blazing, she needs the grace of an empty room. To a lapsed Catholic, a church in the off hours is a place to start, a space to imagine that forgiveness even exists—for you, me, anyone. She leans heavy on the wooden pew, gazes up at the marble carving of the wide-armed Jewish friend she hasn't talked to since late high school, maybe early college. He still reads her like a book: *Which are you trying harder to smother, your ill temper, or your secret pleasures?* She sprints home before he can finish his sentence.

In the kitchen, she's kneeling at her old man's feet, begging him to absolve what she won't accept. It's like she's asking for a miracle he can't begin to manufacture. Him, he's just staring at the table, dejected. Two tickets, two hopefuls, lay there between his hat and the radio. He hasn't got an answer but she won't take no. The tickets curl up at the edges, numbers fading like a cheap receipt. Bum luck: They're nothing but losers for the second time this week.

Have a Good Time

One day I was staring into your bright eyes
and the next, at a hazy horizon

The windshield of our U-Haul framed farms and farms
and mountains, then onion domes and coke plants

It took months before I'd say
"Pittsburgh" instead of "Philadelphia"

Brotherly love rolls off the tongue
in moments of desperate optimism

We left Queens in short sleeves
to pull into Steel City at snowfall

Felt like we drove through a portal
Made of Bronx cheers and cat screams

My best friend raised a glass to us:
May the smoke rise to choke you
and may the monkey always be at your back

Have a good time, baby
untangling that triangle

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