

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Laura Grace Weldon: “Heat”

Laura Grace Weldon · Wednesday, October 14th, 2020

“Heat” stuck out from my initial reading and each time I read it with all the poems, it just felt stronger, resonated more. Clean, clear writing where every word fit. The poem surprised me where it went as I read it, but afterwards it felt as if it went the only place it could have gone and the poet made me feel she/he was telling me something that was important to him/her.

— Tony Gloeggler

Heat

Summer’s steamy breath pushes me
out of the garden, onto the porch
where shade and ice water steady
my pulse. I haven’t handled heat well
since my teens. Tell myself to watch birds
but see past trees to a long-ago classroom
at CSU where Communications 101 students
are separated into groups of five, sent
into quiet rooms, told to tell each other
one secret each. At 17, mine are too shameful
to start, so I wait. First student to speak
is small in stature, clothes plain
as commercial carpet we sit on,
our knees crossed or curled, except for
the lone boy who doesn’t seem made to bend.

She tells of summers spent with Southern grandparents.
Last day of her 12-year-old visit they treat
her to lunch at a hotel restaurant,
nice place with cloth napkins. She describes
her grandfather’s good clothes, patient face.
Her gran’s knobby fingers touching the salt shaker.
No one takes their orders. No one looks their way.
The Northern child’s complaint shushed by her elders.
Finally, as they slowly stand to go, still smiling,

she ducks into the cloakroom
and with complimentary restaurant matches
sets to smoldering hair-oil soaked fedoras left
by old white men. She hears later
smoke closes the place the rest of the day.

We sit, silent, till the boy claims
she made it up. She says
think what you want.
None of our secrets flare fiercely as hers,
but we tell one each, all but that unbending boy
who can't believe girls are raped, girls run away,
girls know anger fierce enough to burn.
The porch is hot as the garden
so I go inside, rinse my arms and face,
do what I can to cool what's still on fire.

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