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In Old Sky by Lauren Camp

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Author: Lauren Camp

Grand Canyon, Arizona. Grand Canyon Conservancy. 2024.
59 pages.

It is no secret that the modern world has given us incredible advances in technology and a thousand ways to connect, yet many of us sit on the edge of existential drift, gazing into our various screens and devices. The clamor and constant hum of city-dwelling consumes us. The light only fully dissolves in natural disasters. There is panic in urban silence. With her collection *In Old Sky*, Lauren Camp takes us away from the metropolitan crutch that so many of us lean on, guiding us into the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona. With these poems, she examines the wild, brutal terrain of the Grand Canyon and teaches us how to find truth in the deepest darkness.

Camp was asked to be the first poet for the Astronomer in Residence program supported by the Grand Canyon Conservancy. As a result of her monthlong residency, Camp illuminates all the pieces that make up what we know as the Grand Canyon in *In Old Sky*, making sure that her readers understand that each element is an entity on its own: the canyon, the sky, the dark, the light. In "Plate Tectonics," she observes that "the sky is busy / making tomorrow's / facts," and in "Arena," that "The sky is out again, galloping on its inherited ribbon" to show us that the environment is alive and works constantly to create each new moment. We as human beings are just lucky to exist in such a place. Each element of the scene has its own function in our perception of reality. Camp continues, in "Arena," to contrast the landscape with the human element: "Everyone has a reason / to visit this place . . . / . . . and I am amidst them, bathing / in their overlapped languages." It is a congregation that comes to worship in an infinite, unknowable cathedral.

I think of Walt Whitman's poem "When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer" throughout Camp's collection, and that it could be an extensive reply to Whitman's urgent need to "[look] up in perfect silence at the stars." The poems in *In Old Sky* also bring music to me. Ethereal, floating sounds. Somewhere in this world is David Bowie's final album, *Blackstar*. Somewhere there is a symphony by Gustav Mahler. There is a drum circle keeping the heartbeat going. And yet somewhere else, there is a medieval choir chanting in unison in square notes. Camp is not only in communion with nature, the divine, and the eternal in this collection but also with the truth about darkness: it is not something to fear. In the dark we truly learn to see ourselves.



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