



Spar (Iowa Poetry Prize)

Karen Volkman

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Karen Volkman's award-winning collection *Spar* has as its central form a highly compressed, musical variant of the prose poem. Volkman develops a new lyric density that marries the immediacy of image-centered poetry to the rhythmic resources of prose. Her first poem begins, "Someone was searching for a Form of Fire," and this wild urge to seek form—and thus definition—in the most uncontainable of elements propels the book forward; each poem maps the mind's evolving positions in response to its variable and perilous encounters. Sometimes the encounter is romantic or purely carnal, a sensual landscape of human relations. At other times, nature itself has an almost humanly emotional connection to the speaker. While very much a living voice, the poems' speaker is not a consistent self but a mutable figure buffeted by tenderness, terror, irony, or lust into elaborate evasions, exclamations, verbal hijinks, and lyric flights. As its title suggests, *Spar* embodies both resistance and aspiration, while its epigraphs further emphasize the simultaneous allure and danger of the unknown within the sensual and material worlds and in the mind itself.

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