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MEDIA CONTACT: Monica Fernandez, Media Director, media@redhen.org

P.O. Box 40820, Pasadena, CA 91114 / (626) 356-4760 / fax: (626) 356-9974 / redhen.org

apocrifa
POETRY BY
Amber Flame

APOCRIFA is a nongendered love story told in verse, the journey of a lover and their beloved finding each other, falling apart, and then creating their own way to love together.

APOCRIFA imagines a love that sits comfortably at the crossroads of commitment and freedom. The developing intimacy between a lover and their beloved is propelled by a compendium of words for love, romance, sex, relationships, and affection that do not lend to direct translation in English. Serving as both titles and markers of the progression of time, these poetically defined words highlight the growing tension of one who claims "I cannot love you enough/to unlove the wide world" and yet is inextricably drawn to the offer of "a place of sustenance, rest, and my delight in your very bones." Heavily inspired by the metaphors and structures of Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon), from the Apocryphal books of the Bible, the characters speak to each other with contrapuntal call-and-response while letting us into their private thoughts through epistles, sestinas, odes, and other poetic forms.

ADVANCE PRAISE

"An elegant, loving, and lovely journey. Again and again, *apocrifa* lifts us up, drops us, then lifts us again. Finally setting us down exactly where we need to be."

— **Jacqueline Woodson**, 2020 MacArthur Fellow, National Ambassador for Young People's Literature 2018-2019, Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award Laureate 2018

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amber Flame is an interdisciplinary artist whose work garnered residencies with Hedgebrook, Vermont Studio Center, and more. Her first poetry collection, *Ordinary Cruelty*, was published through Write Bloody Press. Flame is a recipient of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture's City Artist grant and served as Hugo House's 2017-2019 Writer-in-Residence for Poetry. Flame's work featured in *Alone Together: Love, Grief, and Comfort in the Time of COVID-19*. She is Program Director for Hedgebrook, a residency for women-identified writers. Amber Flame is a queer Black dandy in Tacoma, Washington, who falls hard for a jumpsuit and some fresh kicks.



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MEDIA CONTACT

Monica Fernandez

Media Director

626-406-1206

media@redhen.org

MARKETING CONTACT

Tobi Harper

Marketing Director

626-406-1209

marketing@redhen.org

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MORE PRAISE FOR *apocrifa*

"Enter this exquisitely delicate collection of poems and experience the tender tensions that shudder and shake the chords of love. Part love song, part dictionary of love, Amber Flame's *apocrifa* offers us a language for love's many faces and phases and allows us to bear witness to the lovers' attempt to 'sink and surface' through love together; balancing the pull and tug of the desire to nest with one's beloved and the itch of having all the world still to taste.' In these poems we are invited to feast on both the sweet glut of love and language and the agonies which can make 'a whole desert in [our] teeth.'"

— Brionne Janae, author of *Blessed are the Peacemakers*

FROM *apocrifa*

sonnet: inhalation

today, the dead thing on the forest path
as i walked to the tree where we first met
did not immediately bring regret
did not burn through my empty chest as wrath
it was, after all, a thing whose time passed.
who mourns each night because the sun has set?
i know bones and flesh are simply the debt
the earth always comes to collect at last.
and here it was, all the sweetness greening.
i relearned how to breathe in deep relief
a world that continues even through grief,
even through what seems to have lost meaning.
as i walked, i saw nothing that stays dead -
just stasis, bud, blossom, fruit, repeated.



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