



When Winter Come: The Ascension of York (Kentucky Voices)

Frank X Walker

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A sequel to the award-winning *Buffalo Dance*, Frank X Walker's *When Winter Come: The Ascension of York* is a dramatic reimagining of Lewis and Clark's legendary exploration of the American West. By focusing on the humanity and struggles of York, Clark's slave, *When Winter Come* challenges conventional views of the journey's heroes and exposes the deeds, both great and ghastly, of the men behind the myth. Grounded in the history of the famous trip, Walker's vibrant account allows York -- little more than a forgotten footnote in traditional narratives -- to embody the full range of human ability, knowledge, emotion, and experience. He is a skillful hunter who kills his prey with both grace and reverence, and he thinks deeply about the proper place of humans in the natural world. York knows the seasons "like a book," and he "can read moss, sunsets, the moon, and a mare's foaling time with a touch." The Native peoples understand and honor York's innate bond with the earth. Though his expertise is integral to the journey's success, York's masters do not reward him; they know only the way of the lash. The alternately heartbreaking and uplifting poems in *When Winter Come* are told from multiple perspectives and rendered in vivid detail. On the journey, York forges a spiritual connection and shares sensual delights with a Nez Perce woman, and he aches when he is forced to leave her and their unborn son. Walker's poems capture the profound feelings of love and loss on each side of this ill-fated meeting of souls. When the trek ends and York is sent back to his former home, his wife and stepmother air their joys and grievances. As the perspectives of Lewis, Clark, Sacagawea, and others in the party emerge, Walker also gives voice to York's knife, his hunting shirt, and the river waters that have borne the labors and travels of thousands before and after the Lewis and Clark expedition. Despite fleeting hints that escape is possible, slavery continues to bind York and quell the joyful noise in his spirit until his death. Walker's poems, however, give York his voice after centuries of silence. *When Winter Come* exalts the historical persona of a slave and lifts the soul of a man. York ascends out of his chains, out of oblivion, and into flight.

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