

★ **Attend****West Camel**

Orenda Books (May 1, 2019)

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In West Camel's *Attend*, something mythic lingers just below the surface of Deptford, England, that will bind together three lives at loose ends.

A recovering drug addict, middle-aged Anne has moved home to face her family, sobriety, and a future in the haunted landscape of her past. Twenty-three-year-old Sam has moved to Deptford for work, but even more to escape the memory of his friend's death in a sailing accident. By chance, each meets centenarian Deborah. When she tells them, "And of course, I can't die," they're inadvertently drawn into her obsession: to help her die by destroying an ancient strip of cloth that she discovered in 1913 buried in a tunnel underneath 36 Albury Street. As Anne, Sam, and Deborah face the stories they've been telling themselves, they help each other find their paths to freedom.

Camel understands the heart's momentum and its lurid compulsion to plunge. Anne, Sam, and Deborah have plummeted into a darkness from which they haven't fully recovered, whether it's a seemingly cursed return from an underground tunnel, the shadow of addiction, or the specter of death. Sidelined by their trauma, each is trying to find their way out of private hurts and back to connection. Navigating that distance overlaps the quotidian with the mysterious, and Camel uses both to interrogate their most practiced patterns, showing the snarled relationship between the personal and public faces of grief, reconciliation, and survivorship.

From its opening gambit to its final line, *Attend* demands and rewards attention. Camel's magical realism opens trenchant depths in the ordinary, elevating the raw details—both emotional and prosaic—of people's lives into moving motifs. Relayed with lyricism and compassion, *Attend* is "somewhere between a Bible story and an ugly fairy tale: never wanting to settle on either."

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May/June 2019)

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