

BOOKS



60 SECONDS WITH...

Lauren Francis-Sharma

We caught up with the novelist and assistant director of the prestigious Bread Loaf Writers' Conference

» How would you describe your upcoming novel, *Book of the Little Axe*? It's a Western set in the late 18th century about a mother who, after a tragic incident, realises the only way to help her son uncover his future self is to share secrets of their past. It has drama, beautiful landscapes and humour; the main character, Rosa, is a salt-of-the-earth Trinidadian woman living in the western part of North America, which is not yet the United States.

» What drew you to this period in history? Readers of my previous novel *'Til the Well Runs Dry* asked about the racial composition of that book's characters. I often found myself trying to explain the long and complex colonial and migrant history of the southernmost Caribbean island, and I became intrigued thinking about what life might've looked like for the citizenry when the British arrived at the island. *Book of the Little Axe*, set largely in the early 19th century, doesn't touch on the arrival of indentured East Indians or Chinese workers,



but sets the historical groundwork for their arrival, by showing Trinidad as an atypical colonial Caribbean space.

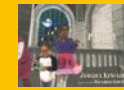
» How has your experience at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference shaped your writing? When I first attended the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, I expected to walk the Vermont landscape and draft a new story, but my schedule was packed with readings, lectures, craft classes and workshops. The 25 pages of the novel I submitted for workshop were strong but, when I shared the intended arc of the story, the workshop leader, Peter Ho Davies, offered an idea that solved a problem I'd had for three years. I was grateful for a place to feel vulnerable with people who had the tools and the desire to help me understand my work better. Now that I'm assistant director, I realise that's what Bread Loaf is designed to do: help writers at all stages of their writing life.

* LAUREN FRANCIS-SHARMA IS THE AUTHOR OF *'TIL THE WELL RUNS DRY*. SHE LIVES NEAR WASHINGTON, DC AND IS THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE BREAD LOAF WRITERS' CONFERENCE. HER NEW NOVEL, *BOOK OF THE LITTLE AXE*, IS PUBLISHED IN MAY. WWW.LAURENFRANCISSHARMA.COM



3 GREAT READS

Pick up these diverse new Caribbean titles



PARTY: A MYSTERY
(BLACK SHEEP/

AKASHIC BOOKS) BY **JAMAICA KINCAID AND RICARDO CORTÉS**

This beautifully illustrated adventure book tells the story of three girls caught up in the most curious of mysteries. It promises questions that will grab children, but does not guarantee answers. Cortés' expressive artwork brings to life the characters and setting, also providing hidden hints to eagle-eyed readers.



A TALL HISTORY OF SUGAR

(AKASHIC BOOKS)

BY **CURDELLA FORBES**

This book tells the story of Moshe Fisher, a man who was 'born without skin' so that no one is able to tell his race, and Arrienne Christie, who makes it her duty to protect Moshe from the social and emotional consequences of his strange appearance. A haunting, epic Caribbean love story, reminiscent of García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*.



FRYING PLANTAIN
(ASTORIA)

BY **ZALIKA REID-BENTA**

A rich and unforgettable portrait of growing up between worlds, *Frying Plantain* shows how, in one charged moment, friendship and love can turn to enmity and hate, well-meaning protection can become control, and teasing play can turn to something much darker.



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