



Dear DeeDee

Kat Meads

Regal House Publishing (Dec 4, 2020)

Softcover \$13.95 (159pp)

978-1-64603-015-6

An elliptical novel that integrates the death of a lineage into a reflection on personal mortality, Kat Meads's *Dear DeeDee* recasts the unresolved stories of a Southern paternal line.

Rooted in North Carolina, the Meads family line is petering out. Its generations are scattered and its relationships are shattered. This incites a one-sided correspondence from Aunt K to her college-aged niece, DeeDee, in which she reworks the Meadses' narrative and "pimps nostalgia as connection."

Like a stone skipping across a pond, the book's structure touches on depths without wholly revealing them. Aunt K writes from California and from middle age; her correspondence is structured into monthly sections. While she says she's presenting herself and the past three generations too honestly for family comfort, there's a sense of persistent withholding, of the "eye fixing on what it could bear."

The narrative's relaxed pace also creates a time-out-of-time that emphasizes the importance of story, both to Aunt K and to the Southern tradition she's revisiting. A bibliophile who makes sense of nostalgia through books, Aunt K knows the value of a good yarn, especially one whose meanderings invite revelation, amusement, and audience participation, without any one element dominating.

At times, Aunt K is the perfect raconteur, passing along wisdom and bon mots to a beloved youngster; at others, she is unyielding about her nostalgia and hazy on specifics. But what the novel lacks in tension, it makes up for in its pitch-perfect encapsulation of late middle-aged reverie, particularly as it pertains to the troubles of family, fate, and "how difficult it seems for Southerners to relinquish investment in the controlling idea of it."

As a reverie, *Dear DeeDee* is as carefully packed as an overnight suitcase, its final destination signaled as much by what's left in as what's left out.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (November / December 2020)

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