

Home By Now

Meg Kearney

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Meg Kearney's first book, *An Unkindness of Ravens*, garnered BOA's A. Poulin Jr. New Poet's Award. It's not surprising that her new collection, *Home By Now*, continues her practice of unforced, gracefully adept poems that are equally deserving of recognition. In a literary world where poems may become obtuse in order to reflect a fragmented universe, these pieces are refreshingly direct without being simplistic. Kearney's poems do address an unstable world, but they do so in lines laced with a compassionate, if arching eye. Her empathy, wry wit, and exquisitely subtle craft make this collection an authentically rewarding read.

Her themes are rich and warmly varied, including family lost and found-particularly as it relates to adoption (Kearney was adopted)-and home poems that depict a place that cradles the interior being as well as the physical body. As she explores the death of a father, she voices the challenge of caretaking while honoring the work of care. In "Socks," she writes of a bedpan scene, "We close our eyes- / Dad, then me. Oh, he pants, it's so damn cold / as I tell myself, I am not the first / daughter to do this." After the death, her lines become elegiac of family as much as father, "All night / we eat nothing but / orchids and lilies. My mother / cannot cry." Even in persona poems, the voice feels personal. Her Magdalene women live in a coarse world inundated with threat and loss where against all odds, they find a damaged kinship. In a section titled, "A Grasshopper Walks into a Bar," her world-weary speaker is sometimes bartender, sometimes the gal who lingers at the bar. Kearney's adeptness at depicting these persons without falling into familiar language will leave readers wishing for more lines like, "It's Friday night and you've got a full bar, three deep / and every seat taken, the five Miller brothers filling / the corner by the jukebox, singing along to 'Take / it Easy' and waving for another round of ponies."

Finally, in her final title section, Kearney's lyricism rises as she writes as an adoptee of country life. Metaphorically complex, these poems, which frequently feature animals and birds, allude to other homes, urban and significant. Of a hawk flying into a window, she writes "He's still warm when we carry / him to the woods. We don't // speak of suicide flights / into buildings..."

In all of these poems, Kearney's talent is refreshingly understated, her craft is subtle, her voice clear and empathetic. These are poems that draw you in with a highly skilled diction, but keep you there with human experience that matters. (December) Anne-Marie Oomen

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