

Descent by Kathryn Stripling Byer

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Available from your local bookstore or www.Amazon.com

"From the glorious opening poem, the mourning sound of the morning train weaves through Kathryn Stripling Byer's new collection, as much a part of the hills of home as are its sins and beauties. Oh, the longing to shed forever what we are and what made us, at the same time hugging the litany to us that brings it all back: Cullowhee Creek, Buzzards Roost, hay bales, blackberries, grandmother's gladiolas and lace doilies, and the earth that knew us better than

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we knew ourselves. Such longing in these pages, such hunger, such 'grabbing at air.'"
—Alice Friman

"A Kay Byer poem is utterly compelling from its opening lines: "Now take this, she'd say, her mouth / full of pins—a bird's tail / of fastenings held tight / against revelation." Even those of us who've read and loved her work for years scratch our heads and mutter to ourselves, How does she do that? The poems in her new book, *Descent*, both embrace and struggle against her heritage as a woman of the both the deep South and the southern mountains. Her work is to be cherished for its beauty, its courage, and the gift of its revelation. Her poems shine a light that we yearn for here in the darkness of the Twenty-First Century."

—David Huddle

Navigating the dangerous currents of family and race, Kathryn Stripling Byer's sixth poetry collection confronts the legacy of southern memory, where too often "it's safer to stay blind."

Beginning with "Morning Train," a response to Georgia blues musician Precious Bryant, Byer sings her way through a search for identity, recalling the hardscrabble lives of her family in the sequence "Drought Days," and facing her inheritance as a white southern woman growing up amid racial division and violence. The poet encounters her own naive complicity in southern racism and challenges the narrative of her homeland, the "Gone with the Wind" mythology that still haunts the region.

Ultimately, *Descent* creates a fragile reconciliation between past and present, calling over and over again to celebrate being, as in the book's closing manifesto, "Here. Where I am."

A native of Georgia, Kathryn Stripling Byer has lived in the western North Carolina mountains since receiving a graduate degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she studied with Allen Tate, Robert Watson, and Fred Chappell. Her several books of poetry have received honors from the Associated Writing Programs, the Academy of American Poets, the Fellowship of Southern Writers, and the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance. She was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in October, 2012. She will lead the poetry Master Class at the

2012 Fall Conference