



Madeline Tiger

WHAT MATTERS

By Adele Kenny
 Welcome Rain Publishers LLC, 217 Thompson
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 \$15.

I have been following the moon all through **WHAT MATTERS**, the new collection of poems by Adele Kenny. Her lines make sky trails and ways of wandering through her life in all seasons, as the writer recalls her childhood and her complex adult years. Themes of strength and gratitude are illuminated by a motif of the traveling moon leading through these incandescent poems.

There is sadness, there has to be, as the poems confirm; but a reader is kept in view of the sky, in touch with the earth, enlightened by the dawning of images and the insights of hand-earned wisdom. The poet finds the exact image for passionate tenacity: when she was five, she remembers, "...something died in our drain spout./ Feather or fur, I watched my father/ dig it out, knowing (as a child knows)/ how much life matters..." (from "Survivor").

WHAT MATTERS is not about illness, suffering, and survival, although on first reading one may see it on this level. It is rather about making impressive poems from the immediate world and signifying visions.

Rivers and trains run through the collection—motifs of motion, as life goes on; and a-

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bove, the stars move, where first she saw how they "pressed/ their imprimatur against the dark." The speaker, with other children, gazed up: "Cold/ in our warm bodies,/ we stood in the trees' deep shadows and/ wished ourselves up, into that other universe/ of gradual light..." Human bodies connect with the "universe" by such fine ways of holding them together in words.

That connection to the universe comes through "a language of stars..." They render belief in something great, "larger than logic." This theme becomes more sure through the course of the book, but even the early poems rise in praise of what is amazing.

Kenny describes how, when a fallen bird was released into the sky, an elderly neighbor, Mrs. Levine, "breathing deeply, raised her/ numbered arm to the light" and moved her "thumb over each fingertip as if she could feel/ to the ends of her skin the miracle edge of freedom, of feathers, of flight." Small incidents layer these poems with historic paradox.

Held together by image and music, these poems become celebrations—of the earth, of friendships and loves, of dogs too! of significant places; the more engaging because of the charm in the language, as in the last stanza of "Survivor": "Morning breaks from sparrows' wings/ ...and I'm still here,/ still in love with the sorrows, the joys--/ days like this, measured by memory, the/ ticking crickets, the pulse in my wrist." The sounds—short vowels, internal rhymes, wittily complement what the poem is reporting.

At the narrative level, the poems demonstrate the human "story"—the forces of life, courage, and endurance. The collection rises through life-threatening experience and grief to an astonished love of being here on earth, repeatedly signifying its beauties. ☼