

Having and Keeping

David Watts is a Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, and a Professor of Poetry at the Fromm Institute. His new book of poems, *Having and Keeping* (his 17th), is less about the practice of medicine, and more about the life of a poet who also happens to be a physician.

The book opens with a series of poems about Watts' family—a father who was a farmer, a mother who was a musician, and a brother who served in Vietnam and later suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Each of these family members has now passed, and Watts' poems are a way to:

Tie Knots in the Strings of Memory
and tighten them against forgetting.

There are several poems about love, relationships, marriage, and divorce, including "Pleasure," which is a wonderful meditation on remembering the solitary joy a past partner felt in her passion for running, and how if:

pleasure remains in the world
despite sorrows...Who should refuse beauty,
then?

"Invisible Disgusting Things" "Empty," "After Long Silence Running into My Ex at a Family Gathering," and "Affair" continue a narrative of loss and disconnection:

He didn't know how it started
but he did know that inside
the pleasure was a loneliness
he could not fill.

These are followed by poems about new love and family found, including "The Woman I Love in Mountains," "Family Bed," and "What it Was," which is a delightful poem about the mysteries of in vitro fertilization:

Well, they asked again, is it sex
if it happens in a Petri dish?

Watt's poems are wonderfully imagistic and narrative. "Perfection" is a poem about the body of a woman exercising at the gym:

Her spine pushes through her skin
like a brontosaurus erupting
from its tar pit.

He also shows a great ear for language in a series of humorous poems made from phrases spoken by his young son, Gabrielle, "Things My Son Told Me," "Gabiellisms," "More Gabiellisms," and "Gabiellisms IV."

There is an intimation of impending decline, illness, and death in "Family Away, Empty House," and "Longevity."

Watts seems to have found a way to find joy in life, and in language, and perhaps to truly understand the difference between having and keeping.

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