

Classic Poetry Series

Kenneth Fearing
- poems -

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Kenneth Fearing(1902 - 1961)

Kenneth Fearing (July 28 1902 - June 26, 1961) was an American poet, novelist, and founding editor of the Partisan Review. Literary critic Macha Rosenthal called him "the chief poet of the American Depression."

Fearing was born in Oak Park, Illinois. His parents divorced when he was a year old, and he was raised mainly by his aunt. After studying at the University of Wisconsin, Fearing moved to New York City where he began a career as a poet and was active in leftist politics. In the Twenties and Thirties, he published regularly in The New Yorker and helped found The Partisan Review, while also working as an editor, journalist, and speechwriter and turning out a good deal of pulp fiction. Some of Fearing's pulp fiction was soft-core pornography, often published under the pseudonym Kirk Wolff.

A selection of Fearing's poems has been published as part of the Library of America's American Poets Project. His complete poetic works, edited by Robert M. Ryley, were published by the National Poetry Foundation in 1994.

Fearing published several collections of poetry including Angel Arms (1929), Dead Reckoning (1938), Afternoon of a Pawnbroker and other poems (1943), Stranger at Coney Island and other poems (1948), and seven novels including The Big Clock (1946). He is the father of poet Bruce Fearing.

Aphrodite Metropolis

Harry loves Myrtle--He has strong arms, from the warehouse,
And on Sunday when they take the bus to emerald meadows he doesn't say:
"What will your chastity amount to when your flesh withers in a little while?"

No,

On Sunday, when they picnic in emerald meadows they look at the Sunday
paper:

GIRL SLAYS BANKER-BETRAYER

They spread it around on the grass

BATH-TUB STIRS JERSEY ROW

And then they sit down on it, nice.

Harry doesn't say "Ziggin's Ointment for withered flesh,
Cures thousands of men and women of moles, warts, red veins,
flabby throat, scalp and hair diseases,
Not expensive, and fully guaranteed."

No,

Harry says nothing at all,

He smiles,

And they kiss in the emerald meadows on the Sunday paper.

Kenneth Fearing

Evening Song

Sleep, McKade.

Fold up the day. It was a bright scarf.

Put it away.

Take yourself to pieces like a house of cards.

It is time to be a grey mouse under a tall building.

Go there. Go there now.

Look at the huge nails. Run behind the pipes.

Scamper in the walls.

Crawl towards the beckoning girl, her breasts are warm.

But here is a dead man. A murderer?

Kill him with your pistol. Creep past him to the girl.

Sleep, McKade.

Throw one arm across the bed. Wind your watch.

You are a gentleman, and important.

Yawn. Go to sleep.

The continent turning from the sun is quiet.

Your ticker waits for tomorrow morning

And you are alive now.

It will be a long time before they put McKade under the sod.

Sometime, but not now.

Sometime, though. Sometime, for certain.

Take apart your brain,

Close the mouths in it that have been hungry,

They are fed for a while.

Go to sleep, you are a gentleman. McKade, alive and sane.

A gentleman of position.

Tip your hat to the lady.

Speak to the mayor.

You are a personal friend of the mayor's, are you not?

True. A friend of the mayor's.

And you met the Queen of Roumania. True.

Then go to sleep.

Be a dog sleeping in the old sun.

Be a poodle drowsing in the old sun, by the Appian Way.
Be a dog lying the meadow watching soldiers pass on the road.
Chase after the woman who beckons.
Run from the policeman with the dagger. It will split your bones.
Be terrified.
Curl up and drowse on the pavement of Fifth Avenue in the old sun.
Sleep, McKade.
Yawn.
Go to sleep.

Kenneth Fearing

Love 20¢ The First Quarter Mile

All right. I may have lied to you and about you, and made a few pronouncements a bit too sweeping, perhaps, and possibly forgotten to tag the bases here or there,
And damned your extravagance, and maligned your tastes, and libeled your relatives, and slandered a few of your friends,
O.K.,
Nevertheless, come back.

Come home. I will agree to forget the statements that you issued so copiously to the neighbors and the press,
And you will forget that figment of your imagination, the blonde from Detroit;
I will agree that your lady friend who lives above us is not crazy, bats, nutty as they come, but on the contrary rather bright,
And you will concede that poor old Steinberg is neither a drunk, nor a swindler, but simply a guy, on the eccentric side, trying to get along.
(Are you listening, you bitch, and have you got this straight?)

Because I forgive you, yes, for everything.
I forgive you for being beautiful and generous and wise,
I forgive you, to put it simply, for being alive, and pardon you, in short, for being you.

Because tonight you are in my hair and eyes,
And every street light that our taxi passes shows me you again, still you,
And because tonight all other nights are black, all other hours are cold and far away, and now, this minute, the stars are very near and bright

Come back. We will have a celebration to end all celebrations.
We will invite the undertaker who lives beneath us, and a couple of boys from the office, and some other friends.
And Steinberg, who is off the wagon, and that insane woman who lives upstairs, and a few reporters, if anything should break.

Kenneth Fearing