



Vow

Kristina Marie Darling

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Kristina Marie Darling's latest collection, *Vow*, stunningly enacts the ominous anachronism of the word *vow* itself—"promises committing one to a prescribed role, calling, or course of action, typically to marriage or a monastic career." In this airy, white-spaced book of veils and concealment, the wordless invisibilities of the institution of marriage are glimpsed, but only from the margins, in deft footnotes to blank/missing text and haunting fragments—situating the ghostly bride behind the battlements of a moldering mansion, or castle, filled with endlessly locked rooms from which there is no escape barring catastrophes such as fire, or suicidal leaping. Evoking the Gothic domestic spaces of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, *Vow* startles and speaks through the uncanny silences of white space, echoing the erasure and effacement of the wedding gown, the growing silences of the marriage hidden behind the vow, as—powerfully, heartbreakingly—the frozen couple locked inside desperately make "paper wings and little box kites, hoping they'd bear us over the iron gates." —Lee Ann Roripaugh, Author of *On the Cusp of a Dangerous Year* In Kristina Marie Darling's *Vow*, a bride maneuvers in a locked house as it goes up in flames. *Vow* has the brilliance we've come to expect from this author, inventing and mastering forms—footnote poems, expansive sequences. Where Bachelard claims a home is memory, Darling's poetics of space presents the house on fire, inaccessible and full of mystery. The house is a structure one is in yet all the while kept from and intimacy seems to be in the burning embers, the cordoned off spaces. In these poems, emotion feels as though it could physically move away from private life. Bluebeard meets Synecdoche, New York with the eerie sense of the self as a brooding other, the one who watches as everything burns. Our house became a small fortress. Every night we take turns stoking the fires. —Farrah Field, Author of *Rising How* name this strange invention, this kaleidoscopic script, this lyric aggregate? Kristina Marie Darling's *Vow* is one part the salvaged fragments of a gothic romance, one part the careful records of a fastidious archivist of the imaginary, and one part meta-documentary. Above all, this book spotlights the nature of vows, how a vow "reveals, harbors, and conceals, and how "we are made and unmade by those we love." Truly, this book projects this making and unmaking in every aspect, of the wedding gown that is painstakingly tailored only to have its "endless rows of white stitching" undone with a pair of scissors, of the house that is inhospitable, "a corridor filled with locked rooms," of the vows themselves that the lovers "bury one by one," and finally, of the book itself, with its innovative approach to form—its fragments, footnotes, appendices, and erasures—that makes Darling's themes echo through the hollows, haunting and delightful. —Katy Didden, Author of *The Glacier's Wake* In Kristina Marie Darling's *Vow*, both text and subtext paint the fraught institution of marriage, particularly the subjectivities of the bride's several selves. Written in candle, tale, and glass, the book "reveals, harbors, conceals" in an exciting new collection. —Carmen Gimenez Smith, Author of *Goodbye, Flicker*

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