

KIRKUS REVIEWS

DR. BEARE'S DAUGHTER

by Janice Jones

A powerful coming-of-age story about life as an adoptee

Jones reflects on her adoption, her childhood, and her search for identity in this debut memoir.

"I am seventy-seven years old," the author writes in an introductory note, "and there is one thing that I *must* do before it is too late, and that is to share my odd, but true story." She was adopted at the age of 4 months by Ralph and Lucinda Beare, and her experience initially seems like every orphan's dream. Her first memory was of her doting adoptive mother reading her Valentina Wasson's classic children's book, *The Chosen Baby* (1939), and the family's living room was decorated with a picture of three bears: a papa, a mama, and a baby. Her adoptive father was one of the most respected figures in their smalltown home of Celina, Ohio, where he served as the county doctor. Strangers on the street, she recalls, would regale her with tales of how her dad had delivered their children or saved their grandfather's life. However, as the memoir's title implies, her idyllic childhood as Dr. Beare's daughter came with an erasure of her own identity, and she tells of struggling to live up to the expectations that came with being part of the family. Paralleling this narrative is a recurring, italicized internal monologue of the author as a child, which reveals anxious, trauma-fueled thoughts: "*Didn't the home have any babies that look like them?*" the author asks as she compares her "*ugly freckles*" and red hair with the dark hair of her parents. When her mom scolded her for not shutting an outside door with a colloquialism ("*Were you born in a barn?*"), Jones tells herself, "I wasn't born. I was adopted."

Another central theme in this wide-ranging remembrance is the role of Catholicism in a small Midwestern town. The author tells of how the cultural and moral ethos of the faith shaped her upbringing, education, and even her teenage romantic life. There are vignettes that give the response of local nuns to the election of John F. Kennedy, for instance, and of her father's bewilderment when she didn't eat fish on a Friday. Jones effectively bookends the memoir with memories of the day her father died in 1981, in which she poignantly reflects on her conflicting emotions: She was consumed by grief, but she also felt free to pursue a new identity without the expectations and doubts that came with being "Dr. Beare's daughter." Readers will also find that the author is brutally honest about her own struggles with self-esteem: "I was of no good to my husband and children because I was of no good to myself," she observes at one point. In these pages, she offers a compelling work that will be of particular interest to adoptive parents and children. In one revealing moment, for instance, she remembers a therapist asking her, "Why are

you here?” Jones intended to answer that she wanted help to process her grief, but the words that came out were simply, “I was adopted.”

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