

Lost in the Bardo,
Carolynn Kingyens.
Kelsay Books, American Fork,
Utah, 2026.

Review by Ed Meek

Lost in the Bardo is Carolynn Kingyens' third book. I reviewed her previous book *Coupling*. In her new volume, Kingyens continues to develop as a poet well worth reading. Full disclosure, Kingyens gave a positive review to my book, *Great Pond*.

"If anything, middle age offers perspective, however precarious," Kingyens tells us in her insightful new collection, *Lost in the Bardo*. The bardo is a Tibetan term for an intermediate or transitional state. Kingyens has applied this to middle-age and this is the realm Kingyens has chosen to explore and illuminate." In *Lost in the Bardo*, Kingyens frames personal narrative poems with short poems describing the bardo lending her book a thematic coherence.

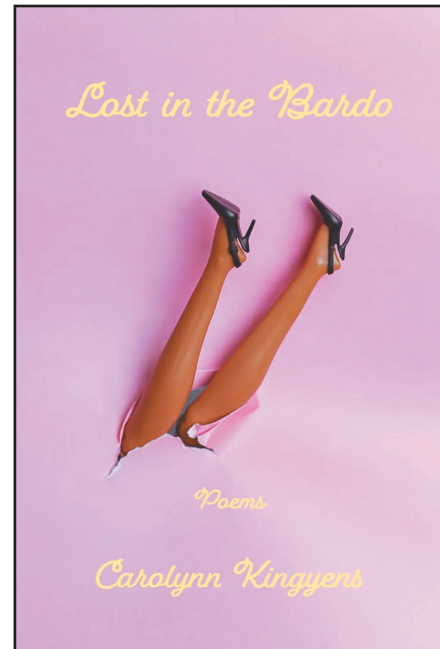
Sometimes complicated emotions, too heavy to bear, require suspension" she tells us in "Time Bomb." Later in the poem she refers to "our mid-century modern house where the floors are made entirely of eggshells." Although it may appear from the outside that everything is fine, inside the houses of our middle-class lives, we all have problems to deal with and work out.

Kingyens doesn't keep us hanging for long. Instead, she delves into painful emotions like a poet she refers to as "the patron saint of poetry," Sharon Olds. In *Hell*, a date tells her, "we are forced to watch as if held down/ by the hand of God/ our atrocities animated/ against loved ones." As in her other books, Kingyens uses references to religion in a manner that gives power to her perspectives. Like many of us, she grew up with religious beliefs that continue to influence us even though we question them.

In "Duper's Delight" she brings up the difficulty of getting at the truth. "A liar tells me/there is no such/ thing as truth...The liar says/ I am the victim here/ and no questions/ are asked..." Later in the poem: "She says truth is a shit show/ a dumpster fire/ in a tin roof trailer park..." This is the world we inhabit in which victims are valued and what we see as truth has to be ugly.

"What has become of the First Marriage" explores one such truth. The way older couples holding hands and sitting side by side in restaurants are probably onto second or third marriages. Otherwise, they wouldn't be so affectionate.

Kingyens' present has, like the present of the rest of us, been shaped



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by her past. A poignant poem called “Nightswimming” perfectly depicts what we all miss, the excitement of being young.

*It's the anticipation
you missed most,
those youthful days
when you didn't have
to will your weight thin,
wearing a black and white
polka dot bikini with ease
during hot, humid nights
Nightswimming.
She talks about swimming in the dark, feeling
Someone's pulsating wrist
and that glorious anticipation
of a slippery wet grasp.
Here in the Bardo part VI, she brings her themes together.
I would always be
that sad girl
forever searching
for my father's love
in someone else's eyes —
dilated and high
in the backseat
of smoky Saabs
mouthing lyrics
to favorite songs
no longer on the radio.*

Kingyens weaves references to pop culture throughout her book. From Rapper's Delight, to R.E.M.'s “Night Swimming” to Yoko Ono and Barbie and “Polka Dot Bikinis.” Those references lighten the tone and bring us back.

In *Lost in the Bardo*, Kingyens invites us to take a closer look at our past and how it affects our current lives. Freud talks about “the watcher at the gates” who keeps most of us from examining our lives too closely, and how we need artists to get past the watcher and uncover the truths beneath the surface. Luckily, we have poets like Carolyn Kingyens who are brave enough to dive under the surface.