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“THE KEEPER” USES NURSERY RHYMES TO STRENGTHEN OUR RESOLVE—AT WE PLAYERS

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Millennial Notes

Ava Roy Navigates a Rocky Voyage, Skillfully

by **Tyler Jeffreys**

This feel-good one-woman show is an epic, visual nursery rhyme built on a charming metaphor. Playwrights Ava Roy and Britt Lauer provide a lighthouse surrounded by a dark sea of uncertainty: the mass shootings, family abuse, and repeated bigotry that American culture has to offer.

Lighthouse keeper Caretta Caretta, played dramatically and boldly by Ava Roy, spends her days caring for her beloved light. When we hear Caretta Caretta whisper, “This little light of mine” while scanning the horizon at Alameda Point, we know the lighthouse stands for our spiritual light.



Ava Roy as the Lighthouse Keeper

A clever set, designed by Susan McComb and JD Durst, draws us in before the show starts. Hosted outside, in front of an abandoned military barracks, “The Keeper” boasts an intricate lighthouse on a stage wagon.

We Players invites us into a kooky, isolated lighthouse keeper’s daily tasks. Through repeated scenes, Ava Roy’s performance stays spunky. We have to admire her playfulness and attention to detail that pull this fantasy together.

The set feels fun like an amusement park attraction. Inside, we see controlled chaos—stacks of books, bowls of salt, boxes of paper, and a large, mysterious metallic turtle shell hanging from the wall. During the first scene, she cheerfully speaks to tools and knick-knacks around her home. But then, she faces a life-threatening problem.



Ava Roy (The Keeper)

On the very top of the lighthouse a dozen silver windmills reflect the setting sun. Excitement fills the audience as Caretta Caretta dutifully climbs up to her lighthouse beacon belting out synonyms for “light,” using rhymes to elicit our empathy. She declares: “Light! Bright! Glisten! Listen!”

We shudder as she majestically spins her light until it shines! We watch her perform this beacon lighting ritual at least six or seven times, each time lessening its appeal. The nursery-rhyme rhythm makes “The Keeper” easy on the ear. But the repetitions also make the show frustrating.

For six or seven days—they all start to blend—she searches for the answer to her problem. She starts each day with coffee and ends by reading herself to sleep. While she is reading, her words change from poetic popcorn style to poetic fortune cookies with moral proverbs:

...the whale would by all hands be considered a noble dish, were there not so much of him;
but when you come to sit down before a meat-pie nearly one hundred feet long, it takes away your appetite.

Can Caretta Caretta save her lighthouse from the deep darkness around her? Can we?



Ava Roy as the Lighthouse Keeper

Like solving an intricate problem, enjoying “The Keeper” takes patience. The nursery rhyme poetry and Roy’s whimsical movements charm us. Each scene or day changes only slightly from the previous. A slow burn.

After watching “The Keeper,” the spiritual hymn: “This Little Light of Mine, I’m Gonna Let It Shine” plays over and over in my head.

I leave wondering how we can keep our own inner lights shining for ourselves and others.

“**The Keeper**” by **Ava Roy** and **Britt Lauer**, mobile set wagon designed by **JD Durst & Susan McComb**, by **We Players**, at Alameda Point, Alameda, California. **Info: WEplayers.org (<http://www.weplayers.org/the-keeper-2022>)** – to June 26, 2022.