

Deirdre Fagan – Five Poems



Featured Poet

Knotted We

After Jason Quigno's *Infinite Flow*

Hip to ear,
Elbow to lip,
Intertwined &

“She loves me;
She loves me not”

‘Round and ‘round
Petal by petal we
Daisy ourselves infinite.

“Knot me;
Knot me not”

Breath to clavicle,
Toe to treacle,
Nose to nose.

They say love is—
But ours is blessedly knot.

The Unnamed War

I had come to a darkened apartment in Jordache jeans—
only a teen. In the five years spent, I grew breasts, grew up,

but couldn't leave, not yet. I had been drafted and there was a war in that house; I had not yet known how to cross the line, how to leave the country already mapped for me.

By flying to a foreign land—my father's house—I escaped that not home the summer the Arizona sweltering scorched all records. I was twenty years old and had traded my only possession of value, a fourteen-year-old Buick, on a street corner to an immigrant who handed me his life in a money order.

I shipped what little I owned in tattered boxes & landed on father's doorstep, scars intact and weary from the journey, but afraid to tell its horrors. Sixteen candles had been blown out by you, one by one. But some fire was still burning, enough to drive the body back east where it belonged.

I, in safety, now sat on the second story of father's duplex having escaped war in that Arizona desert just before the radio announced the U.S. was going to war in the Persian Gulf. Surrounded by flowered wallpaper, in lamplight, I shuddered, remaining in fear of the flight of survival I had well come to know.

What it is Now

Sad isn't what you think it is as you get older.

It's not being called names—
that hardly makes you wince anymore.

It's not crashing on your bicycle and having
the gravel picked from your knee in the ER.

It's a gloomy day, yes, but only when it's the
thirteenth in a row and you miss your mother

whose been dead almost thirty years, but even that
isn't the sad it's come to mean, come to be, is it?

Sad is a grip of awareness that one day your children
will, maybe, miss you, but not like you think. They will sit here

each by this tree on this cold bench and remember the year you shook
to the heavens about the broth, hours spent simmering on the

stove, now all over the refrigerator, stove, floor, the dog, your slippers.
“It isn't going to be Thanksgiving now, is it? Is it?”

It wasn't going to be, but not because of the broth. Because of you.
That's the kind of sad it is—the sudden what you can and can't mop up.

The Widow Gets a New Mattress

She has been preparing to let go.

A raft in the corn fields of the Midwest after
winding its way north on asphalt rivers.
The interludes and caresses it once afforded,
images now creasing freshly ironed sheets.

It had been the somewhere to which
she had returned, comparing all others
to its quilted arms. He had never slept in it
without her, as later, she must without him.

Babies were made and comforted on its
pillowtop; the mattress first holding two,
then three, then four—two children to
cushion the blow of husband loss.

Then came the wear of more years, the
sink and then the fluff of new life, new love;
the previous one was lifted away—
the new one arrived.

“It's not my old one....” She wistfully tells
friends over wine. From across the room,
the new one, winking at her, says:
“That's what she used to say about me.”

Kinder Garden

When wee, you had squeezed ants to their quick deaths between pink-polished
tiny pointer and thumb: “It's because I love them,” you had grinning said.

Lifting a rock, you, now three, eagerly asked whether your sitter would also
be watching over the squirming pill bugs while father and I were out.

Ladybug umbrellaed and polka-dot skirted, the pink-petaled world was all beneath the magnolia and magnificently yours then.

By three and a half, young father had been terminally diagnosed. Doc McStuffins stethoscoped and fortified, you listened closely, and then inoculated him best you could.

We both felt we had arrived when on one of our last family outings, your small hands easefully clicked on your own seatbelt in the high-backed booster of the white minivan.

By then, we both simply wanted you out of diapers before ailing father would necessarily wear them himself; in the rearview mirror, it was what we could see that we first noticed.

Later, when you tied your own blinking shoes, I alone stood astonished by how far you had come—your dexterity, the knowing tilt of your head, the now sad lilt of your eyes.

Glitter-shoed & sunglassed (even if worn upside down), by four, you had most intrepidly learned of loss and of love and of their most unsubtle differences.

Deirdre Fagan is a widow, wife, mother of two, associate professor and coordinator of creative writing at Ferris State University. Fagan is the author of the memoir *Find a Place for Me: Embracing Love and Life in the Face of Death* (Nov. 1, 2022), an Eric Hoffer Award Category Finalist and Next Generation Indie Book Award Finalist short story collection, *The Grief Eater* (2020), a poetry chapbook, *Have Love* (2019), and a reference book, *Critical Companion to Robert Frost* (2007). Meet her at deirdrefagan.com