

Deirdre Fagan

The Height of Gladness

I breathe you in, what's left of you, the oils from your skin still wrinkling these smooth sheets, balled up in a dusty closet, sleeping in the dark.

Your ashes were taken to the dump the day before yesterday, (the garbage men don't know).

Your books still line the shelves, the lines you wrote at dawn, singing to yourself.

You hummed off the road and into a dream, the minced meat still on your tongue, while I, opera-soaked, walked myself into a corner, and got hung up on a rack. The peace plant died two weeks ago, the one brought by Lucifer and his side-kick Jezebel, its last blossom a burnt sliver of a pod clinging clay-side.

I sit in the corner, imbibing to the last, and imagine you whole.

When I go, ashes to ashes, front to back, closed in on myself like a folded sheet of paper, spread me out, iron me, crease me, but no hospital corners, no, not for me.

Roll me in crackers so that the birds believe they are dining at the Ritz, then shove me off a precipice at the height of gladness.

Deirdre Fagan is Associate Professor of English and Coordinator of Composition at Quincy University in Quincy, IL. She has published creative work in *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Bartleby Snopes*, and *Boston Literary Magazine*, among others. She is also the author of *Critical Companion to Robert Frost* and has published articles in *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, *Americana Review*, *South Asian Review*, *Creative Writing: Teaching Theory & Practice*, and *The Explicator*. She is a recent widow, mother of two small children, and a mid-career academic who is currently spending more time writing fiction and poetry than literary criticism.