

Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, 2019 Winner

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Fox Collar

By: Kathleen Kirk

She's on the shoulder of the road,
her coat swinging open.

I've come out of the house
with something in my hand, a spatula or spoon.

I start walking toward her.
The car must have broken down somewhere

over the hill, but not too far
or she'd look worse.

It is the suede coat with a fox collar,
stolen from her in a nightclub

on New Year's Eve when I was a child,
restored to her in my dream

where she's lived another life.

Judge's commentary

Poet Denise Duhamel, the judge of the 2019 Dobler Award, wrote this about Kirk's poem:

"I chose "Fox Collar" from a group of truly amazing finalists. "Fox Collar" is a haunting exploration of a childhood story that has stayed with the speaker. She imagines her mother as a young woman, embellishing the family lore's narrative and inventing a "what if" parallel life. The poem's couplets mirror mother and daughter, then and now, glamour and peril. The child has inadequate tools ("a spatula or spoon") to help the mother fix what is broken or regain what has been stolen. There is mystery "over the hill" (a pregnant belly?) and this poem distills the many ways children never truly know their mothers and all of their desires. Was the mother a fox/foxy? Was she clever and resourceful? Was the mother restrained by her collar? The exact imagery in "Fox Collar" opens to many interpretations and emotional tones. I could say more, but I don't want to ruin the poem's deft ending."

About the author

Kathleen Kirk is the author of eight poetry chapbooks, including *ABCs of Women's Work* and *Spiritual Midwifery* (Red Bird Chapbooks) and *The Towns* (Unicorn Press). Her work appears in many print and online journals, including *Confrontation*, *The Fourth River*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry East*, *Redheaded Stepchild*, and *Waccamaw*, and she is the poetry editor for *Escape Into Life*. Her poems in the voice of French sculptor Camille Claudel were set to dance and published by dancing girl press as the chapbook *Interior Sculpture*. Her poems in the voice of Sarah Davis appear in Ken Kashian's book of photographs, *This Moment...in Sarah's Garden*.

About the judge

Denise Duhamel's most recent book of poetry is *Scald* (Pittsburgh, 2017). *Blowout* (Pittsburgh, 2013) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Her other titles include *Ka-Ching!* (Pittsburgh, 2009), *Two and Two* (Pittsburgh, 2005), *Queen for a Day: Selected and New Poems* (Pittsburgh, 2001), *The Star-Spangled Banner* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), and *Kinky* (Orhisis, 1997). Duhamel is a recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and served as the guest editor for *The Best American Poetry 2013*. She is a Distinguished University Professor in the MFA program at Florida International University in Miami.