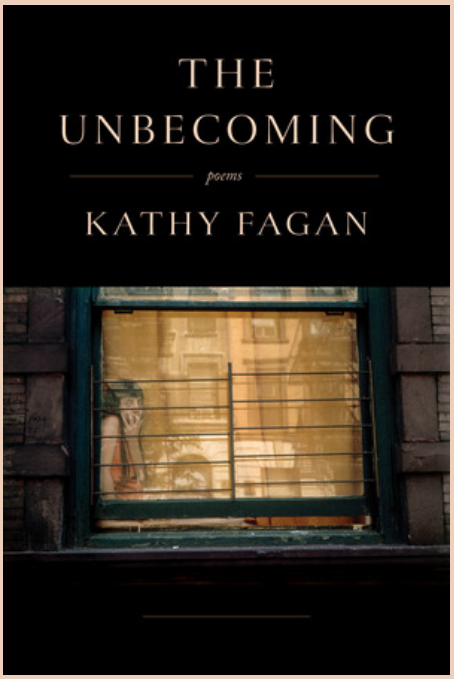

SEPTEMBER 2026

The Unbecoming

Kathy Fagan

CONTACT: Eliana Brown, elibrown@wwnorton.com

A dazzling meditation on the limits of life from a poet whose "mind is endless with depth and truth."

—Brenda Shaughnessy

A luminous seventh collection: a poet's fearless reckoning with mortality, memory, and the art that outlasts us.

On a sketch of the Virgin and Child, Michelangelo instructed his young assistant, in shorthand Italian, to *Draw faster*, acknowledging that life lasts a moment, death—and art—far longer.

As an aging, bi, childless poet currently recognizing the limits of her own life and that of our planet, Kathy Fagan has immersed herself in the intimate and urgent discovery that growth and decay are the same cycle, and that art and memory, made in the tumultuous rush of these, are the deeply human attempts to outlast them.

Fagan's luminous seventh collection, *The Unbecoming*, begins with the sequence "Listening to Others," and a command: *Run*, into a process that is, for all of us, a circle of becoming and unbecoming simultaneously. Favoring perspective over nostalgia and clarity over certainty, the poems are, then, *memento mori*, a loving reminder, a poet's reckoning with the rewards and losses of age, and with our painfully beautiful little lives "rounded with a sleep."

"If you're holding this book—you might know heartbreak well enough to speak into the dead father's hearing aids. So what does this poet make of our human situation and what can art make of it? Kathy Fagan doesn't sidestep these questions; she sets them to music. This sets her apart—this and her angle of vision. There are no easy resolutions here—but what feeds us is the generosity of Fagan's exacting images, a music that carries. What a gift is this lucid, honest, radiant book."

—Ilya Kaminsky, author of *Deaf Republic*

"Kathy Fagan is one of the finest poets writing in America today. Fagan has a special gift for putting into line and color the essential in-betweenness of being that makes up the majority of our days; the griefs and triumphs, the stings and sensualities, that live within mere seconds, moments that quietly coalesce to make up the weight of our lives. The Unbecoming *will stay in you."*

—Erin Belieu, author of *Come-Hither Honeycomb*

"Kathy Fagan's The Unbecoming *gathers the indelible nuances of memory and personal history with startling virtuosity that is both formal and wild. Intuitive, intelligent, and searing, Fagan blends and blurs wit, myth, and wonder with elegance and revelatory candor. Each poem is a site of courage, risk, and pleasure, even as the poet observes and catalogues how our bodies and memories, often dissonant and coherent, warp and withstand us.* The Unbecoming *achieves the kind of beauty that lasts because it is lived. Across a life, Fagan opens the world at every breathtaking scale."*

—Rachel Eliza Griffiths, author of *Seeing the Body*

Kathy Fagan's new poetry collection is *The Unbecoming*, forthcoming from W. W. Norton in Autumn 2026. Her sixth book, winner of the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America, is *Bad Hobby* (Milkweed Editions, 2022), available in print and audio. *Sycamore* (Milkweed, 2017) was a finalist for the 2018 Kingsley Tufts Award. Winner of the National Poetry Series and a 2023 Guggenheim Fellowship, she is the recipient of NEA and Ingram Merrill grants. Fagan co-founded the MFA Program at Ohio State University, for which she served two terms as Director and over twenty years as Poetry Editor of *The Journal* and its annual poetry book prize for OSU Press.

September 2026 | Poetry, 104 pages | W. W. Norton & Company
978-1-324-13139-7 | Hardcover | $26.99