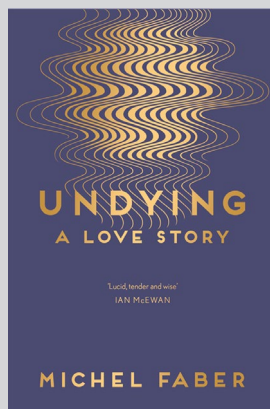


Book Reviews



Undying: A love story

Michel Faber

Edinburgh: Canongate

2016

144pp

£12.99

ISBN: 978 1 78211 854

Michel Faber is the author of several novels, notably *The crimson petal and the white* (2002). He does not perceive himself as a poet, but in the last days of his wife's life he started writing poetry, and after her death he wrote more as he tried to make sense of his grief and distress. The first part of this book is a collection he wrote mainly after she died, about post diagnosis and leading up to her death. The second part is about the experience of everyday living taking on new significances in the light of her death. Sometimes it is hard-hitting about body functions like diarrhoea and tumours, with which some people may feel uncomfortable, but it is a raw, honest sharing of grief, anger and frustration, with a sense of containment. The reader is not left holding the author's misery but sharing in his personal journey. Sometimes the poems are very light humoured and sometimes, obviously, refer to something very personally disturbing. *Nipples* describes the tumours that appear on his wife's body, that even now I find disquieting, but at the same time I understand the need to reframe each experience so that it is manageable for him.

Three poems stand out for me. These are: 'Remission', where luncheon choices are made to complement and boost the deficiencies in the body's levels. 'You choose the crispy fish because your lymphocytes are 1.6'; 'Account holder', with the frustrations of Faber trying to change the names on accounts after death; and 'Tamarind', with the clearing of cupboards and a final use of a jar of tamarind bought with promise and intention that did not come to fruition. He gives voice to the numerous small incidents in the life of the bereaved, which can be overlooked by the mainstream, but without overwhelming the reader. It offers the bereaved an opportunity to recognise their own life experience and know that they are not alone in their frustrations and

bewilderment about how the minutiae of life become great challenges.

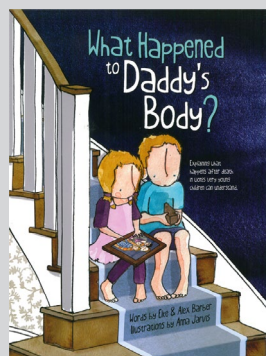
It is a useful companion to *Things to say to a deadman: poems at the end of a marriage and after* (2011) by Jane Yolen which I have previously reviewed. Each author has produced a collection of poems addressed to their loved one – husband and wife. Some of the poems in each are gender and role specific, and some are more general. This allows a bereavement counsellor to move between the two books to offer poems to clients which may reflect on their personal relationship, or more general issues. I rarely loan a whole book to a client but share copies of poems that I feel may be relevant. I then leave it to the client as to whether they wish to acquire the book and explore further. This one will be well used. ■

Janet Dowling

Cruse Bereavement Care Volunteer

Faber M (2002). *The crimson petal and the white*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

Yolen J (2011). *Things to say to a deadman*. Duluth, Minnesota: Holy Cow!



What happened to Daddy's body?: explaining what happens after death in words very young children can understand

Elke and Alex Barber

London and Philadelphia: Jessica

Kingsley

2016

40pp

£10.99

ISBN: 978 1 78592 107 0

This book, first published in 2014, comes from the same authors as the earlier *'Is Daddy Coming back in a Minute?'* and will both look and feel familiar to readers of the earlier book.