

AS PETALS TURN TO ASH

Rose wore leathered skin
eyelids painted
pajamas polka dotted

she lay in her hospice bed
end stage COPD
guarded by slender silver rails
head turned towards sun-soaked flowers

I used to garden

Rose, do you like hydrangeas?

yes
her lavender eyes
told me their colors change
with the pH of the soil

I picture her at twenty-five,
wandering an endless field of hydrangeas
blue petals dissolve in her fingers;
she cups acidic soil like breath
stems rise, vertebrae of some quiet life

And I, at twenty-five,
tending to the living,
studying the dying,
can't help but notice

flowers beginning to droop
petals taking on
the same hues
as Rose's deteriorating lungs

I can't breathe, I'm dying

but all I can do is listen

Rose passed days later
my internship with death
as winter strangles
eternal autumn

as petals turn to ash.

is it naïve?
to give death
a preparatory meadow
& welcome it
as the soil that nourishes the last parts
of its exhausted flower
cradling the remnants of a well-worn existence
a kiss of admiration

the hydrangea tastes its soil
wearing its best periwinkle lipstick
places a kiss on Rose's forehead
wrapping its stem around her arm

Well done, it whispers in her ear

—Maggie Weichert

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