

Her Father's Roses

Tell me again, Nan, how he followed you home
that night, after asking you to dance.
You'd managed to lock the door before he got hold of you

and you watched at the window with your sister
as he uprooted your father's roses, exploding earth
across the lawn. You dared not tell your mother—

she was so naïve, you say, you did not trust her
not to step onto the porch to confront him,
present herself like a bud lifting towards rain.

He'd have had her instead, you say. So, you told her nothing.
In the morning, your father swore thunder
at whoever tore up his roses. The flowers lay in cringing heaps

just outside the front door, white roots curling with shame
at this immodest display of things that ought to stay hidden.
Perhaps he managed to salvage a few.

You and your sister watched him gather survivors,
from the porch in your slippers, smearing last night's dance
from your eyes before he noticed. You dared not look at each other,

just like you dared not tell your mother
and you dared not confess to your father
that his roses were killed by a drunk man

who wanted to ruin his daughter.
You laugh now, Nan. You laugh
with the thrill of the escape.

Perhaps, when there is no moon outside,
and the wind calls like a drunk man after a dance,
you close your eyes and think of the roses,

the roses with split stems and cracked leaves
torn from soft beds, like too many daughters.
Perhaps, on these nights, you cannot remember

if he even asked your name.