

Before Truth

Just as I turned to leave,
the rose found me.
Standing a little taller than the others,
soft pink fading to white,
quietly asking to be seen.

The thought was already there:
I must ask Dad to cut that for me.

I never had to ask.
He would notice me looking,
or hear me say
how good the roses looked that afternoon,
and disappear without a word.

A moment later,
he would return with the garden shears,
choosing roses just beginning to bloom,
the ones the garden would miss.
He gave those away first.

Perhaps he thought I would say no
if he asked.
Perhaps giving me the best of what he had
mattered more
than what was left behind.
Perhaps he liked knowing
a small part of his garden
would come home with me.

He would trim the thorns, wrap the stems
in a small square of kitchen foil,
and hand them to me without a fuss.
I would thank him just as plainly,
and leave.

Memory arrived before truth.
I looked away,
hugged Mum goodbye,
and said nothing.

The rose stayed in the garden.
And all the questions
I never thought to ask him
stayed there too.

Now, I'm learning to cope
with the empty chair
at Christmas, the name
missing from birthday cards,
that day in August
every year.

Some absences still find you
in the everyday,
a Saturday, a rose,
the moments you didn't know to mark,
the ones you only understand
when they are no longer there.