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Shipment

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SHIPMENT

Katherine Smith

In the shadow of the dogwood tree, May's white petals
evaporating like steam on the driveway, I scatter
letters, envelopes unfolded to rivers of watery ink,
steadied by a twisted trunk, read until, done,
I flip to the pages of a flower catalogue,

dazzling hallucinations for next year's garden:
allium, poppies, clematis, peonies. I've heard
how rare such color once was, how pilgrims traveled
across oceans to fetch flowers like blue fire, red coral.
Now common as work in a strange town, these flowers
spread across my lap. It's easy to circle what I want:

golden hummingbird gardens, lavender butterfly bushes,
wisteria, vines thick as a man's arms,
flower heads that hang like heavy purple breasts,
crimson azaleas crushed between the fence posts,
a kitchen table, set with china, toast, honey,
a pot of smoky amber tea, money. Ten years ago
I lifted that walnut table into the moving van

that took me from Tennessee. Driven by a preacher,
the van sailed past blue mountains, rhododendrons
rooted in leaf mulch and red clay, green rivers, limestone quarries.
I'll be back for you if you need me, the preacher cried
waving good-bye. I've moved twice since.
His letters, spreading the Good News, keep coming.

Like all kindness, news of the past keeps coming,
wheel churning the current from Chattanooga
to Knoxville, dragging the river bed for scent
of earth, mountains and valleys like dark provisions,
bare-rooted climbers for trellises of ink, arbors of memory.