

For AW

I first saw her in the back garden,
white hair full and
pulled back in a barrette, like a schoolgirl.
Schiaparelli pink garden tools
surrounding her feet
as she dug in the dirt
a faint sound of an aria—was the music Gianni Schicchi?
or Boheme? coming from her
bedroom window
that I would later discover was painted lavender.

When I knew her and loved her,
I planted thousands of tulips in that same back garden—
Pink Impressions.
Apricot beauties,
Parrot tulips
arranged to perfection
in earthen holes
spreading a handful of bone meal over the bulb to feed it
like she taught me
to surprise her in the spring.

One night when her lungs
sounded under water--no matter how much Lasix I gave her,
I wrapped the tulip's cardboard covers
with faded silk velvet ribbon and placed
them under her pillow
wishing her to dream of spring--
no, willing her to live till spring—
tricks we play with the reaper
that cold winter's night
on the southern side of the Ohio River.

We never spoke of eternity.
The thought always exhausted her.
“I have lived long enough,” she said,
as I tuck her in our bed with ruffled sheets
that looked like the sleeves of her silk blouses
she stitched by hand
that burned.

“If there is an afterlife, I will come back to tell you,”
she promised me,
again and again and again.

She has not come.

My darling,
whose only prayer was to not die in the spring---
you, who loved so much and expected so little---

no diamond crown of glory,
no golden streets
no archangels
or fixed stars
in the Primum Mobile.
You, worthy of the Empyrean,
the highest of heavens
you, rare one,
never desired.

Your wish was to be the bone meal
to feed the crocus, the daffodil, the tulip, the muscari.
You are one.
I hereby place the stone.