

ARRANGING FLOWERS

A little treat for myself, she'd say guiltily.
The flowers came from Walmart,
the ancient rose, daisies, alstroemeria that last and last.
Sometimes there would be two bouquets
in vases I'd bought her. Where are those shears
I got you? I'd ask each time I went to visit.
Oh, I think in the drawer in the kitchen
next to the sink — everything in there
from gum to receipts.

She had a knack for arranging,
and it didn't take her long.
I often sent flowers, and think of that
this spring, the second since her death,
wishing she were here to see the cherry blossoms,
the dogwood slow to bloom because the seasons
are confused — heat then cold again.

The yellow of the finches deepen,
the squirrels are crazy,
jumping, leaping, rolling in the mulch.
Soon the iris will open,
delicate flower — turn your back
and they're gone. I live farther south
than my mother, so enjoyed tulips twice
when I travelled there in April for her birthday.

I can't cut a flower without thinking of her,
and I may go again to place some
on her grave, but I'll have no desire
to continue. Once you sever the stems
you know to make the most of it,
and isn't that why we love them,
their beauty, the petals that will fall.

by Gail Peck

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Gerhard von Haniel, *Still Life*, 1938.