

A Memory

Harry Hall

I remember one day in the garden picking peonies. The flowers were *itohs*, golden and beautiful, but however carefully I handled them, the petals fell off in my hands. I felt myself getting afraid. The stems were also far too short, and dirtied, I did not know why. I picked another. Barely open, the bloom disintegrated. My mother was nearby: silent, but becoming angry.

Although we were actually inside picking the peonies, out of planters, kneeling not in the dirt but on the top floor of a house, which was my childhood home, because Bella was sniffing the polished wood floor in the corner, making a fuss, as if digging for something and distracting me.

Every flower was frail, so I tried to focus. But just then a final peony lost its form to my touch as my father came home, downstairs, dirtied and smiling, and I was beside him, taking his bag. Bella was in the corner seeking the site of some scent. My father was happy, having returned from months away, about to tell me everything... but first Bella—she had been a beautiful Golden—running toward us from the other direction—having passed two months earlier—was moving too fast to be tracked and—having only walked for her last six weeks, then limped—came from the corner to sniff the soil-scent of my father's bag.

And only then I sensed something—so looked behind me at

Bella in the corner, and Bella by the bag, where there were now two of her, playing together, and she was also by my father—four total. Then a noise by the backdoor as three more Bellas ran in. They were excited and slobbering but silent. I was afraid. I ran out to the yard, where a Bella was digging in the corner of the fence, and two around my knees, another trampling the few remaining peonies in the garden, and then five more behind... they drained out of the house and up from under the corner of the fence, and all the cracks, and they ran toward me as I bent down in a ball and screamed, high and loud—as if to alert *everyone*, of *something*—

And then I awoke to darkness, inside my apartment. It was quiet, and I knew: it was, of course, a dream. But was my mouth open?