

Peony

KELSEY ANDREWS

1. Ants

A peony open like a fist
after the fight, filled with ants.
Tiny ants who hunger, too, for sweetness.
Blossom the size of a small doll's head
heavy with memories of growing.
Ants like black hair in her mouth
moving and coiling and tangling.
Why do ants come, always,
into the mouth of the peony?
They eat the nectar
that sits on her tongue.

2. The Teaching

The cut peony in the little vase
was teaching me how to die.
It held tight to its petals even when my mother
dipped it upside down in water to get rid of ants.
The full pleated head nodded for days,
then one breakfast it was darker pink
and sweet-peony-rot overwhelmed.
It shrivelled, the pleats closing in.
I was about to learn the secret
when my mother threw it in the compost.