



**My Favorite Smell is
Fire (*apologetic ode
to the flowers I gave
their third death*)**

Darby Brown



This morning I burned
dried flowers. An accidental burning
from a candle flame—
cinnamon apple sweet mingled with
lavender, sage, wildflower,
to create the taste of ash.

Three years they have lived
tucked into a mason jar on my desk,
twine still tied around their stems.

How many deaths have they died?
I wonder.
First, the plucking,
being severed from their mother soil.
Then, the drying
(was it excruciating to become eternal?).
And now this unexpected death, and after
being promised immortality.

How do they feel, entering this fresh stage
of the afterlife?
Having already died twice before,
do they fear death?
Did they twitch away from the flame
when they felt its raw breath?
Or did they sigh into the heat,
like rolling over beneath warm sheets
in the middle of the night.

My favorite smell is fire—no,
the aftermath of fire:
the smoke that billows and the life that
crumbles into black.
What does this say about me?
What do these flowers think of me?

I never expected these flowers to last.
I've wondered
as they stood sentry over my college life,
how much longer their scent will remain?
lavender, sage, wildflower.
Now they smell of flame
and smoke, like so many twigs caught
in the making of a campfire.

I wonder
what have they seen, these dried flowers
that have now died a third death.
Three years of
eyes flitting across thousands of pages,
of fingers clicking at keys,

of hair brushing and hair tearing,
of this pen (and the ones that came before
it)

staining pages with poems like this.
They have seen faces with eyes
and smiles, some of which still appear
above my dried flowers. I wonder
if these flowers remember
the eyes I no longer see.

I removed the candle, but the scent of ruin
remains,

a stain of soot chars the fingertips of my
dried flowers.

Though I love the smell of burning, I wonder
when I will again taste
lavender, sage, wildflower,
in the air.

Or if I ever will.