

# Grandma

Kristin Gifford

Ninety-three years old and just now she says she might be feeling it. Late light sneaks past plastic blinds, pulls her

face further into its labyrinth of wrinkles. She is so beautiful. She holds her years loosely now, rattling them like stones in her

fossilized hands. These small cairns orient her, they orient us, in the growing dimness. Here is crumbling Dakota sandstone. She

can sense the shuffling of Virginia shale. Mineral-rich  
Minnesota  
quartz tumbles from her fingertips in a sparkling,  
indistinguishable

heap of grandsons and great-grandsons. There's northern  
granite too,  
rising cool on memory's edge with its deep molten fissures  
long cooled.

I feel my strangeness here, as the sunlight skips past my body  
to tug  
at hers, as my plate of sandwich slips on my lap and crumbs of  
news

fall from my lips. We do not belong in the way she belongs  
to the disappearing, to the long labor of marking these last steps  
towards center.

# Foxglove in Late September

Kristin Gifford

I'm learning, like foxglove, to let my top,  
showy blooms go brittle and break.

Instead, I thicken and darken down where  
scalloped leaves are low, layered, sheltered

in coolness. Un-blossoming requires a  
secret joy, one much closer to the dirt.

Even without blooms, the world  
pockets infinite beauty. Today,

when he asks worriedly about death,  
I mean to say change is life. But

there is no denying the bees and their  
busy tunneling are long gone. They moved

all summer through freckled flower lips, emerging  
victorious and kissed all over with pollen.

Now, we hear the hollow crunch as he pulls  
the empty bells off, undoes the buttons

of the stem. He is small against September  
sky's gigantic blueness. He tunneled

his way through me only six years before, pink  
lips pursed. His mouth opened again and again

wider than all the hunger in the world. Somehow  
joy flowered to meet need. Somehow, he grew

when I was a dry, empty stalk. He finds one bloom  
nestled low, the hole of it ravenous for what comes next.