Doom Comes for Grandpa Jim

Doom hurries alongside me as best she can with her toes squeezed into shiny blue shoes—needless decorum. When I was Doom’s age, my mother dressed me in socks & sandals for visits to Grandpa Jim. He won’t judge us, won’t know what we’ve gone through to see him, but still—one ought to look nice when creeping up on the dead.

We arrive at the house he built & loved & sure enough, the sun is perfectly overhead. What a gift to behold him: reclined on the concrete front step, comfortable & youthful at 68 years of age, timeless in faded jeans & a bleached-white shirt. He has always waited for us, just like this. What a gift to pluck a peach-colored tulip from the earth, to watch Doom’s big eyes want for something beautiful I can give her. I’ve brought Doom back to a world that hasn’t ended, yet—to learn the color green, to meet the kindest man I’ve known.

She sheds petals from stem until he catches her eye, then tramples the garden to reach him, discarded stamens & pistil floating in the air. He kneels, arms outstretched for a hug, their two voices laughing together. Take a picture of us, Hayles. Life is short but death is shorter.

A shutter click. Another laugh. The sun bows behind the house & casts a single shadow. The grass beneath me browns. We turn to leave, & as I hand Doom another tulip, she is slow to accept it. She trails behind me, dragging her little blue shoes.