

The Rose Jar

Emma Lou Thayne

Musky as the cedar drawer
in Grandmas' standing metal trunk,

a genie scent, improbable and
distant as the sound of hooves on sand

in some Arabian tale read by Father
in the hall between bedrooms to say goodnight.

Rose petals, five generations of fragile crinkles
once supple, fresh, pressed on at a precious time

into the four-inch cloisonné on pointed golden legs
fat as a Buddha tummy, bottled in

by a cloisonné hat with wobbly lifter,
an ancient pine cone of blackened silver.

Lift it, raise the smooth bowl with its infinite expertise
laid with tweezers into a miniature mozaic:

flowers rusty orange, circles and shields aged before aging
curls of gold small smaller smallest and red,

edging a sapphire river spilled into dusky green.
Watch. See the centuries of Chinese have their way.

Feel the careful hands that plucked each piece in place.
Raise the lid, bring the smooth round closer. Tiny gusts

of history waft the gatherings of births, graduations,
weddings, funerals, celebrations—one petal each,

pink, red, yellow, orange, crisping, sinking into petals
then to holy mash, salted into decades collecting

but never filling to the top the space, mysterious
space, defying definition, only wafting life

like some subtle, still surprising breath of God.