

Greenhouses

Roethke got to know them first hand
from the ground up and down — bulbs and roots,
corms and blossoms, shoots and rhizomes.
I knew only the plants in the sales room —
the luscious smell of hyacinths, the speckled
elegance of tiger lilies, and a glimpse
of emerald shamrocks in the greenhouse proper spilling
out of the beds still under cultivation
when my father would take me there on Mother's Day,
Easter or Valentine's Day back then
when their divorce was still years in the future.

Maybe I was luckier than Roethke,
never got tangled up in sinister tendrils,
ominous metaphors, musky odors
of decomposing vegetable matter,
insinuations of exotic inflorescence
so dour under the glass as he worked his trowel
row after row helping beauty grow
despite more than once finding himself
unable to breathe in the hothouse atmosphere
forcing everything to flower on time.

Now I have a greenhouse of my own where blossoms
climb trellises and hang down from overhead —
jasmine, bougainvillea, honeysuckle —
shamrocks with baby pink flowers in spring
spilling out of clay pots and half barrels
in the shade of palms and dwarf citrus trees
while sourgrass — small cousin of the shamrock —
spreads a lush oxalic verdure in the beds
where a nursery rhyme of other plants grow,
nothing exotic and none for sale.