

2026 TMA Poetry Prize

2nd Place, Adult Category

Calen Fledderjohann

Findlay, Ohio

“Unraveled”

Inspired by Raphaele Peale’s *Still Life with Oranges*

I can’t see a still life without thinking of the first
time I visited my grandmother’s house after she died.

Through pulled blinds, the light was soft and refined—
two things she always wanted me to be.

In the kitchen, the neatly woven basket is exchanged for Tupperware,
flush not with fine but rotting fruit.

Where others might find sparkling glasses of wine,
there are only dried coffee rings stained over the newspaper’s headline.

At the feet of the recliner, tangled yarn and crochet hooks.
On the shelves behind it, rows and rows of unread books.

And on the end table,
a bouquet left over from Mother’s Day,
the sunflower’s head, like mine, bowed to pray.

No matter the distance I’ve since traveled,
when I see a still life, I’m back there,
like a half-peeled orange,
unraveled.