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Gulag

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GULAG

He potters in his garden
in torn undershirt
and a pair of
ragged red trousers.

His flowers are
as wilted as he is,
his care for them
as fitful as how he

tends to his own needs.
But, having lived what would
have been his best years
under hammer and sickle,

he treats freedom warily,
as more like something
he could contract
rather than embrace.

The beetles devour his roses.
His petunias won't open
as if they fear
to show their colors.

Once, he was imprisoned
by the state.
Now, little by little,
his mind makes

a gulag of everything,
even plants, the soil,
and little scraps of beauty.
The day is dark and empty

except for his rake,
his clipping shears.
In truth, he's no gardener.
And his world is still no garden.

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