

From Dust to Dust

I take my spade and turn over the ground
by the roses. It cuts clean, this spear
heart, in the dry soil, clean into the gray
flesh of the earth, gray like boiled meat,

gray like the clouds of incense ash,
or pickled bodies of the dead. So this is
the mixture roses use to make their blood.

I gave mother a rose that Sunday we drove
for steaks. We passed the cemetery where
father stays and I could not help notice
how her gaze lingered on the pastures

of stone, how she tried to say something
about a city of ash, and I, seeing her
go cold, knew her mind had hold of earth,

the gray dust of our end. I knew my gift
of a rose was a gift for the underworld,
the gift of fire against the claims of dust,
a touch and go attempt, like the very way

weeks later in a bar, that boy with skin
smooth as a rose played touch and go
with my desire, all night, till after many

vodkas I decided to ask him if he dances.
"Not very good, no!" he says.

I shut my eyes against the lights and din
and fall into his gray and separate dust.

Robert Klein Engler