

**Just a Minute**  
(300 words)

Another gray-sky morning knocks at my door, but I don't answer. Instead I fill the tea kettle with tepid tap water, turn the knob on the gas range, and watch blue flames turn the color of sunrise. A cat tip-toes across linoleum ready to nosh while two dogs follow me outside to grab the morning paper.

I look at the headlines and pull the shades. I light a cigarette and blast *Blackstar*. The lyrics bump my leg and demand I breathe. I focus on my surroundings; my tropical houseplants and their hue variances take me to another overhead while I cocoon the orchids' blooms in my palms. The colors, such vibrant and violent purples, such sunsets of oranges, pinks, nasturtium reds curl around my fingers, weightless wonders uniquely hand-painted by the mother of nature.

These plants have lived with me over the decades, watched seasons come and go, offering so much yet asking so little; my thoughts begin to drift when my phone rings, then vibrates off the pine floor. I stare at the screen, see it's my childhood friend so I pick up. She's a slushy mess of snot and tears and matter-of-factly says her mother just died. "It's surreal," she says. "So strange," she says. "I walked in her room, kissed her cheek and she said, 'Just a minute, I'll be right back', and then she died. What happens now?" she asks.

I can hear *Blackstar* in the background. My cigarette's burned down to the filter. My fingers fidget while asking her if she wants company. She blows her nose, and says yes. I hang up the phone, get dressed, comb my hair with my fingers, stop to grab an orchid then head to my car. Overhead the sky remains gray, wandering, while waiting for what happens now.