Why I Press Flowers

The year before you left,
you moved to the tundra of Alaska

to reconnect with your wildness, to find
healing among the brown bears and salmon.

But instead of connection in Katmai,
you found yourself standing on the edge

of a wilderness so vast you couldn't
tell which way was home anymore.

Instead of healing in the Last Frontier,
you found yourself on a bridge between

giving up and seeing how much
more you could take. I wrote you

a letter while home alone recovering
from what was supposed to be a life-affirming

surgery. It was. But a week after the surgeon
cut lifelines across my chest to bring me closer

to who I was meant to be, I found myself holding
an alluring arsenal of narcotics in my left hand,

a glass of water in my right. I was supposed to be happy,
but instead was entirely convinced I was a lone wolf.

I wrote to you what I needed to hear at the time,
that the depression wanted us to believe

that we were alone, but we weren't.
A letter arrived to me two weeks later

postmarked Anchorage, AK.
You said that you were in a better place

but fragile, like the pressed hawkweed flower
I had slipped into my letter to you,

a delicate token of love. You tucked red flags
into your letter —a pressed bog-star flower,

a print of a raven. You signed, *let's live through this,*
shall we? I never got a chance to write you back.

At your memorial service, I read a poem
whose metaphors I could hide behind,

too afraid that I would suffocate from
my own grief, from love unspent. But suicide

is not a flower you can press; it is the kind
that leaves bitterness on your tongue.

Nothing feels like healing yet. Not the rain,
not the robin nor the redbud.

I just know I'll never leave another letter unwritten,
never leave my words to dry between blank pages

of words unsaid, every pressed flower
a promise I intend to keep.