

## **From Breath to Bloom**

*Morgan Anne Feeney*

It is not unlike the blossoming of a bud  
This quick scission, one cell  
Into many spores

Formed in long chains, rounded and pinched to split  
One cell-in-waiting from its sister cells,  
Also dormant.

Like a blossom, this development comes with colors  
Blue spreading out from the cells, deep-dark enough to purple the agar plate  
The red stays inside the cells, like a secret held tight

And the spores are cloaked in gray coats, complacent in their waiting.

Take a breath -- the air carries with it the smell of rain,  
Of summer sun-decked forests hit by the first few drops, the start of the storm.

In the lab with rows of benches and high-backed chairs, we demystify it:  
Volatile geosmin, earthy odorant, signalling molecule  
Made, by curious pathways, by these spores

Spores that hold more secrets - other pathways, hidden  
instructions that trace the veins - blue webworks under your skin,  
Soft sappy paths in plants, the patterning of leaves and petals  
inherited mechanisms, all written out in large letters.

Letters lead to calculations, the tick-tock of molecular clocks,  
The blossoming of cell to spores, the waiting --  
The silence, the signals, the final, long-awaited growth.

Morgan Anne Feeney : I've loved literature from my childhood, but came to science as an adult, starting with a summer spent in lab as an undergraduate. I then did a PhD in microbiology in Boston, and moved to Norwich for a post-doc five years ago. I'm studying how soil bacteria sense oxidative stress.