"The Azaleas" or "Azaleas"

"When you go," "If you go" begin two translations
of the great poem by Kim Sowol,
whose azaleas, which burn in version A,
are gathered twice on a green mountainside, or perhaps a hill.

Are the famous flowers in armfuls or in another measure,
unspecified?
Is she through with him, or just sick and tired
is what choice we're left as the poet,
that lover who bids good-bye quietly
or without a word,
is left, we conclude, with emptiness.

Some evenings in her dim office we translated
the minor poets—Mi Kyung with dictionary,
her desk light a yellow island,
me with pacing coffee about to make
art out of the least utterance, out of
the brown creaking of her dusty chair.
Mostly her voice became soft
when she began to read
her finished drafts—title first,
inflection dropping in lyric pain—a cultural obsession—
followed by a dark pause for stillness:
"Spring Night" "Paper Kite"
"To the Wind" "Musky Scent"
"Rainy Day" . . . She was afraid, she said,
it would not sound the same or right in English

but it's all I can know, the translations, and so today
I will not weep or show tears,
perish or die, but want
to scatter, strew azaleas in her path
before her light, soft, gentle, gentle step.

Richard Terrill