

## FLOOD

*for Cheryle*

I sing you a river dry.  
It should hold a thrash of sturgeon  
under the bare ass moon, silted wind  
with its cargo of sorrow straight  
from the Sea of Cortez.

Through shelterbelts a century  
strong with scars of stars  
in the meaningless night  
the river will breathe past buffalo grass

and bridge pilings, your eyeless  
sleep just before the first  
tractors groan through fencerows  
and haystack shadows.

I sing a river dry.  
The murmur of sandbars  
in your arid ear,  
the green one that burns  
to a preacher's sermon.

I am not the bard of the western  
ache, you are not water  
carving its name  
into a continent's skin.

I sing you a broken dam,  
eclipsed like a lonely steer,  
forgotten lover watering  
brome and bindweed  
with herbicidal prayers.

Listen. Here I sulk,  
cottonwood snag.  
I will catch a story  
from horizon's oxbow,  
slip six state lines  
to surprise you.

I sing you a river dry.  
Its branches will bend  
a mind around your season's  
grief and tease you down the miles.

## UNTIL RAIN BLENDS OUR BLUES

In what feels like earth's last epoch I just watch  
your hair kink into curls as you sleep, trying  
to remember what I was wasting when you rebuilt

the retaining wall all those flowers ago.  
I could steal into your journal: all morning  
your green eyes frowned over a pen's tremble,

some dumb tv show nattering, cluttering  
our cobwebs. Shattered beauty, I am kissing  
those hands that stacked two thousand bricks,

marveling at the rivers without answer branching  
blue and sunless below. On good afternoons  
we whistle at the moon, bumblebees frizzing

in the echinacea. Again and again I forget  
to water the tomatoes, the birds, myself.  
Remind me again how to be decent, honor

your evergreen limbs bounding in time  
with my wedding reception dance moves,  
your stillness as they slipped that needle

in your spine, my ritual cleaning of the PICC  
line stiffening your vein. Forgive us brown  
bagging booze through town laughing then

screaming, who stared on Vesuvius unbreathing,  
who drive godless toward another tourniqueted  
sunset, who will gift these bodies that lolled

in Mediterranean foam to be unpuzzled and fed  
into flames by scientists yet to be born, wend  
our way through another Thursday night

with soup on the stove and clouds piling up  
like headstones over our playground  
that is a cenotaph, a sick-ward, a garden.

Dream of sidewalk chalk and I'll write  
our names on every block so won't be  
forgotten until we're forgotten.

## ODE TO A BONEYARD DOG

Poetry is a bum tooth. You shaved how many graveyards,  
    mouth a feedlot for chaw, butts, whiskeys, nicknames  
of girls who knew better and that's why they rode with you

toward split-rail hangovers, the wig-shop burning, ancestors  
    unbeautiful in funeral suits, Nebraska a word spat by men  
in shirtsleeves or a buzzing chorus of whatever bugs were left

to maze the poison-slick greenery of Ponca where the last  
    Indian bar withered under a drought no rainmaker could  
slake. Dribble Schlitz down a furry neck, red beers slung

toward women who will kiss you for a dime and disappear,  
    turn your gimlet eye toward the last cold snap of the last  
shitty century, no more double wides, fat lips, rent men, liver

biopsies, casings numbered by bored detectives, the great bruises  
    of night darkening Omaha's shoulders. No more parents,  
brother cooling in a furnished apartment, no more burnt steaks

and blood drives, end-times roulette of the glovebox mint tin  
    rattling with white crosses and pink hearts, Jerry Jeff  
on the tape deck to woo a stranger huffing locker cleaner, winter

liquor kissing the wheels. Reaganomics whittling towns to ruins  
    while AstroTurf cliques drove you toward the pylons  
and railroad bridges buffalo grass couldn't beatify, rehab coffee

and rigorous honesty any weekend away, skinheads at the drive-thru,  
    brawlers and ladykillers no match for cell death. So put down  
your sick god. Kill the engine. Pour your last dose into gravegrass

while you slur the serenity prayer. Dear bard of the western  
    ache, your poems will murmur constellations of scars  
and chemo port sores like moths on a busted screen door.