

FORTY DAYS OF DROUGHT

Sun was the peen of a smith's hammer.
We were heated red but not flattened. Sparks
bounced off the rim of prairie nights.
Aunt Vi and other old folks called it
heat lightning. Nothing to do with rain.
Aunt Vi visited kin, sharing her Mason jars
of last year's green largess.

The earth rattled like a giant gourd
full of dead seeds. Three counties surrendered
dust to corkscrew breezes. Wind-coils tightened,
etched our windows with looted loam. Our land
sifted into drawers, beds, books, iced tea glasses
as we sipped and pressed them against foreheads
and cheeks. Our teeth gritted on words. Our dreams
scorched, incurled like spores that wouldn't sprout.
Aunt Vi seasoned the meatloaf with grated irony.

Stubborn Midwest faces refused to dry in lines
of rancor. Something in the genes: saturnine,
satirical, sudden-turning on a family joke,
giggle to guffaw to knee-slap. Old roots twined
below the water table, fused around bedrock.

We listened to Sinatra, Bach, Garth Brooks
while anvil-heads gathered and thunderclouds
bloated without spilling their promises.
Our prayers the reverse of Noah's, we made
ourselves quit gazing up at the glare
as if our eyes were necessary to the process.

Monday, Aunt Vi vowed she was having rain pains
in her barometric big toe. Noon gravity tugged
the cumulus into a shape like Italy. It sagged.
Lean. Black. The boot's tongue flopped down,
licked away our silo. We found it later
a mile off in a single shiny wet spot.

Aunt Vi always could tch! better than anybody.
She said that crazy auger drilled a hole in the sky.
Tomorrow, she announced, rain would pour through it.

It did. Honest rain all across the state.
She nodded, gave us her sassiest "Told you!" grin.
Just before her heart serenely stopped.

--Glenna Holloway