

Blank Song
sang blanc

He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow bone

--William Butler Yeats, "A Prayer for Old Age"

Blank Songs

Day after I'm told
chemo's on the horizon
Archer season six.

◦

I'm fifty-two, haemoglobin, platelets, and lymphocytes
low, marrow, as they say, suppressed, after three days
chemo six days ago. Two in the morning, a warm
and humid air mass, a nomadic meteorological sauna,
looms over the city the next two days. My mind's
tongue's been still, my writing hand holding a book,
muse ear deaf...

◦

Instead of saying
say my heart

is heavy but
that's just because

my fire's burning
low I say

In the immortal
words of Hank

Williams "We're still
livin' so everything's

ok" when asked
How are you?

◦

No point drawing
back from the world

when the threat's
in the bones.

The Chemical Brothers

They work me over
three days. The women
are friendly and efficient.

They sit me down,
adjust the chair, then
dose me with three

kinds of steroids, Tylenol,
and something that makes
me drowsy. Then they set

The Mouse on me
for almost an hour.
Then Cy' and 'Rabine

get their thirty minutes
each. The next two
days it's just them.

You don't feel the blows,
but they reach the gut's
lining, the marrow. For

days your urine's a
dark tea. A queasiness
fills your stomach

and eyes and brain
teaching you the difference
between appetite and hunger.

Too tired to sleep,
you doze and sweat
for a week. And

two weeks later, you're
scheduled to see The Unc,
who takes his vials

of blood and tells
you to come back
after the weekend for

the next round.

Independence Day 2013

The summer my niece married in Virginia
five days after the diagnosis received

a week before my last manuscript got turned
down we rented a holiday cabin

overlooking the Shenandoah Valley.
The Fourth of July, after a local Kölsch

aperitif, ratatouille and pork chop
dinner inspired by the kitchen's cookbook

with a fine French red wine, I rolled and lit most
of a thumbnail sized bud gifted me this side

of the border. The evening's birdsong seemed
to rise from more and varied throats than any

other since we arrived (a right hip pain nags
for explanation: my niece's too-soft

guest bed? nascent lymphoma like what seems
swelling in my groin?) as if the birds witnessed

what happened when a bang on the cabin's big
window drew us out to find before our door,

twisted, stunned, yellow, yawning beak slowly
closing, a grey-brown cuckoo. Pity made us

think first to maybe crush its head under foot
but enough fight when I tried to shroud her

in a red cloth napkin counseled patient
indulgence in fate. Now, already sitting

dizzily askew, half-lidded, beak half
open, we set a plate of water near and

sheltered her from the noon under a green
plastic deck chair. Still there when we got back

from driving into town, roused by rain water
splashed on her from the chair when we pushed it

aside, she sat there unmoving as we went
inside to unpack our groceries and leave her

be. So silently we didn't notice she
hopped away and flew off. Reminded now of

how needful it is to just lean back and watch
the skies, make passing cars and wild yahoo

hoots musical, perceive the trees' growth patterns
as Nature thinking Nature's thinking, a skull

cloud floating in the dusk, grinning, dissolves.

Blue Ridge Mountains, Luray, VA