

OLD HABITS

Into the blossoming essence of April,
my twelve-year-old dog leads me out to the trestle,
and we head west between white-flowered thickets,
the wild plums abloom either side of the trail.

Unleashed at last from the day's cares, I run
out of old habit, like a dog in a dream
tracking down a long-gone litter of pups and
fetching them back one or two at a time—

*Happy and Lucky, Tiny and Snowball,
Willie and Nikki, Kelly and Ace,
Pee-Wee, both Peppers (one spotted, one black),
Fred and Barney, Duke, the two Belles,*

*Cory, Yoda, Rowdy, Rusty,
Rocky, Aries, Aspen and Trey,
Mattie, Emmet, Jenny, Blizzard,
Buddy, the Gypsy—each of them rare,*

a perfect misfit in a misshapen pack
of pedigreed pointers, coonhounds, retrievers,
a cross-bred assortment of happenchance mutts,
howlers and barkers, bay-ers, yarkers,

beggars and stealers, old lollygaggers,
bold tail-sniffers, wild trouble-makers,
loafers and tireless pissers of tires,
each without question a best-friend for life.

Out to the feedlot and back to the trestle,
trailing Smoke, the living heart of the pack,
I hear in the blossoming rasp of her panting
the approach of the dreamer that will fetch us all home.