

# Decoration Day

*Jillyn Carpenter*

No funeral today, but the town  
has business at its cemetery.  
Dust leads the procession;  
handles of rakes and hoes protrude  
from pickup beds, trunks of cars.  
Hardened hands grip steering wheels  
jounced by the washboard road, stabilize  
Mason jars filled with bridal wreath,  
peonies, forsythia, iris—called flags.  
New this year: coat hanger wreaths  
made of pastel tissues.

A coyote evacuates; rabbits  
and desert rats crouch in burrows  
made precarious, while boots  
and sturdy shoes make a day of it.  
Front-aproned women, some  
with bargain names already carved,  
bend and fuss at mounds  
as if their dead are sick or on a trip;  
weathered men hoe tumbleweeds,  
scratch at dirt, lean on tools,  
pull handkerchiefs from back pockets,  
blow and snuffle.

Death is so dry. Dusty children  
drink from the single tap,  
wipe their mouths, trudge the perimeter,  
wrestle through stories of loss  
in childbirth, orphans, drowning,  
choking. They hear the syllables  
of influenza, consumption, meningitis.  
They stop for a shooting accident,  
a man who tripped on his shoelaces.  
At lightning, one looks at the black cloud  
growing above fifty-mile mountain.