

POEM FOR MARTHA

"I don't believe there's such a thing as courage,"
you said once. Winter weather of an x-ray
snapshot, clever chemistry and radiance

of launched electrons. One stranger, a Czech,
sends you chicken marrow illegal here,
and acupressure soothes the pain. Another

time you said, "Life's too short for drinking
mediocre wine." Since I've known you,
we've seldom spoken of the cancer or your

paintings of ghostly flowers, all the muted
sunflame they harbor, but in this
fading nautical twilight on an Irish hill,

I lit a candle to the courage that fuels
you. The church, a medieval ruin,
the prayer: "Stay by this woman, her sons

and husband, hold her to Your heart closer
than the shadow of eternal bone." This one
message I would send transatlantic: within

the grim discovery, it's the radiance
of working will that sanctifies and holds on.
Hours later, I sit at the window, while

Mick Tracey tunes his rosewood fiddle
and gets it right till even sorrow is a song.