CHRIS KETCHUM

Elegy for Your Whereabouts

—for N

you heard gunshots by

the moon-limned banks

of Paradise Creek

and spooked into the cottonwoods

I followed you

I followed even though

I didn’t believe in bullets

not in this town not in my home

wind splintered the branches

an engine popped at the traffic light

anything I didn’t believe

you were truly afraid

until weeks later

when your father wouldn’t let you in

and I didn’t answer the phone

you rode down A Street

to the decommissioned silo

where a nest of hay-stuck blankets

fleeced the concrete floor
I wish that I had known
about the emptied foils
of Sudafed their crushed-out
blisters strewn and gleaming
winter’s guttered leaves blown in
lithium-crusted batteries
their positive anodes opened
like eyes on sleepless nights
ammonia piss a bone
-colored quart jug of lye
forgive me I didn’t
even think to think of you
as your white rabbit
of lantern light ducked in
and out of its hole
I thought you were calling to smoke
how could I have known
the way you painted human shadows
on the steel corrugated wall
tossed a black-capped can of Rust-Oleum
below the floating graffiti how

you would become the opposite of a body

outlined in chalk

like you were never there

like you were never anywhere at all

how you laid your head

on a black bunched-up coat

and called once into the

dark

how nothing in the dark called back