The Flood I Pray For

The sun burns white on the iron roof,
the paddocks crack and sigh,
and every road that leaves this place
runs empty, long and dry.

The tanks are low, the dams are dust,
the riverbed is stone,
and somewhere past the boundary fence
my drover works alone.

Each afternoon I take my place
out on the weathered floor,
one hand above my squinting eyes
and stand upon the porch.

“Tea in ten!” I call aloud
to children in the yard,
their laughter chasing swirling dirt
across the baking hard.

Bare feet red and shirts undone,
they play till daylight fades,
too young to know how silence grows
when love rides drought for days.

His hat still hangs behind the door,
his boots sit where he stood,
a layer of the country dust
still dried into the wood.

The wireless speaks of scattered rain
in towns an hour away,
and I pretend I didn’t hear
each hopeful word they say.

By night, when every child’s asleep
and heat won’t let me rest,
I sit beside the open screen
with prayers I don’t confess.

Irene Johnston, Whiddon Wee Waa

Assisted by Lifestyle Officer Cassandra

The Flood I Pray For

Dear Lord, don't send a teasing drop,
don't cool the ground then clear -
break open every cloud You've held on too
and bring the river here.

Let thunder roll across the flats,
let black soil drink its fill,
let every crossing disappear
and every road stand still.

I'd never wish for trouble, no -
I know what floods can do,
but if the waters cut us off
he can't drive straight back through.

The trucks would stop, the phones go quiet,
the town would slow its pace,
and just a few small borrowed days
would keep him in this place.

His boots would sit beside the bed,
his laugh fill up the shed,
his hands would lift the sleepy kids
and tuck them in instead.

So I watch the sky each evening
as the heat bleeds from the land,
where the gravel meets the horizon line
and the dust meets my bare hands.

For out here love is measured not
by words or grand display -
but distance, time, and waiting long
for someone's homeward way.

And though the drought has hardened me
like earth beneath the sun,
sometimes a wife will pray for floods
just to hold her wandering one

Irene Johnston, Whiddon Wee Waa

Assisted by Lifestyle Officer Cassandra