Foxgloves

By Laura Webb

After Van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*

The story that Vincent's paintbrush told
was sunny in those final months,
and I always thought that colours hold

our moods. But then I didn't know
that digitalis tints vision gold,
creates ripples, swirls, haloes

so I was ready to believe that stars
are stirred into the sky, that the yellows
of sunflowers can float from a vase

and that every stalk of wheat in Auvers
converges to meet the horizon's arms
at a single vanishing-point. I cared

for Vincent, truly. Often he'd call
to paint together *en plain air*,
discuss the ways that light can fall

across a scene. Whenever I asked
whether his spirits had lifted at all
with the digitalis, to the very last

he answered yes. And yet I sensed
a moment's hesitation. Perhaps
I always saw him at his best;

he loved the garden, how it became
a riot of flowers in June, how hens
and cats and roosters had reclaimed

the wildest parts. At the end of each day,
the foxgloves, nodding, would remain
when paintbrushes were packed away.