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The Bassoonist

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THE BASSOONIST

His was a life that ached for form early on
It needed something outside
 to rhyme with what it was
something it could leave behind later

And so he played bassoon
because bassoon, like life, was hard
 No one, hardly, played it
so he was in great demand

The sound it made (we knew this)
was really just his body
 honking against the twilight
it already belonged to

—a winged thing getting
not quite off the ground
 calling to the other flying things
to *wait*

The face the double reed disappeared into
was pocked well
 cratered really
For its red and purple hues there is no word but *angry*

He read the notes barely
through a curtain of stringy hair
 But our quintet couldn't be
a quintet without him

 which gave to his life
a certain necessity lasting
 through a very long series of rehearsals
made even longer because his ideas about

rhythm were rather original
and he had to be convinced
by the band director singing right into his ear
how his part went

I don't remember now
how I first found out that his ugliness
was guaranteed
to kill him before he turned thirty

Thirty today, that field of volcanoes
then the knobby lips then the
chewed straw of the double reed
appear to me again

The face is still that pool
a small boy has fired fistfuls of pebbles into
— He is that boy
That pond is his own face

What self can do to self
scares me still
But now I also wonder why a shame so deep
it burrows inward through the face

and sucks at you from underneath
for the brief time forever is
fell to this boy
to be our first example of

When the band took to the field
in our neat red blazers
we felt him among us, out of step
like a bad cell

A bassoon is too delicate isn't it
to march with in the rain
So for a pretty price all of us
cut him off and didn't miss him

Not when we reshuffled into a quartet
and couldn't find music
for just
flute clarinet oboe horn

Not when we saw him propped in the bleachers
gazing on our formations with a scrambled contempt
Not even when we saw the returned bassoon
dismembered snug in its velvet casket