

Fifth Grade

Everyone is a wonderful poet through fourth grade  
---Dean Young

The fish can no longer be  
of whatever color it please  
God. Trees have pulled up  
their pants into a postcard  
of autumn. What are these girls  
doing here, different from anything  
in nature or the imagination? Your dick  
that was a clown nose is now  
a piece of the rood, and here is a friend  
to venerate the mysteries  
with you. Your pencils lose weight  
and there is your hair in the mirror  
like crazed starlings. The corn snake  
must curl in his cage, not wind  
through the bookshelves  
where he used to fork his tongue  
over all the old paper. Now the world,  
once so close, moves away, and you must learn  
its forwarding address with your fingers  
cut on the envelope of tomorrow  
where the seven magic words  
for your body that once dangled  
from each day's dictionary  
have gone missing. Snacks refuse to appear  
on tables but must be dug out of cold corners  
and spilled for collection across the hardest floor  
in the house. The sky grows into atmosphere  
and the dancing animal clouds  
stack themselves in an order  
you must get right for the test, their secret names  
burned away in the stale smoke of dead language.

## Hand

When every bluff ends finally in the muck  
of chance, and the blade-thin luck you get to hold  
goes dull, scraping away at your limited stake,  
what you need to get out of this universal hole

(that is not so much black as blind)  
is to know when to dare and when to fold  
your arms or the laundry or the last lonely pair of kings  
on earth—O paper monarchs!—and when to sweeten a pot

with departure, turn your back on a bet  
and walk out with your spine finally straight,  
no more waiting for any kind of boat,  
no hope your ship's come in. Now you can ace

the test, conquer long odds, enjoy the trips  
and falls, the playful clink of your last chips.

## A Walk with Charlie Haden's Bass

Pulse less pulmonary than spinal, the top  
of this bottom is neither time present nor past  
but time pedalled to gong and trance, unrushed  
stroke down the belly of the gods, a faultless quake

that seals the cracks and shakes us off the shelf--  
all the ornament of technique burnished  
to erotic duration, tomorrow's harmony  
if we were tuned this right. His moonless *e*

is what the stars love about midnight, deep purple  
that glows like the timpanum of Arlesian sky,  
no threat of crows but somewhere  
you can't wait to be carried. This is one

promenade through fission of body and soul,  
rubato of restoration rung together  
until sunlight and midnight are one, roots so huge  
they burst blues' stone against the mallet fine,

tuber and stock under the family tree  
of matins and vesper erupted to the surface  
and mapped like veins along the body we share,  
changes that press from shadowed fingers

of major sorrow into minor bliss, each note  
an animal moan of sunrise, its depth simpler  
than childhood's fretless dark where blindness  
is a vision we can only hope for

in high notes like arrows to wake organs  
in their *bass*. The foundation  
racks our spheres into order and tremors  
where moan turns to song in the darkness

where children sleep, music so low  
it is heard and unheard where melodies merge,  
as if all books in their earthly silence  
would open to us and we could  
finally read winter without the hope of spring.

## Nap

Spring is like a disobedient mutt today,  
won't come when called. This afternoon,

drifting out into May's grey inlet  
in the skiff of my bed, all the busy reef

of sleep goes phosphorescent  
in the particle trail of you

that rises into speech in my fingers,  
the small of my back, and the rain replies

with your name on the windows,  
its iambs lifting the ark of us out into the flooding world.

I open the bilingual dictionary of dream at random  
and my eyes light like moths on words:

*jornero, joya, jubileo,*  
the happy jewel of work between us

and I sink down into afternoons we embrace,  
the breath of you like the trace of cool fog

just past the pane or the sparrow knocking  
now to get in, tapping out your syllables

and meter—you with your hair of wood fire,  
your smell of morel and ground,

legs of rubbed amber and sienna ash,  
the minor triads of your turned-out feet.

And are you holding some sonata in your lap  
or cradling the voices of eleven children in your two hands

poem continues with stanza break

thinking in the dawn *I grew up in the rain*  
or *Every night is like all the Pyrenees?*

Then sleep lands on me again  
like a wing, the memory of our last night

like fireflies invisible behind the house  
as they listen to the wasps

just stumbling awake,  
taking their lazy turn, and waiting.

## Storm

Words are only shadows  
that can't imagine us.

This pulse is our true text,  
what you would call *a bundle of facts*,

a montuno of muscle and blood  
like a length of road

we travel to the horizon and beyond,  
past tonight's lightning and its sound

track overhead, a backbeat boom  
like the one that echoes in the numb

chambers of my chest and out the womb of my mouth,  
that strikes dumb the drum of my breath

with drought every time I speak a line  
that does not rain down your name.