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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