1999

Bad Cello

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5186
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BAD CELLO

My bad cello! I love it too much, my note to almost note, my almost Bach, my almost Haydn, two who heard things falling off a shelf—they never thought that was music. Try wind at night, one whispers. Try that against your good night’s sleep. Still, something’s passing, same as grief—there’s no word for it. Same as joy but only in the flourish of up and down, the way a note is held—or held off—too long.

Certain afternoons are private, forsythia against the window, its hundreds of branches I should have cut in summer, their scratch-scratch-scratchity. So I practice to them, so I practice with them.

I keep thinking how Brahms slept right through my childhood, that print in a frame above my grandmother’s threadbare couch, and how I loved his face completely. His eyes were closed. He leaned against the piano. And above him all those other faces—Beethoven and Bach and Mozart—misty currents they floated in said dream, said go away, Brahms is having a vision right now, said Brahms needs his nap.
It’s just that—bad cello!—
the rondo? I like it, like to play it twice because
no words! Because I do it
so badly! Delicious part
going minor, right
down the hole, neither-what I thought-nor-

LEAVES IN FALL

They come down, straight down or crooked,
fast or drunken. Wind might do it,
might call the cruel trick but they’re
starving anyway, light’s sugar
nothing so sweet now,
and then this mysterious business
of turning a drastic color. I rake.
I rake the damn sad things
all morning, past lunch.
What was I thinking?

That certain things
have to be done. That the earth
orbits slowly. That beauty gives up
its beauty. Huge piles of it—
maple’s yellow, the elm’s ghost gray,
hackberry with its sulfurous boils
curled tight. Maybe someone else
said this: the sky is a pearl, darkening.
Or this: it’s bad milk, not a cloud
against anything.

So I rake
and drag it all on a tarp to the curb, the heavy
scrape scrape of it past birdbath