

MAJOR RHAPSODY IN F SHARP MINOR

You didn't expect him here
with silk hangings and life-size classic sculpture.
He made no entrance, he suddenly was
onstage, easy as moonlight, fitting with fountains
and topiary as if here had always been his backdrop.
But when he moved and smiled-- you knew--
you knew he was a trumpet man.

Son of a thin ragged line inhaling used smoke
mixed with applause to blow from rubber cheeks.
Son of the hard-molded case-followers,
those rolled-up bus riders
down the stretched streaking nights,
closing their painted eyes and seeing brass
hanging over them-- begging to be snatched
and hidden for a night or two of peace, watching it
turn to an armored snake in their jealous hands,

hearing it tongue out tarnished laughter
on three ribs, belling out morning and a hangover
in some town they mispronounced.

You didn't see this loose-angled one pick it up.
The instrument came like quick cell division
from his lip. And the sound began--
uncoiling slow, coming for you, crawling
into your head, changing the texture
of your bare arms. You know that sound, mama?
Nothing as simple as ever-popular heartbreak
or phantom train whistles-- nothing
as definite as a tenor sobbing Eili, Eili
or wild animals moaning up the moon. His eyes
ignite and lightning arcs from his hair,
striking the conductor zapping it
into your gravity center. The sound, mama,
leaching tones out of the marble statues,
out of your wine glass, rearranging molecules,
making them glow like neon fog, fulminating
red and purple, alive like magnified ocean drops.

How much is music, key lowered now, half a step,
gone minor again, flowing that little groove
where pain runs convex to the surface? How much
is the glint of crystal hung from mirrored arches,
moving faintly with audience breath,
striking flints in his pale eyes?