

Jan. 1997  
edited

MAJOR RHAPSODY IN C-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 was always his place.  
But the way 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, 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 explainable 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 caryatids,  
out of your wine glass, rearranging molecules,  
making them glow like neon fog, fulminating  
red and purple, alive like magnified ocean drops.

(cont.)