

Fade

1. my hair

Derrick, you watched my hair grow
until I could pull it back
into one of those short little
granola boy pony tails
and you never said a word
but smiled and smiled broader
when you saw me later
at a pow wow
and you were a cop and it
was a real braid

when I cut it
you asked me why—
mourning
I said and never grew it back
let it turn grey
learning to have it cut
to work with the curls I always hated
it took years and you quit the force with
a back injury so you were back at school
guarding the door

and on that morning you said
Schlemp you're looking shaggy
I'd be happy to bring in my clippers
tomorrow
and give you a fade
there is no way I'd let you
touch my hair I said
besides I have a haircut appointment
this afternoon. This afternoon
was less that we had
I left you at the front door
laughing at my hair

2. your hand

President Bush called you a hero
all the local Indian dignitaries came out
for your funeral and Father Bill who has a good heart
but always says something wrong at times like this
called you Jeff so many times
your sister banged on the metal casket
with her fist and told the priest to shut up
and I could see you smiling about it
making a joke because you knew what was important
even when you buried your own daughter and told
stories about how wonderful she is
so I didn't even know that she was dead

when I walked out of my room after the shooting stopped
your friends who had been my students and had become cops
were standing in the hall crying and hugging each other
and your body was lying right in front of my door
covered with the welcome mat
your right hand stuck out from under it,
palm up like you were reaching for something
or ready to take my hand

3. my hallway

for the rest of that year I walked
around the place where you lay
in my hallway
sometimes I could still see you there
covered with the welcome mat
your right hand stuck out or in your uniform
like you were in your coffin where I touched your hand
and said good bye
but in my hallway you were always on the floor
waiting for us to do something
and this may sound strange but besides feeling sad
and scared and a little freaked out by it all
I was strangely comforted

4. new construction

this year they built off the front door
toward the west
and walled off the doorway with OSB and wire
so the space in front of my room is dead
no security no light only gangsters hanging out
and fighting each other when I'm not
standing there or even when I am
they don't care and I don't think
they even know any more why they want to kill
each other
over something that happened in the past
or generations ago that someone never got over
but this year I am doing things differently
everyone has to say hello to everyone else
and shake hands
when they come in the room
the kids from treatment think it is an AA meeting
but we also play games where you throw a ball
around the circle until everyone touches it
then we do it faster and with more balls until
sometimes some of the gangbangers laugh
have fun and loosen up with each other
and there are three or four balls flying back and forth
like spirits

5. resurrection

I started that Monday fresh and put together
a new still life for Halloween
with a jack o lantern and a mummy coming out
of a coffin
after lunch we were going to sculpt bones and skulls
of porcelain
I went to the teachers' lounge to make copies
news on the TV about the shootings in the school at Nickel Mines
and something shattered in my chest
heat rose in my neck and I stood

where you had fallen
and ranted
I want to know what is wrong with people why
we can't just live happy without
having to get back at god
by killing someone and why
I care when most people seem not to
when all I get is grief and why
I feel responsible
and why
I cannot stop shaking

6. desensitization and reprogramming

*on a scale of one to ten how much
they ask me
does this image intrude
in your thoughts*

packed with splinters of what was broken
that day
shards of glass slick with blood
air shot with shrieks and buzzers bells emergency strobes smoke
a thin sliver of light under my door
darkness

*on a scale of one to seven
they ask me
how would I rate
the way I feel*

the rough nubs on the thighs of the pilled old pants I wear to work clay
the soft leather and hard metal of the watch I can't read in the dark
no matter which way I twist
I should get to the phone and call someone or
out the window no
they might be waiting for us like that one shooting—
the fire alarm
God

don't let them go
outside
someone is screaming and running
what time is it no
don't turn on the light
don't move
don't breathe

when the bell rings for the end of the day I stand up and open the door
how stupid I think
but it is a reason
I creep to the hallway and peek out
see cops and
you lying there covered with the welcome mat
a bloody footprint on the floor
I was supposed to make a difference

7. the painting

I had one of the students shoot my hand
with the digital camera
so I could paint it the way I saw yours
and I took off my shoes and dipped them
in paint the color of blood and
stepped on the painting so that I am both
the shooter and the victim
I don't understand
why I painted it
I don't want
to see this stuff anymore

the FBI and tribal police tell us to cover
all the windows so no one can see in
in the back room I find a half sheet of Masonite
the right size
on which you had painted
a basketball and your hand touching it
with only the fingertips
a slow motion close-up

of the game winning jump shot
the moment the ball
begins to spin away

for Derrick Brun