

A High School Night between 12:16 and 12:19

Paul Brucker

It's a glorious evening. The air's a warm tea.
The moon winks a warning with its one good eye.

I walk slowly beside you and wait
for you to say something tender or look my way.

We step into the park where my sister buried her hamsters --
Horatio, Hubert the Hopeless and Harold (named for the last Saxon king).

You smell like your older sister, the French horn player
who sits beside me and plays too loud and flat.

I almost blab about the Loudon Valley tennis match
everyone counted on me to win so we could go to State.

You scratch your nose three times; stifle a cough, then cough.
My left sock sinks below my ankles again.

I know every gain has to be paid for, but I discern
white peonies, which legend says help the love-struck.

So I wait agreeably then say, "I love you."
You stare at a spot on my forehead and shake your head.

"The free life is best," you say,
then reach into your skirt and slip on a class ring.

"It's from Larry," you say.

That average redhead basketball player, three years ahead of us.

I suffer a sucker punch to the stomach,
while my left sock sinks again, according to its nature.

I shuffle to the playground to slump on a bench
designed to be a horse, llama or who knows what.

You evaporate into the dark,
stage left or right. It makes little difference.
It's an old story that remains ever new
and if it happens to you, it breaks your heart in two.

I reach into my jacket for a Robert Burns cigar.
Several flicks later, the match catches fire.

My pain, I assume, will in due course diminish
according to the brightness of its stimulus.

I rotate the cigar for better burn and improved flavor,
then try to shrug like Marcello Mastroianni in "La Dolce Vita."

A breeze brushes the leaves of the ash trees --
the warm-hearted ash trees that always try their best to bless.

My waterproof Timex says "12:19."
The church clock across the street says "12:16."