

Last Visit Home

Wes Hempel

My parents are lying in their house
Down this stretch of street now a sea
of walnut leaves the sidewalk turns
to dirt beneath my feet becoming bare
some part of me eager and small

(did I imagine them falling
out of planes
crossing center dividers
left slumped on the rug
by a man in a stocking?)

When I look at the sky it parts
above the corner lamps buzzing on
and whole minutes like years
over the reach of yellow grass
strangling wild vines choking
honeysuckle and ivy on these trees

When there is no train
I hear its distant wail
climb the gabled roof
the small of my back
flush against the chimney
see its thin grey plume
and houses in the neighborhood
where it is always Autumn

The tangled roots beneath the trunk
of that oak in the schoolyard where
I hunched that remarkable Fall over
blue paper sheets against my knees
scribbling secret messages

Then left them
stabbed through twigs
astonishing blue leaves
for you to find

Dear Frances
tonight beside this broken sky
I almost remember what they said