

## Marianne Boruch

### BAD CELLO

My bad cello! I love it  
too much, my note to almost note,  
my almost Bach, my almost Haydn, two who  
heard things falling off a shelf—  
they never thought that  
was music. Try wind  
at night, one whispers. Try that  
against your good night's  
sleep. Still, something's passing, same  
as grief—there's no  
word for it. Same as joy  
but only in the flourish of up and down, the way  
a note is held—or held off—  
too long.

Certain afternoons are  
private, forsythia against the window,  
its hundreds of branches I should have  
cut in summer, their  
scratch-scratch-scratchity. So I practice  
*to* them, so I practice  
*with* them.

I keep thinking  
how Brahms slept right through  
my childhood, that print in a frame  
above my grandmother's threadbare couch, and how  
I loved his face completely. His eyes  
were closed. He leaned against the piano.  
And above him all those  
other faces—Beethoven and Bach and Mozart—  
misty currents they floated in said *dream*, said  
*go away*, *Brahms is having a vision right now*,  
said *Brahms needs his nap*.

It's just that—bad cello!—  
the rondo? I like it, like to play it twice because  
*no words!* Because *I do it*  
*so badly!* Delicious part  
going minor, right  
down the hole, neither-what I thought-nor-  
what I dreamt. Dark in there. Strange.

### LEAVES IN FALL

They come down, straight down or crooked,  
fast or drunken. Wind might do it,  
might call the cruel trick but they're  
starving anyway, light's sugar  
nothing so sweet now,  
and then this mysterious business  
of turning a drastic color. I rake.  
I rake the damn sad things  
all morning, past lunch.  
What was I thinking?

That certain things  
have to be done. That the earth  
orbits slowly. That beauty gives up  
its beauty. Huge piles of it—  
maple's yellow, the elm's ghost gray,  
hackberry with its sulfurous boils  
curled tight. Maybe someone else  
said this: the sky is a pearl, darkening.  
Or this: it's bad milk, not a cloud  
against anything.

So I rake  
and drag it all on a tarp to the curb, the heavy  
*scrape scrape* of it past birdbath