

Nick Norwood

LB ON THE VIOLIN

Or fiddle, in appliance-service blues,
 Larry in red script over his right breast,
 half a shirttail out, grease stains at the knees,
only the nerdy black glasses aslide

on his nose hinting at the kid he was
 growing up on a pig farm in Ashdown,
 Arkansas, this ball-capped deer-hunting father
of four, repairman of Frigidaires, Whirlpools,

Maytags, and Amanas, wrench-turner née
 class clown, amid the Tuesday grind and clamor
 of the repair shop hid behind swinging doors
back of the appliance store's gleaming showroom,

leaning against an oily workbench lit
 by banked florescents suspended on chains,
 his fellow gearheads whooping at this latest
of LB's legendary capers—asking

Now, where in the hell did he get that thing?—
 until LB tunes up and begins to play,
 the battered relic tucked under his chin,
a sudden serious set to his lips,

his eyes fixed on something invisible
 hovering at waist level above the floor:
 a few strains of some simple cowboy song
that speed up into a bluegrass breakdown

and lilt into a Beethoven sonata
 played imperfectly but with the clear ring
 of having once been practiced, learned, sure-felt;
rich keening notes that seem so alien

here, the room itself, thrust into relief,
 blooms into a state of the hyper real:
 a clutter of tools and machinery,
triaged washers and dryers with mouths agape,

the syrupy tang of transmission oil
and unsentimental quality of the light.

It makes the other servicemen stop working
altogether and listen, bemused, become

an audience of music lovers with odd
heart-happy smiles on their smudged, sweating faces,
their eyes fixed on Larry, then carried up
into the steel-beam rafters of the room

where their focus hangs momentarily,
seemingly suspended, like their wry smiles,
on wires or puppet strings that gently let
them fall and range slowly around the floor,

until the eyes, the faces, suddenly
morph into something hard, resigned, the men
having remembered, come to, and turned back
to the grime of their steel wrenches, their parts.