

Playing Free

Oh God have they gone out too far this time?
jamming on the club's tiny makeshift stage,
a row of cow skulls watching from the wall
with empty eyes
the sparse audience paralyzed
in ranks of cast-off wooden auditorium seats.

The drummer, my son's childhood friend,
kit wedged in the corner,
tracks rhythms with a lemur's sense of smell
and someone I don't know on the upright bass
booms like the sea on Adderall,
backing up my boy
who stalks the edge
listening hard
barefoot to feel the vibes
thrumming through floorboards,
guitar prizing like a lever.

They begin with some favorite known in the bone,
Zoller's "Hungarian Jazz Rhapsody,"
its opening phrases
waves of clamorous pulse,
driving deliriously outward,
delivering us to a bare shoal
of electrified air.

Then a long cascading chord
like a wire in the brain
sweeps them out again
and again
beyond form
oblivious that we cannot
breathe
the thin air of such abandon.

At the end
they barely find the head
to reel them back
and in the stunned silence
he bails
shoves his guitar off like it's scorching
eyes full and blank
heaves off
heaven or hell
even his mother cannot tell.