Benjamin Smith

roughly, sixty seconds

I told my students to write in their journals about “the moment that changed your life”.
Fifteen pens and six pencils raced across notebooks.
It was a gray morning for the middle of September after four days of rain and raw mud.

To these freshmen it was a Dead Poet’s Society assignment. They don’t understand how contrived it sounds. To me, it was a bridge between the wild writing of high school and the cold analysis of college.

They kept writing, when I considered how I would complete the assignment:

We’ve decided to get a divorce.
"Have you heard of Kurt Vonnegut? I think you’ll like him." She broke my heart.
Another one broke my heart.
I’m not sure I believe in God anymore. She broke my heart. Again.
"Your grandfather died."
"Dad’s in the hospital. It’s pretty bad."
Where’s my name tag? Goddamn it.
"You should probably move out."
"I can’t handle how much you love me."
"It might be cancer."

but then I remember New York last winter, standing two feet from Starry Night seeing the brushstrokes pushing the cobalt sky curling into itself and the haloed city staring at the saucer stars and the aged moon when I started to cry, surrounded by tourists and armed docents.