

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? Goddamnit.
“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.