

# Brian Age Seven

By Mark Doty

Grateful for their tour  
of the pharmacy,  
the first-grade class  
has drawn these pictures,  
each self-portrait taped  
to the window-glass,  
faces wide to the street,  
round and available,  
with parallel lines for hair.

I like this one best: Brian,  
whose attenuated name  
fills a quarter of the frame,  
stretched beside impossible  
legs descending from the ball  
of his torso, two long arms  
springing from that same  
central sphere. He breathes here,

on his page. It isn't craft  
that makes this figure come alive;  
Brian draws just balls and lines,  
in wobbly crayon strokes.  
Why do some marks  
seem to thrill with life,  
possess a portion  
of the nervous energy  
in their maker's hand?

That big curve of a smile  
reaches nearly to the rim  
of his face; he holds  
a towering ice cream,  
brown spheres teetering  
on their cone,  
a soda fountain gift  
half the length of him  
—as if it were the flag

of his own country held high  
by the unadorned black line  
of his arm. Such naked support  
for so much delight! Artless boy,  
he's found a system of beauty:  
he shows us pleasure  
and what pleasure resists.  
The ice cream is delicious.  
He's frail beside his relentless standard.

