

Eddie Priest's Barbershop & Notary

By Kevin Young

Closed Mondays

is music is men
off early from work is waiting
for the chance at the chair
while the eagle claws holes
in your pockets keeping
time by the turning
of rusty fans steel flowers with
cold breezes is having nothing
better to do than guess at the years
of hair matted beneath the soiled caps
of drunks the pain of running
a fisted comb through stubborn
knots is the dark dirty low
down blues the tender heads
of sons fresh from cornrows all
wonder at losing half their height
is a mother gathering hair for good
luck for a soft wig is the round
difficulty of ears the peach
faced boys asking Eddie
to cut in parts and arrows
wanting to have their names read
for just a few days and among thin
jazz is the quick brush of a done
head the black flood around
your feet grandfathers
stopping their games of ivory
dominoes just before they reach the bone
yard is winking widowers announcing
cut it clean off I'm through courting
and hair only gets in the way is the final
spin of the chair a reflection of
a reflection that sting of wintergreen
tonic on the neck of a sleeping snow
haired man when you realize it is
your turn you are next

Notes:

The epigraph of this poem was originally omitted in the changeover to the new website. Because of this, reciting the epigraph is optional for the 2019-2020 Poetry Out Loud season.

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Kevin Young was born in Lincoln, Nebraska. He studied under Seamus Heaney and Lucie Brock-Broido at Harvard University and, while a student there, became a member of the Dark Room Collective, a community of African American writers. "I feel like a poem is made up of poetic and unpoetic language, or unexpected language," Young said in a 2006 interview with Ploughshares. "I think there are many other vernaculars, whether it's the vernacular of the blues, or the vernacular of visual art, the sort of living language of the everyday." For roughly a decade, Young was the Atticus Haygood Professor of Creative Writing and English and curator of Literary Collections and the Raymond Danowski Poetry Library at Emory University. Young is the poetry editor of the *New Yorker* and the director of New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

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