

I am Trying to Break Your Heart

By Kevin Young

I am hoping
to hang your head

on my wall
in shame—

the slightest taxidermy
thrills me. Fish

forever leaping
on the living-room wall—

paperweights made
from skulls

of small animals.
I want to wear

your smile on my sleeve
& break

your heart like a horse
or its leg. Weeks of being

bucked off, then
all at once, you're mine—

Put me down.

I want to call you *thine*

to tattoo *mercy*
along my knuckles. *I assassin*

down the avenue
I hope

to have you forgotten
by noon. To know you

by your knees
palsied by prayer.

Loneliness is a science—

consider the taxidermist's
tender hands

trying to keep from losing
skin, the bobcat grin

of the living.

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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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