

**First Performance of the Rock ‘n’ Roll
Band *Puce Exit***

If puce were sound not color,
 it would be us: Deep Purple,
though more confused and discordant,

our guitars tuned in electric ignorance
 of tone, key, each other—the word
puce derived from the Latin for “flea,”

as appropriate for pests in the hides
 of neighbors—our raucous weekend practice,
pubescent groupies lingering on basement steps,

first on the block to show hearing loss,
 first to wear paisley with polka dots.
And *exit*, of course, because music is

our ticket out. It’s Peggy Wasylenski’s
 fourteenth birthday party, a real gig,
her parents too cool, or simply so new

to America they’re expecting something
 with accordion or banjo, not the freight
we unload from my father’s blue Chevy:

amps, mikes, drums, Christmas color wheels
 for visual effect. We set up in the dirt
floor garage, our amps a wall of sound

maybe knee high across the left bay.
 Everything’s plugged into a quad outlet
above the single ceiling bulb. Orange wires

cascade around us like a waterfall
 of blown fuses. We start, start over,
and start again, until we get right

the three drumstick beat and launch into
 an 18 minute version of “Satisfaction.”
I’m howling “I can’t get no!” even though,

in eighth grade, I’m not sure what it is
 I can’t get any of, but it’s something,
I am sure, I need as badly as any guy

every needed anything, like “voice lessons,”
the drummer screams. On break, we play
spin the bottle, Peggy flicking her tongue

and me choking with surprise, with glee,
with adolescent resolve to improve
on the next round, which never comes.

Police arrive to pull the knotted plug
and send us scurrying for the bushes,
guitars around our necks, though no one

is drunk or stoned on anything other than
the rush of innocence soon to take a turn,
accelerating around the corner like Peggy,

three years later, first night with license
and the family station wagon, her eyes
on the lit radio dial and not on the barber,

my barber, trudging home in rain, the scissors
in his breast pocket soon to puncture
his heart beneath her tire’s worn tread.

But none of that has happened to happen.
It’s spring, and the bushes we hunker in
make riotous bloom. They smell of sachet,

cheap pink tins scenting my mother’s floral
dressing table. Or maybe it’s Peggy,
her breath against my still whiskerless face,

cops’ flashlights, cymbals hissing as they spill
in puffs of dust, and neither of us
in a hurry to leaven this sweet bouquet.