

Graham Hillard

The Timpanist

Ever watchful, the timpanist stoops,
runs his palm over calfskin smooth

as undisturbed water, troubles
its surface, judges the pitch. His hands

are reed-thin, fine-boned
as something sculpted; they tremble

as he keeps the silent count he has
taught himself to live by, has found

in the pulse of the car's engine, the metronomic
dryer's click, the lawnmower's leading

note sustained twelve beats each pass.
In his grasp, the mallet waits, poised

like lightning gathering, storms willing
themselves into being. Now he watches

the flautist rise to solo, marks each phrase
that glides, winged, into the concert hall

to nest among men in ties and jackets, ladies
roasting in furs. When it comes,

his entrance is a burst of gunfire,
a single, slim measure's roll to forte

marking the final refrain. And he is startled,
the performance finished, to find himself

among those called to their feet, singled out
by the conductor's raised hand

as if patience itself could account
for such music. As if love.