

“‘Mystery Boy’ Looks for Kin in Nashville”

Robert Hayden, 1970

Puzzle faces in the dying elms
promise him treats if he will stay.
Sometimes they hiss and spit at him
like varmints caught
in a thicket of butterflies.

A black doll,
one disremembered time,
came floating down to him
through mimosa’s fancy work leaves and blooms
to be his hidden bride.

From the road beyond the creepered walls
they call to him now and then,
and he’ll take off in spite of the angry trees,
hearing like the loudening of his heart
the name he never can he never can repeat.

And when he gets to where the voices were—
Don’t cry, his dollbaby wife implores;
I know where they are, don’t cry.
We’ll go and find them, we’ll go
and ask them for your name again.