

Fall 11-2013

This Level of Living

Rose Havard

Cedarville University, erosehavard@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/creative_writing_portfolios



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Havard, Rose, "This Level of Living" (2013). *Creative Writing Minor Portfolios*. 3.
http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/creative_writing_portfolios/3

This Portfolio is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Creative Writing Minor Portfolios by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.

ABSTRACT

This portfolio contains poetry, nonfiction, and one short fiction story. Two nonfiction pieces appearing here, “Welcome to the Armory” and “Survey: Headphones” have also been published in the online journal *Prick of the Spindle*. All pieces were written between August of 2012 and May 2013. I consider this collection the best of my college writing.

I pay extra attention to sounds in my pieces. I also try to achieve a certain level of *ostranenie*—a poetry term that means “making the familiar strange”—because I am fascinated with the attempt. *This Level of Living* refers to a state of high awareness, of thoughtful observation and meditation required of the person who does not want to live passively but “deliberately.” Here my subjects are small things, like buttons or mushrooms or cells’ cytoskeletons, which are on different levels of living than I.

My other subjects revolve around disconnected relationships—not just the personal, but detours and distance, hypnagogic hallucinations, and other strange events or things that detach us from our usual lives.

THIS LEVEL OF LIVING

By

Emelie Rose Havard

A Collection of Creative Writing Submitted to
the Faculty of the Department of English, Literature, and Modern Languages
at Cedarville University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Creative Writing Minor

Cedarville, Ohio

2013

Approved by

Dedicated to my writing professors:

Nellie Sullivan, Nick Carrington, Sandi Harner, Ryan Futrell, Julie Moore,
and Dr. Kevin Heath.

INTRODUCTION

It may have something to do with my early-spawned love of jigsaw puzzles.

I spilled my puzzles on the large coffee table in our living room. I spent a few hours each day after school working on them. I liked big puzzles, 1000 pieces or more. Most of the time I approached puzzling methodically—I fastened the flat-edged outline of the puzzle first, then filled in the interesting parts, the portions of peach anemones and clownfish, leaving the sky or the nondescript underwater sea for last. A third of my puzzles consisted of Christian Rice Lassen paintings of sea life. These paintings are romantically vibrant scenes of dolphins, whales, and tropical fish, roiling in light and seaweed.

What makes a puzzle difficult is the image. Landscapes are usually the most difficult, but also the most boring. They lack a point of interest, a purpose, as if someone pointed a camera and shot at random. The scenery blurs together in the pieces, the same blend of green, yellow, and brown, no specific, sharp serenity, all abstract.

Sometimes repetition works. I have a puzzle of the night skyline of New York, pre-September 11th. Its only colors are black, dark blue, dark green, and a smattering of pink and white identical lights. But the picture is beautiful in each individual piece. Each piece has spark in it, has velvet—like each has the whole picture in it, to some extent.

Everything connects in a puzzle—the fit is close and intimate. This is how I want my writing to be, each line individual, each line worth picking up and fitting into space.

I did not intend these pieces to connect when I wrote them. Only “Survey: Headphones” and “Welcome to the Armory” intentionally have a common theme. I wrote these pieces within the same eight months, the result of taking three creative writing classes per semester. The course load,

but mostly the professors, had begun a meta-change in me, shifting the way I approached writing, myself, and the whole sphere of Art. Some of these pieces are experimental, some are cathartic, most of the prose is meant to be essayic, and language leans towards ostranenie.

These pieces attempt to explore small things and disconnections in the most

In a way, the essays “Frames” and “Heterodynes” are an argument against Darwinism, that law of chance and happenstance, that law of meaninglessness. I argue the significance of small meetings and acquaintances. The people that have gone out of my life in these pieces I show to be still connected to me; disconnections are not the end.

The poem “Detours” attempts to find the meaning of today’s traveling practices, specifically highways, interstates, and detours. It describes how a detour is a revelation of the relation between traveling and landscape and how interstates have somehow omitted that relationship. The series of poems that begin with “Introduction to the Field Guide” attempt to connect the small, particular things of field guides to a larger world. The poem “Buttons” is written with similar intent. However “Buttons” leans more toward ostranenie, like “MetaphOracles” and “The Number 2.”

Perhaps only the essay “Older” doesn’t quite fit in this collection. It is an essay on how my older sister has shaped my family and I. In some ways she has defined “family” for me and in other ways shattered it too. This piece was written before everything else, my first piece produced in my meta-change. It was the instinctual piece, the obvious first step. It was my frustration and my confession. It gathers realities, possibilities. “Older” is disjointed and sticks out a bit at the end of this portfolio. But I think, within itself, it fits together.

FOREWORD

In my education I have encountered, and to some extent been taught, the attitude that making art is the natural inclination of the human soul because it is made in the image of God. Humans are therefore little “c” creators, imitating that act of God at the beginning of the time when the Word spoke the universe into existence. In St. Augustine’s view, art makes the truths of the Gospel evident and plausible. Good art reveals Truth.¹

This attitude is undoubtedly a Christian one, informed by biblical study and its subsequent values and worldview. And for the most part I support this attitude. I am a Christian who also happens to love and practice creative writing; it has also been my desire to further a right kind of attitude toward art in my brothers and sisters in Christ, many of whom do not engage with art in meaningful ways. However, many of my friends have also been exposed to Christian views that embrace art, particularly ones that emphasize God’s love of beauty and *Imago Dei*. God intended art for humanity’s growth and enjoyment. These attitudes make God the ultimate Artist, and humans are, rightfully, emulators. In these attitudes, I am essentially a creative writer because God, in a way, is a creative writer.

However, I find I cannot always reconcile the nature of art and art-making with the nature of God in this way.

A somewhat contrary attitude of art to this Christian one is that of art teachers David Bayles and Ted Orland, authors of *Art & Fear*. They assert that art, while being natural and perhaps transcendent, is nevertheless intimately human.² With that comes stipulations. Art is full of error, and sometimes it seems art itself is created *by* error, through accident or mistake. Therefore, art is

¹ Donald T. Williams, “Christian Poetics, Past and Present,” in *The Christian Imagination* ed. Leland Ryken (Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002), 7.

² David Bayles and Ted Orland *Art and Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1993) 29.

not divine. In fact a divine, perfect being has *no need* to make art.³

There is also contention as to whether or not art truly makes a person better, whether she is the artist or the audience. T.S Eliot touched on this discussion in his essay “Religion and Literature.”⁴ But I think Robert Bly, in his introduction to *The Darkness Around Us is Deep*, puts it best:

“It would be too much to claim that art, the practice of it, will establish a good, a serene, a superior self. No. But art will, if pursued for itself, bring into realization the “self most centrally yours.” Writing poetry, then, doesn’t make a poet such as Stafford a better person, only a more genuine *William*.”⁵

These claims have led me to question the nature of art as it encompasses all aspects of my humanity— my new, baptized-in-the-Spirit nature and my inherent sinfulness. Francis Schaeffer, in his essay “Perspectives on Art”, claims that Christian art is dual-themed.⁶ One theme is the message of redemption, the other is a lament, the recognition of a deeply flawed world and broken humanity. I am not referring to this duality, but rather to a different set of questions, not exactly *how* art exists, but *why*. Does art exist because “something is missing,”⁷ and in the absence artists try to fill in the blank? Does art exist because experiences and other people’s testimonies don’t “quite ring true”⁸ so artists attempt to make or find the truth? And if art, in reality, exists *because* of the Fall, then to what extent does God have to do with it?

It seems that God ought to be involved in art in some way. It is difficult to deny the aesthetic, mechanical, and economical powers with which God made the universe, which is beyond

³ Bayles and Orland, *Art and Fear*, 4.

⁴ T.S Eliot, “Religion and Literature,” in *The Christian Imagination* ed. Leland Ryken, (Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002).

⁵ Robert Bly, foreword to *The Darkness Around Us is Deep: Selected Poems of William Stafford*, by William Stafford (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), viii.

⁶ Francis Schaeffer, “Perspectives on Art,” in *The Christian Imagination* ed. Leland Ryken (Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002), 43-44.

⁷ Bayles and Orland, *Art and Fear*, 69.

⁸ Ibid.

compare in complexity and beauty to any art made by humanity. But God may not be an Artist at all. It seems that artists wrestle with the truth—they must think and reason out the world. Art is not only concerned with beauty, in other words, but it is concerned with the way the world is. But God does not wrestle with the truth. He knows the world and everything in it. He discovers nothing. He is the “I am,” the beginning, the end. Even Jesus said “I am...the truth.”⁹ So perhaps what He makes is not art.

I would argue that God is *above* art. What He does is the actual thing—the truth—and what artists do is an interpretation. Art represents reality, it isn't making it. An artist's art represents herself more than anything, much like the artist herself represents God. But the artist is a cobbler. Artists take a blender to reality, a chisel to stone, a knife to wood, a saw to metal. They take what already exists.

Now if art was completely from God and of God, non-Christians would probably not do it well, because their access to God is limited at best. But non-Christians make splendid art, and even Christian art fails to perfectly represent truth. This failure, however, does not stop it from being art.

All humans do not see truth clearly. People are justified in God's eyes by faith, not knowledge. Faith has no stopping point, because faith rests on the future. Faith is a hope of things unseen. People must continually pursue faith until that day of seeing not “in a mirror darkly” but “face to face.”¹⁰

In this way, art is the stumbling error that is figuring out the world from our flawed perspective.

Consequently, writing becomes a metaphor for faith. Writing is my process and my product of engaging the world internally. It is a way I define meanings. It is a way of being myself.

⁹ John 14:6, ESV.

¹⁰ I Cor. 13:12

My Christian faith, however, cannot be separated from my writing. I do not intentionally try to write “Christianly”, that is I do not force certain religious themes into essays or poems. My Christian worldview already informs everything I do: how I interpret the world. In the words of Jacques Maritain,

“If you want to make Christian work, then *be* Christian, and simply try to make a beautiful work, into which your heart will pass¹¹...it would therefore be futile to try to find a technique, a style, a system of rules or a way of working which would be those of Christian art. The art which germinates and grows in Christian man can admit of an infinity of them.”¹²

There is no need for me to write in a certain genre, or ban subjects from my writing. I am free to explore the entire world.

¹¹ Jacques Maritain, “Christian Art,” in *The Christian Imagination* ed. Leland Ryken, (Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002), 53.

¹² Maritain, “Christian Art,” 54.

Bibliography

- Bayles, David and Ted Orland. *Art and Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*. Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press, 1993.
- Bly, Robert. Foreword to *The Darkness Around Us is Deep: Selected Poems of William Stafford*, by William Stafford, viii. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1993.
- Eliot, T.S. "Religion and Literature." In *The Christian Imagination*, edited by Leland Ryken, 197-208. Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002.
- Maritain, Jacques. "Christian Art." In *The Christian Imagination*, edited by Leland Ryken, 53-54. Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002.
- Schaeffer, Francis. "Perspectives on Art." In *The Christian Imagination*, edited by Leland Ryken, 33-47. Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002.
- Williams, Donald T. "Christian Poetics, Past and Present." In *The Christian Imagination*, edited by Leland Ryken, 3-21. Colorado Springs: Shaw Books, 2002.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MetaphOracles.....	1
The Number 2.....	2
Whales.....	3
Inside a Room that shouldn't be Boring.....	6
In One Sitting.....	7
How We Look.....	8
Frames.....	9
From a Corner.....	13
Introduction to the Field Guide: Stars and Planets.....	14
Introduction to the Field Guide: Mushrooms.....	15
Introduction to the Field Guide: Bacteria.....	16
Introduction to the Field Guide: North American Butterflies.....	17
Welcome to the Armory.....	18
Ode to Buttons.....	21
Survey: Headphones.....	23
Experiment.....	26
White Tornadoes.....	27
Detours.....	36
Heterodynes.....	37
After a Walk.....	40
Older.....	41
Icarus.....	48

METAPHORACLES

A period is a bridge, not a dead end.
A period has nothing to do with ties.

The sun is a period.
The sun is a pragmatist, wax logical.

God was found in the sun,
cleaning whales from under his nails.

Staplers are gods of corners and loose ends
Staplers don't like thumbs.

The thumbprint of the sun on a cornea,
hammer-stamped light bulb stain.

Light bulbs remind everyone of private things.

THE NUMBER 2

The number 2 is a poised cobra. The number 2 is blue paint. The number 2 is a desirable woman. The number 2 has a tight schedule. The number 2 doesn't know what to make of 3. The number 2 won't eat bananas. The number 2 will wait for 1. The number 2 is a successful author. The number 2 is a microscope. The number 2 doesn't need a stepladder; it climbs. The number 2 is jealous of 5. The number 2 is ashamed, however loyal. The number 2 is the form of a penitent 7. The number 2 can cook. The number 2 isn't offended when mistaken for L. 2 is the wrong number of cookies. The number 2 can get a date. The number 2 has eyebrows. The number 2 is a ripped paper.

WHALES

Insomnia is not so much a disease as it is the art of not sleeping. Insomnia can be the pain in bones, the busyness of nearby roads, lethargic couch days. Insomnia is that obnoxious test tomorrow, or too much bacon, or the common cold. Insomnia refuses to withdraw.

Sleep is a little more or less than twenty-five years long in a long life. The body, if deprived, is driven to find sleep more than water or food; only the need for oxygen beats sleep. Twenty-five years redrawn is 219,000 hours. It is a third of the day and as deep as yelling through six feet of soil. Sleep is made of slow, big waves: theta, beta, and delta. Sleep makes the body shiver, shrinks the pulse, binds the limbs. Sleep holds you down.

Sleep is a mystery for scientists who like to agree, disagree, grumble about rules and exceptions, and generally disprove themselves earnestly. They argue that sleep is mainly for repairs, or sleep mostly satisfies the need to relax, or sleep is actually renewing everything like a reset. Perhaps sleep is there to unfold and replace all those images the day has served scrambled. Perhaps sleep is the brain composing what it couldn't in the day. Perhaps sleep is escape from living. Perhaps sleep is leftover from some genetic spindle and soon will not be necessary.

Books began my insomnia. Long after I grew accustomed to darkness, I pretended fear so my nightlight could explain the golden crack of my closed door. When I became too old and proud

to pretend, I covered the crack with a blanket, or cleverly hid both book and flashlight near my feet instead of my pillow. Books are much like sleep in that they are self-contained other worlds, the senses extracted from the present.

I slowly began to deny sleep altogether for map projects and speeches on ESP. Sleepless nights are eerie, empty, forced energy, and if spent inside, as bright as a school day. I attribute my ability to stay awake to classroom education; it teaches how to ignore the sun. Nights are disquiet silent, an awful awareness that everyone else is paralyzed and dead.

There were rare nights I stayed awake just to walk in my backyard and watch the moon paint silver whispers over leafy hands and the hairy ground. Snow is especially mysterious under nightly brushes; what was once white and blinding becomes grey, innocuous.

Don't ever become good at staying awake. Sleep hates being ignored. I had to beg at the feet of sleep for two years before it acknowledged me again.

Near the end of that exhausting interval, I saw from my bed a humpback whale swimming forward, mouth open. It swam from the growing depths of the ceiling towards me, followed by a wailing pod. I realized I couldn't move, heavy limbs, numb hands. The maw of the first beast scooped me, my sheets, and pillow, into itself as a pelican. I slid down the vortex into a deathlike state and discovered a bottom floor of sleep.

My humpback whales are called *hypnagogic hallucinations*—things one sees when the waking state is transferring to the sleeping state. These are not dreams; they occur outside the REM sleep cycle. Hypnagogic hallucinations are usually part of experiencing Sleep Paralysis (SP), which is an extremely misleading term because SP isn't describing something that happens during sleep. It describes a sudden paralysis before one has fallen asleep or right after waking up, and is usually

accompanied by one or more of five things: a crushing weight on the chest, inexplicable fear, hallucinations, a sense of a “presence,” and a repetitive sound growing louder.

SP has been universally recognized as a legitimate human experience for centuries, documented in myths, folktales, and common language. Those argumentative scientists’ circles have given surveys spanning every continent. Anybody can experience it; SP isn’t part of a brain disorder. It isn’t linked to anything. SP has no cause. It is estimated that half the people on the planet have experienced or will experience SP at least once in their life.

Everyone has their own origin myth. The Koreans believed a ghost entered the body and squeezed, *kawinullium*. Germans thought it was a witch passing through a sleeper’s bedroom, *bexendrucken*. In Mexico they didn’t seem especially concerned, just a *pesadilla*, a nightmare. Thailand calls it *phi um*, a specter consuming someone’s body like food. Otherwise, it is a ghost-baby attack.

Some people are blinded and deafened by their hypnagogic hallucinations. Some experience shaking, brilliant explosions of light, buzzing sounds like a room full of pagers, clanging like someone tipped over a dozen metal platters. Then there is that tremulous feeling of “presence.” Half the people who experience SP tell it this way—when one is trapped motionless on the bed, the presence comes and stands there in the corner, in the edge of an eye. Sometimes the presence perches on one’s chest, but even looking straight at it, one can’t see what it is.

I couldn’t see the presence coming towards me. I knew the whale-shape, the grunts of underwater mammals. That wasn’t the presence. The whales weren’t. The sounds weren’t. It was like the ocean finding me, an enormity I couldn’t move, couldn’t find the edges of, couldn’t greet or hold or kiss, say I missed it. The presence was the act of diving—the deeper you go the harder it pushes you down, like the accumulate atmosphere which exists to hold you down.

INSIDE A ROOM THAT SHOULDN'T BE BORING

If only the wall had standing. The wall
is a square where ceilings scrape
their eyes off.

The wall couldn't understand numbers if numbers
existed and could breathe.
The wall couldn't breathe if breath
were a form of expressing every existence.

On the wall stands enmity; enmity slams
throats closed. A throat breathes
 under the wall,
a waste of dirt in the throat
fretted from the foots of weeds
which are taped to the wall.

Clipped, the not-quite-ripe green weeds
stand under water in a vase painted
 by a Ukrainian orphan.

She was thinking she
had never seen the color blue
when it was sleeping.

IN ONE SITTING

Confidants, mistakenly, assure their confessors
in large lobbies and coffee shops “no one listens.”
Not everyone is coincidence.
For instance,
never trust people with books;
they always overhear.

HOW WE LOOK

We are trained to look for the depression
of a woman's chest
to see if she has let us see her
between the breasts.
I don't even like breasts.
Mine are a burgeoning burden
that I bind for running,
for moving like gazelles or monkeys.
I don't like looking,
but I do,
measure them against her shoulders,
her waist, the trim or bulge ruler,
observe the lumps that tight bra fabric makes
under the arm, that cuts into the shoulder.
I notice if the twin peaks are gloomy and limp,
or oranges perfectly primmed
(or perhaps pimped),
or as my sister prefers,
released,
like a pearl diver, like the ama of Japan
pushing hands between themselves and clothes
plunging naked into salt and the semened soup
of reefs' mating rituals.

We forget ankles, the supple elbow,
the elbows of knees, and swanish spines
rise from the brine.

FRAMES

Andrew didn't talk loud enough. He was bent all over like a scrap of paper, fingers spiraled inwards, shoulders leaning over his feet, neck hooked up. Andrew couldn't uncurl himself, as if he were still in the womb. He ran one lunge at a time, deliberate, slow. No one wanted to tag him because he couldn't chase us. His best friend was Thomas, a boy I admired more than liked. Thomas was tall for fourth grade, loud and sun-bronzed. I remember asking him about Andrew, because I didn't understand Andrew. Thomas' face is plain-eyed, arms down but hands turning out and in, like he's making a point. He's telling me Andrew is as smart as the rest of us. Don't talk down to Andrew, because he understands you. There's nothing wrong with him, he just doesn't like speaking up sometimes. He gets mad too. I can tell.

For the rest of Andrew's life, I made sure to wave. We weren't in classes together in middle school, in high school. I think one time I got him to stop and say something. His voice startled me; I heard him. His mother could recognize me and stop me in the grocery store to talk. I became one of those people who think they have to talk to everybody they see sitting alone.

Now I've taught myself I'm not responsible. I don't go up to strangers asking after their personalities. Thinking about Andrew again, I want to retract my previous statement, go back to chasing the umbrella-less in the rain.

Thomas never let Andrew alone. They walked through high school together, disproportionate. Both of them told me, don't ever leave anyone alone.

My fellow counselors-in-training were strangers. We dressed in neon orange and green, roared songs about caterpillars and moose into each other's faces, and told ourselves we got along well for a group of strangers-in-training. There were eleven girls and three boys—the girls lived in a tent with a wooden floor and slept in bunk beds. It was the summer my older sister throttled us with indecision, between leaving our family and needing our family. That summer Ann Petrie was dying.

Some months before this, my mother had signed me up for three weeks of counselor training at a camp in Seymour, Indiana without my knowledge. She paid for me to go there. The gift was not being home. It was escape for me—she said it would be “good” for me—I thought she meant she wanted me to learn something. I read my mother's printed emails while I was at camp, which consisted mainly of updates on Ann's condition: *she's in the hospital, her body is rejecting the kidney, she's doing better, she has a viral disease, read Psalm 42, don't stop praying, she can talk, she can't anymore*. On the top bunk I listened to my campmates breathe, and lay waiting for a wet grief to swallow me. I wanted Ann to survive on our prayers. If she could, my sister could.

It was while I was losing these two people that I was suddenly forced to care about this temporary family of ten sisters, two brothers, a soccer mom and Purdue student dad. I had no freedom for apathy, or to be alone. Even so, I told them as little about myself as possible; I wanted to forget I existed. I wanted at least that freedom. This is extremely difficult when one can't sleep. Nothing but you exists at night.

The cytoplasm is that clear, weightless, empty space between everything important in cellular drawings. The cytoplasm is four times as viscous as water. It controls cell division, intercellular communication, and morphogenesis. Cytoplasm is composed of different densities and fibers, more like cereal or a vegetable soup than homogenous jello mix. The cytoskeleton can't be found until a cell splits open and the soft parts of cytoplasm are suctioned out. The cytoskeleton is a leftover, a rough outline. It is a fibrous, floating frame that tells everything inside where it ought to be. These filamentous components aren't like skeletons. They rearrange like traffic, like cafeteria tables, like the free-floating collar bones of cats.

Those people who look through microscopes for a living write books about microtubules, actin filaments, the many components of a cytoskeleton that change, that move constantly, like a crowd of seagulls gathering each other on a beach. The cell holds itself together with motion; it has shocking, deliberate, complicated control over itself. "Cytoskeleton" has an unreliable definition. Different microscope watchers file different parts of the cytoplasm under this name, while other microscope watchers only use it to refer to the rough outline left behind when the cytosol is vacuumed.

I see that the cytoskeleton isn't a skeleton. It's like a cat's collar bone, connected by muscle but otherwise free. Cats aren't promised to their shoulders. Cats can get into any place the size of their head; their collar bones rotate to let the rest of them in. The cytoskeleton and cytoplasm is thick, mutable stuff. It wraps the organelles, the ribosomes and nucleus and mitochondria. It frames the cell inside. The cytoskeleton is see-through, the part of the cell I barely read about in genetics class and biology. The cytoskeleton was just a word, not a factory, not a guardian, unimportant. But the cytoskeleton stabilizes every cell in my body, promising they won't float free.

Mother called me sometime during spring. I was at college and expecting nothing. She told me Andrew had died. I hadn't seen Andrew since graduation. We hadn't anything between us but names, a memory of tag, recognition. I started seeing ghosts of Andrew around campus. He was curled at a computer. He was watching the ducks from a picnic table. He morphed and played Frisbee, tall and loud and a little brown.

Ann died the Friday morning I came home from camp. I recently wrote a half-hearted ode to her, saying something about how she treated me like a daughter, kissing me, holding my hand like she knew me very well. The widower David Petrie still plays the piano at church. My sister survives herself.

Now death happens like this: a son of our friends falls off a car. His name is Evan. I don't remember him well enough, like I remember Andrew and Ann. I saw him save a little girl from a truck once. I saw him sulking in the back of the sanctuary once. I saw him play the drums once. My sister tattoos his initials on her shoulder. But she isn't my sister; she is Ann, taking a new kidney into herself. Evan's mother tells me she believes her mother when her mother dreams of Evan in heaven. But it isn't Evan's mother; it is Andrew's mother, telling me she is glad I'm still friends with Andrew.

FROM A CORNER

1

A coffee shop debut for the D major musicians,
and she enjoying his arm, who,
unaffected, loses his eyes,
doesn't ask for a dustpan or tweezers.

2

Three boys at a table,
their long arms and abrupt
hair between them,
don't know any swear words, what the heck.

3

Eating salad, like pieces of water,
and everyone-should-eat onion
she keeps a found-empty glass
bottle for the color of its shell.

4

On this chipped table a book
teaches "all know the vendor tricks of trinkets."
She bought it for her daughter
on the side of a nowhere-is-everywhere street,
which Indian fingers stamped.
A Hindu in the corner of a 'historic' site
impressed a rose, an uneven line
diamond-shaped, without rulers.
She said "in the same room,
dirt floor, no shoes,
all melted in."

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD GUIDE: STARS AND PLANETS

Among the night's charted inhabitants
we birdish immigrants believed
"to put names"
stirred
the silent mind.

A small astronomic
telescope
confined on a single continent,
finds its way around heaven
the serious amateurs thumb constellations.

The naked lights—twice omens, their movements
considered future and origin—

white dots in black air

Granted the immense Universe,
the local scale has no dignity—now we must advance

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD GUIDE: MUSHROOMS

Man fancies
the lowest form of plant life
he knows. Though they should be
regarded with certain suspicion
for appearing sudden
after rain.

The chosen fungi—the problems of their existence—process over life, and all the edible
habitat of forests—the explosive, smoking public interest—until recent only slight identity,
only five per every one million six hundred—

Fruit body seeds,
from mycelium ceilings, feeds
off
afterthoughts from underground.
Fairy rings with four hundred years
of creeping
under their caps.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD GUIDE: BACTERIA

Rule one: don't need microscopes.

The collective footprints of bacterial dimensions
are macroscopic: pink scum-clothes, red-tainted salt crystals,
black dust, bubbles rising murky
from ponds.

Rule two: amateur naturalists ponder
bacteriocentricity. The practice

of pretending you are rods, jiggling cryptic dots
in the unseen majority
of doormat community.

Rule three: tongue, finger, cornea, nostril,
ear drum: all field tools.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD GUIDE: NORTH AMERICAN BUTTERFLIES

The occasional strays
 living nearly everywhere
expect some brilliance to come of moving, like just after rain
 when birds are easier observed,
as if the fundamental miracle is place
as if the microscopic level of living concerns them,
just as everything in the Universe seems to.

True butterflies attract backyard gardens,
mountains, acid swamps, tundra;
their cloudy wings bewilder flowers,
easier observed than birds.

The female's heavier body's the fundamental miracle-place
 joint-legged, spineless.
What goes into the egg without bronze, without proboscis,
until place consumed, egg-eats-everything.
The fundamental living: to expect meta-change,
 like just after rain to taste rain,
 butterflies having tongues on their feet.

WELCOME TO THE ARMORY

Scene: Inside an aisle found everywhere, in supermarkets and that gas station with overpriced cereal, the Customer approaches an array of writing weapons and waits for her eyes to settle on something familiar. The Armory Attendant, a commercial collection of voices rising from the packages, tells her how to think.

Armory Attendant: Here in the Temple of the Written Word, we provide you with the essentials of inked communication, your tools for worshipping the Almighty Language, the Shaper of thought and perception of time, Lord of names, Author of authors.

These are the handheld Creators of the Definitions of the world.

Customer: I hate pencils. They snap at ends like paper itself. What good is it for paper to be broken like that, to be scratched, to be colored, chalked, grated like cheese. I hate this; that pencils remind me of crumbling bones. Temporary, granulate charcoal scraped on the page, not like the crisp, the entirely visible, the bloody loops of pens.

Armory Attendant: We offer only the most elegant instruments here. It is our tradition to provide classic, timeless pens, refined over ages of design. These are from our elite collection. Aren't they

perfect? Brilliant, like a piano. But over here, if you're more revolutionary, as I might glean from your shoes (or perhaps that stare tells me you are unconvinced), we have our modern section of urban tastes. These pens value expressiveness *and yet* they're fashionable, the latest styles for classy writing. Perhaps you'd like these more professionally dressed ball points. They define precision, so mistake-free I would venture to say they're *smart*. It's simply inspiring, like the words *panache* and *pizzazz*. Have a kind of glossy flair, don't they? With names like Lancelot, Energel, Clarius, Silhouette, and Capri (sharp names, smooth names), they'd make anyone practically envious. These are the sleek ones, the desirable ones. These are the best ink-eaters.

Customer: I rescue pens from the floor, from corners and Lost and Found boxes, from the edges of sidewalks, from the trash. I rarely buy them, I can't remember the last time I did. Am I stingy or am I holy?

Armory Attendant: Your poor writing may be your pen's fault. We want to make writing effortless. Our pens become an armchair for your hand. Come test the tungsten carbide ball points. They were fire-hardened in ovens to attain diamond-like strength, ground to perfect globes. Cartridges are spun in centrifuges; machines write circles like compasses to test the new-forged pens' mettle.

Or perhaps you prefer felt-tip, leaky ink. Artists are fond of those. But I warn you, the stain is permanent...no, not on the skin, don't worry about that...oh, but it's permanent everywhere else!

Customer: I see pens as solid. Who drew with charcoal? With lead? The ashes of fires, it must have been, scraped on rocks as one-dimensional as they could find. But they cut things into rocks first, didn't they? Spoke for years and remembered for generations; they didn't need writing. I search for

pens on the floor where they lie like discarded pennies, and that's what most are worth, a dollar or two, unless they are sleek and ergonomic, supersonic, titanium, engineered for the perfect hand to fit in some mysterious fashion. Their names are laughable, attempts at endearment like "Papermate," "InkJoy," and "Pilot," as if pens were any such company, ecstasy, or authority.

Armory Attendant: We try to make you happy. We try to help you see that magic in ink when your eyes fail, when your mind fails to care about those words you scratch, because you'd rather type, you'd rather gather pixels on a glowing screen, but we want you to know that pens are mighty, pens are ancient, pens are godly—why don't you love them like we do?

Customer: You're wrong. I am the proponent of pens; I am their salesman.

The Customer's Inner Desire: I am searching for the flow, the river from a blueberry, a shining startling line as eloquent as Emerson in mere appearance; as smooth, as rich, as colorful as that wheel my uncle is always talking about, spinning peacock before my eyes, how he joins lines enough to make a moth flutter out of his canvas, those flawless joints between blue and green and purple to red and orange and yellow, back to grass and lakes when they seem deeper because the sky is stormy. I am looking for verisimilitude, for a liar on paper. I am looking for the dark, the night stain on the innocence, the beautiful adulterer perhaps, the perfect line bringing to an empty one dimension several transcendences all ordinary, all mutable.

ODE TO BUTTONS

In a flat galaxy that
ripples instead of spins,
placed planets pin together the universe,
stitched in stagnate orbits by two or four stark holes.

Examine: suns are invisible. The planets' atmospheres are glossy, impenetrable aquariums.
When the unseen sun implodes, stitches drop their planets. The lost gather in old peanut
butter jars and green bottles in the sewing rooms of needle angels.

People wear several galaxies in a week and scarcely notice.

There are subtle planets,
sober sandy or damply melancholy,
loud planets shouting
"Sherbet!"
"I am one hundred percent flamingo!"
placid planets,
unicellular, frictionless flat worlds,
basin worlds, sinkholes and jungles.
One holds a comet frozen inside it.

At one satellite shot, a tsunami epicenter and its consecutive waves dimple a jagged
shoreline.

a dichroic of bone and teeth
 and teeth's ceramic, silver fillings shoved inside ditches,
a steel-wrought shield, whose black eye
 and raised scars tell victory stories,
a rectangle all gold, cold ore, creased
 as an elephant's trunk or the folds of a rope,
a slippery mountain ice-covered and lifeless,
 one yellow-stormed,
 whorled like snail shells,
 forged like coral,
 one translucent as a vein.

Inside a peach world an embryo stirs nameless.

SURVEY: HEADPHONES

1 Q: How do you physically relate to headphones?

The girl who braided my hair without asking: I sleep with mine.

The girl with a right-angled nose: Regular headphones mess up my hair.

His curly hair is capped: They wrap around your head and convince you of their sound.

Former Roommate: I got them 'cause they were called "Gummies," and that's a cute name, and they're pink. And they're strawberries. When I lie down, sometimes they fall out of my ear and I don't like that...I don't know what you want me to say!

A boy I don't know: I don't. Like...yeah. Yeah, I don't...Like, what do you mean?

The roommate of the girl with poor hearing: I put them in my ears.

The girl with poor hearing: Same thing.

2 Q: What do your headphones think about living with you?

The girl with poor hearing: Mine are happy because I use them a lot. They're well-loved.

His curly hair is capped: I actually got them just a week ago...they may be wondering how long they have to live because of my reputation to wear them out. We're getting along pretty well.

They like me in the sense that they get to talk to me often, and I'm a good listener. I don't know if I talk to them much.

Former Roommate: I torture them. They're always tangled in my pocket and I lose them all the time. That's probably why they don't work. My headphones probably think they're doing the best they can...and I think they can do better.

The girl who braided my hair without asking: Mine suffer from mood swings. Use—no use. They're bipolar, going from bubbly to action music. But they're very circular because I coil them up. They conform. It's like *War and Peace* by Tolstoy. I think they don't like me; they hurt my ears after three hours.

The roommate of the girl with poor hearing: I think they're okay with it. But I bang them around a lot...They're probably upset with me because I don't treat them very well.

A boy I don't know: I don't think they have any feelings. They're inanimate objects.

3 Q: Isn't it ironic that headphones provide sound to drown out more sound?

The girl who braided my hair without asking: It blocks out the echoing silence of the library.

Former Roommate: I use it when I'm studying; I don't know what you want from me. When people are talking and I want to study, I listen to really loud music. I'm the worst, I can't think of anything interesting!

His curly hair is capped: It's the idea of choice, what you want to be hearing, and so I think that's why they're ironic, but also very intentional.

A boy I don't know: I just use them to block out my roommate. So I'm in control of my focus.

4 Q: What sense of security do you find in your headphones?

The girl with a right-angled nose: I can't hear people talking to me.

His curly hair is capped: You can't have a closeness with that anywhere else, that music being right next to your ears.

Former Roommate: I find none; my headphones are really unstable. At any second it could stop

playing music. I just really hate my headphones.

A boy I don't know: When I'm in the gym and I'm listening to my music, I can view everything as a challenge and an enemy...I work harder.

The girl who braided my hair without asking: It's a sense of fear and panic and paranoia, because I only wear them when I write a paper....

The roommate of the girl with poor hearing: Well, I feel secure because I know I'm not disturbing anyone when I have them in.

The girl with poor hearing: Same thing.

5 Q: How do your headphones shape your perception of the world?

She likes webcomics: They muffle it.

A boy I don't know: Sometimes the music can provoke deep thoughts.

The girl who braided my hair without asking: They limit my view of reality yet channel my ability to speak and the closer to the deadline, the louder it speaks, until it's too close and I fall into a pit of despair.

The roommate of the girl with poor hearing: It opens me up to different cultures and it allows me more freedom in my musical choices.

The girl with poor hearing: Ummmm...I think it emphasizes how individualistic we are because we want to listen to our own music. That might be because we wanna listen to weird stuff so people don't know. We don't want people to know what we listen to (cough, cough) I don't want to be sick.

EXPERIMENT

Is the marble a sore thumb
to the drunken angels?
Cherubim rum, bum gullible.

June-bug sheen fat
goes quickly in this zoo.

Sea bee is cherished as a gum bauble,
goodbye, maudlin, my doll.

Beluga whales are
stapling mama Gershwin for this
Miss Georgia job.

I must in sheer resemblance
of a Hamlet-brutish fervor
charge the edge of the oracle.
Stupid omens claim I am a brittle catacomb
while you yell for conscience.

WHITE TORNADOES

My bathroom, when it isn't drowning under Candace's makeup, is the safest place to be in our house during a tornado. The Fergusons next door hide in their basement. It looks nothing like a basement. The floors are carpeted, the walls are painted and wooden, a rectangular window shows how tall the grass is. My grandparents' basement has rugs on top of cold rock, no windows. The walls are concrete bricks painted with latex-like paint that doesn't chip or scrape off like oil-based paint. It seeps into the cracked porous stone like ice cream.

Most of our neighbors have basements to hide in, the standard home-remedy in Harrisonville; it's also the standard arrogance to ignore warnings and sit out on the back porch to watch the sky boil.

Since we don't have a basement, Dad built us an underground shelter outside. It looks like someone left a door lying around in our back yard. It looks like I could pick it up, drag it away. Dirt falls off it when I lift the door up, dust follows me down the tunnel of stairs.

We turned it into a workshop, Dad's and mine. We only take the trouble to dash across the yard and squat on the stairs when Dad reads the online Doppler Radar and decides it's a good idea. Candace and Mom don't like the water-stained smell of fresh cut wood, the dander of shavings powdered on every surface. Sitting close to the shelves or the work benches is potentially dangerous.

A plastic jug of nails fell on Candace once. She backed into the shelf in the dark.

Dad planned to furnish the space between the stairs and the south wall for more comfortable hiding, but I took it over with my own workbench and stacks of wood for model sailboats. Tracing-paper charts and oval-penciled plans of hulls spatter the south wall with sticky tack that I am secretly, wad by wad, replacing with five-cent bubble gum. The sugar in the gum caramelizes in old age. I stack my drawings on top of each other, a bark-like wallpaper.

I paint my sailboats different shades of white from Mom's leftover paint jobs. Candace thinks white doesn't have shades, but I can list dozens. Mom likes to drill me with paint chips and use me as a walking catalogue of colors. She used to be a nurse and tells me that what I do with paint chips she used to do with bones. I've memorized half of her chip collection. The other half I don't agree with. I think the Cherry Red is more of a Peony Red, and the Leaf Green should be Plastic Slide Green. I've never seen a slide painted another color.

I've memorized all the white chips because they're all true.

There's Overcast White, exactly the color of light that breaks through clouds on a no-blue-sky day. There's the silver-white of Ashwood, the Linen White of sheets, the white of pelican feathers. Pelicans, according to Birdman, are the biggest birds in Missouri. I don't believe him. Most of the eighth graders, our grade, think he's got life backwards. The seventh graders think he's cool because he broke our 200 meter track record.

Birdman thinks he's a ninja. He claims to have broken his knees one summer so the bone marrow would grow back twice as strong, then he could kick through bricks. I might believe that. His knees are abnormally large, swelled and knobby. He sits beside me in Spanish class, one leg poking towards me knee-bare, the skin stretched like canvas Extra White. I hadn't understood Extra White until I saw Birdman's kneecaps.

Birdman lives near us, on the other side of the neighborhood on Aspen Drive. I see him sometimes, when mom takes me to visit Aunt Alice, who lives right across from a cemetery. Mom and Aunt Alice talk about mystery novels and I watch Birdman through the front window. Birdman paces up and down the rows. He holds a clipboard and pencil, pausing on one foot in front of each stone, like he's taking attendance. I've got into the habit of cheating off his tests at school (he's good at math) and I've noticed he never uses the erasers on his pencils. He wedges a large cube eraser, Horizon White, between the inside of his thumb and the edge of his hand. It fell out once and he immediately put it back in, like he was plugging a troubling gap in his anatomy.



I was trying to paint a sailboat in wax. I thought it might work as cheap waterproofing. The last half of the bathroom vanilla-cream candle burned on my workbench. I couldn't stop the wax from drying on my brush as I dipped it into the pool at the base of the wick and brought it out into flameless space. My other option was Powered Sand, from mom's project on the North Lake house, a boring choice next to translucent vanilla wax. There are more whites in wax than paint. The surface is a soft Seashell and the inside a solid, bright Chalk. Wax shavings are more like Alpine. Melted wax is Steam. I was carefully scraping the wax off the brush over the candle flame, watching increments of Steam White melting back into the pool, when Candace came down the stairs.

"You're wasting my candle," she said, leaning over the railing.

"I'm using it."

"I want it back."

"I'm using it."

"I need it, Brandon. Right now."

"I'm using it!"

Her face said she was going to get her way. She sat on the stair and looked up. “Brandon’s here, come on down!” she called.

A pair of huge, Extra White knees descended through the light and into the normal dim of the workshop fluorescent bulbs. “Hey. I heard you build boats?”

I didn’t want to look stupid. I gave Candace the candle.

Birdman wasn’t wearing a shirt. I thought it was a little cold for that. His knees were grass-stained. He wouldn’t take his left hand out of his pocket. I didn’t know what to say. Nobody knows what to do with Birdman. I started showing him my model wood, the small, precious supply of boxwood wrapped in green tarp, my cheaper stacks of pine, and a random two-by-four of cherry wood which I had long ago planned to carve a red sword out of, but as of yet hadn’t drawn a satisfying design for. I thought he’d like talking about swords, being a ninja and all, but he was more interested in my drawings. He put his face right up next to them. It looked like he was sniffing them.

“You know a lot about boats.”

“Yeah. Sail boats. Cutters. Schooners.”

“You ever build, like, a Spanish Galleon or something big like that?”

“I like making the smaller boats. They get done faster.”

“I go for the big stuff.” He traced my drawings of hull frames with a brown fingernail. “This looks like big stuff.”

“Those aren’t to scale. I have to draw it big so I see everything.” I said this like there wasn’t enough intelligence in the room.

“Know what I build?”

I shrugged.

“I build stuff out of bones.” He took his hand out of his pocket, holding something white.

It was as long as a sink faucet, about as thin as Birdman's thumb. He rolled it in his fingers. "This is a cat bone, the clavicle I think. I got it from 49, the stupid thing got run over." Birdman watched my face, but I'm not a sissy.

"Cool. What do you build?"

Birdman smiled. "Animals. Like, eagles and wolves and crap. Just whatever I think the bones are thinking."

"Thinking?"

"Sure. Bones do some of it afterwards, you know. Because that's all that's left. Bones are it."

I was thinking, "this is Birdman—this is what he talks about", but then he grabbed my wrist and put the bone in my hand. He told me to pay attention to it, as if I wasn't. He said "bones are the shapes of souls," or something like that. I stopped paying attention to everything he said when the bone got in my hand. It felt like hard, polished wood, like a pencil. It was Ghost White.

"I thought bones were yellow," I said.

"I clean them. You gotta soak them in peroxide for like a week. Sometimes they turn out yellow." He took the bone back. "I don't know how to make boats. But I got these deer bones, they're screaming at me 'Boat.'" He held the bone horizontal on my hull frame drawing, fitting it into a rib space. "I don't do carvings with them. I use each bone like a puzzle piece, like Legos. So you been doing this since forever, right? You made the midget version of the Santa Maria for Christopher Columbus day in elementary school. You can draw something up for me can't you?"

I pondered this wholly white ship. "I'll have to see the bones."



Birdman's basement didn't have carpets or rugs or latex-painted cement bricks. Everything was bare concrete, and there wasn't any natural light, the strong kind I got from my workshop's

open door. I couldn't even see the back wall. The scent of peroxide scalded my nose. Birdman had buckets everywhere, rib cages of coyotes and cows and deer sorted in piles, lines of vertebrae on a scrubby old pool table. Most of his skeletons came from road kill; those were the most time-consuming as he had to drag them off the road and pry open the carcasses, carry the bones back one bag at a time. His dad knew about his bone-collecting, was "okay with it," but didn't help him gather corpses or sort his white plunder. The bones he found lying around in the woods were usually of smaller creatures, birds and mice.

Birdman used the floor as his workbench. Behind the pool table, bones were scattered in a wide circle around a rectangular shape with two arms sticking out of the sides. "This'll be another eagle," he told me. He grabbed a flashlight, pointed it at the dark part of the basement. The beam revealed two rows of steel wire shelves crowded with the shapes of bones. In the heart of the beam was an eagle, spread-winged. "There's my first one. I made it from lots of owl bones, some squirrel. I don't know why, but sometimes the birds just want to be other birds."

I thought Birdman would have tried to recreate the skeletons, but he built the eagle with flesh and feathers in mind. The bones fit together like tinker toys or mom's mosaic tiles. I couldn't tell what was holding them together. In the flashlight sweep, the shadows dipped in and out of the spaces between the bones where they curved away from each other. The bones could have been breathing.

Birdman cleared a space for me, directly under a desk lamp screwed upright to the wall. He gathered his buckets (the bones weren't done soaking) and showed me the enormous rib cage, the skull, the long leg bones, the bow-like hips. I had to think "big."

We only had the time after school before dinner and Saturday mornings to work on the bones. On Sundays when Birdman was at church I was at home in the workshop, tracing bones out

of mom's old anatomy books, cutting them out and placing them every which way, figuring out how they would fit into the sleek, ovaled bow of a sailboat.

I played around with a smaller skeleton first, an owl's skeleton. I also borrowed from a squirrel. Birdman said it was a common combination, and that I should pay attention to which bones wanted to be which part of the boat. I pretended to know this, when all I really wanted was to use only the whitest bones from my pile.

In about a week I had finished something like an eighteenth century clipper ship, with an extremely pronounced round hull made of the owl's rib cage, a mast of its spine, and a squirrel-leg bowsprit. Birdman showed me how to sand the bones before I glued them together. It was the kind of glue I think they use for book spines. It was Earwax Yellow. I used as little of it as possible on my white bones.

In another week, I had made a tiny schooner out of the smallest, straightest bones I could find. The ship was a collection of the front legs of mice and moles, tiny bird ribs, the vertebrae ends of tails. It took twice as many bones, but it had less gaps than my first ship.

Birdman talked a lot, and only about bones. He was trying to get me to see something; he'd pick them up and hold them to his ear, he'd pet them, roll his fingers along the strings of vertebrae he hung from an exposed copper pipe. He talked to them as much as he talked to me. "Try to see what they see," he kept saying, "try to hear what they're thinking." I figured he was sniffing too much glue, or the peroxide fumes. I didn't really worry about it affecting me, since I'd brought my own Cotton White face masks from home.

It was the last week of school, and I was so close with the big bones. I had arranged the deer's ribs side by side, the joints pointing up and out. I was piecing together the ship's deck deliberately on the pool table, which I planned to rest just inside the hull joints and glue it as tightly

as possible. I was using the scapulae as two masts—their triangles looked like very tight sails with no wind in them.

I was sweating a lot. The humidity was depressing outside. The stupid bones kept falling out of each other—the glue wouldn't stick. Birdman bent over a couple buckets, massaging a fox skull with a soaking rag. His eyes were half-closed. He was rubbing the same spot on its nose, like he thought it could feel, like it was enjoying him.

I finally asked him, "What's it thinking?"

Birdman held the skull up, pointing the chin in my direction. "All the land mammals, they want to fly," he said. "And the birds want to be above flying."

I asked, "What's above flying, again?" because every time he explained it, I got lost.

"Transcendence," Birdman smiled. "They want to be the stars."

My hands were tired and gummed with dust and glue. "They're not getting to be stars, though. They just sit around your basement in the dark."

"So? I make them into stars."

"But they're not transcending."

"With me they are." He put down the skull and came over to me. He started fitting bones in the gaps of the ship deck. I didn't stop him—he found all the right places to snug them in, curves and joints aligned. "You still don't listen to them. That's why it's taking you so long. I make them transcend because I pay attention to them. That's all they need, someone to pay attention, someone to place them somewhere. That's how humans transcend. They need God to listen to them."

"Bones aren't humans."

"At the end they are. Bones are what's left, not your brain, not your heart. You're spirit's staying in your bones."

I stared at Birdman's hands, weaving through the piles of bones on the pool table, pruned from peroxide and water, Skin White. The bones were White Deep in Thought. They nestled into the spaces of his fingers before he put them where they belonged.



Clouds were swallowing the sky as I rode my bike back from Birdman's. The trees churned. The wind wasn't making up its mind about direction. As soon as I pedaled into the yard, Dad came flying out the front door. Candace was already sprawled in the tub. The radio frizzed at Mom turning the dials. It was a big one. It wasn't necessarily coming for us. We heard the sirens split, and for some reason I thought "Fragile White." We probably waited for five minutes before Dad freaked and made us go to the workshop.

Outside I heard what everyone calls "the waterfall sound," which is the sound a funnel makes when it's roaring towards you. The sound grew like a wave that hadn't hit shore yet. I had never heard it before. I listened, sitting on the top step with Dad, because he didn't mind us watching for a little while. Something in my pocket stuck my leg. I let out a sparrow's wing bone. I held it between the inside of my thumb and the edge of my hand, plugging the fear in me. The sound outside grew into my ears, came through my nose and into my mouth, plugged the gaps of my neck and shoulder blades, sealed the space between legs. It was Rushing White all around us through the door into the ground, into the sketches of fragile wooden ships, into the hard bubblegum, the bucket of nails, the anatomy of Candace's neck and shoulder pressed against Mom on the bottom step, Dad's hand holding my back. I was full of White. It buried us, our spirits sunk in a hole in the ground. My bones screamed.

Then rain. Rain and that was it.

We eventually went back to the house, bending through the downpour. We couldn't be

bothered to turn on the lights. In the morning we would discover they couldn't be turned on, poles snapped in half and electric-less wires snarled. We dripped up the stairs to our own rooms, exhausted from relief and, I thought, a touch of disappointment. I peeled my clothes off in the dark. Inside my drenched pocket the wing bone moaned for stars. I folded into bed and let the rest of the White drain out my head.

DETOURS

In the nowhere-ness of interstates, wheels and the flattened land
respect each other's time. Road is direction.

On the backs of hills, beside pocket ponds and cow-cut grass,
the where-ness keeps the wheels a while. Distance disappears
between the wheels and doesn't know it.

You return to know where you stumbled in;
you were time-pocked and grown up between numbers
too rare, or wrinkled.

You decide you were too young for this infringement upon your youth.

That doesn't-pertain-to-you rolling down your window
at the silence point outside direction.

There. Where you stumbled in, you find your own world half-baked,
childish, old.

HETERODYNES

are two new frequencies created by combining two other frequencies in a nonlinear signal-processing device, usually a vacuum tube, transistor, or diode. These two new frequencies are the difference and sum of the two original frequencies. Engineers use this process to shift signals into a new frequency range. They don't need both heterodynes; they use one and filter out its partner. I don't find heterodynes particularly interesting. I am simply fascinated by how the word leaves a mysterious flavor around the head, like "saccharine" or "winter."

Kate Haldrup had the bony, developed face of a 26-year-old before she was out of middle school. Her angled bangs swept across her forehead (the edgy look) and hung over her righteous cheekbones, cutting out just below the fine jut of her jaw. She was the best on our basketball team. I adored her. I have no idea what she thought of me.

Kate had the most boyish gestures of any of us on the team. She jerked her head like a guy, she ran sharply, she stared with indifferent cockiness, she waved her hands in a specifically relaxed,

male way that isn't directly describable but instantly recognizable—we all see it in the football games where the padded men hail each other, signal, smack shoulders, roll their necks. That was Kate. She was loose. She was strong. She was collected, cool, confident. Mysterious.

I chased after Kate. I wanted to *be* her, but I didn't pretend I was her friend. But we both tried, stumbled to meet and converse whenever we happened to stand in the same ten feet. I didn't ask the coaches about technique, I asked her. I asked her about practice, about dates, about time, about why she let her hands bounce fistless as she ran. We were supposed to be friends, we knew, because we shared the same faith. We were sisters. But we couldn't manage reading each other's frequencies.

I remember mostly that feeling of looking through a window at an exotic animal which I so badly wanted to hold.

We happened to be in the same physics class two years after our teammate-ship in basketball and cross country. Our teacher, Mr. Stacey, believed in ghosts and coached football and talked like Southern Ohio. He was rather small for a man and very thin. I couldn't understand how he coached football.

It didn't matter that she wasn't my point-guard anymore. I paid special attention to her as she read her answers out loud in the physics language of speed, velocity, and plumb. I think she noticed me watching her by the way she also glanced at me, how she seemed uncomfortable, awkward when I was near, like she didn't know what to make of me. Sometimes she almost smiled, almost laughed, almost scowled at me, but all those mouth movements were obliterated in a squirming blankness.

Kyle was a sock dangling as crutches walked. Kyle was blue basketball shorts, lighter blue basketball shirt. Kyle is now a newspaper clip in my art references folder, ball in hand, arm extended,

looking up. Kyle had science in his head. We pushed him and his wheelchair down the little hill outside our elementary school, not allowed to, but laughing, he held up his arms like a rollercoaster, he was happy we put him at risk. We enjoyed Kyle in his wheelchair.

Kyle was born without most of his right leg. His mother had chicken pox while she was pregnant with him. I don't know if that's actually the reason, that's just the one he told us.

Forest Dale Elementary was new to me and I had never seen anything like him before. My shameless fourth-grade-self stared. And asked. And decided we were best friends. We liked to race each other to the end of books, usually ones that involved lordly badgers and sword-wielding otters. Kyle won most of the time, but only because he checked them out first. He wasn't religious, but he gave me a silver necklace prayer box for my birthday in seventh grade. It immediately became part of my skin. I didn't understand what it meant. I still don't. Two weeks later, by a compulsion I can't attribute to myself, I gave the necklace to a ten-year-old girl as a Christmas present.

First day of Spanish class, eighth grade, Kyle mysteriously stopped talking to me. Idiot me returned his spontaneous coldness. We've ignored each other faithfully since, as if we didn't need each other, as if we didn't miss the sound of ourselves together. I wish I could find that little girl again and ask her to give me a birthday present.

The spring of 2008 Susan Ishim, my childhood friend, walked up the school stairs and I was completely unprepared. I hadn't counted the years since I'd seen her. I'd forgotten. I almost didn't recognize her without pajamas, without snarled hair, without looking like me. She wore makeup. She was talking to girls who didn't look like me. When she saw me I felt our history finding us, telling us we were friends. Then we were separated by a startling clarity. She had grown up. I had not.

AFTER A WALK

Father, there isn't silence anymore,
alone even, and with erasers.
Are you God in/with me?

Living isn't where,
blushed pines.
Drowning depends on where.
This level of living requires
why, who is your god?

This isn't news to you

Can I come back?
It is empty dust and light in here,
do I have to convince you?

Will you be ahead
making sure there is no silence
for me to stop in?
That girl who asked me
"you looking for a quiet place?"
I wasn't (sure there wasn't silence)

and you up there
without news in silence,
the wordless sun has your feet,

I can't imagine where your mouth is.

Do I convince you here, Father?
Making silence dust to
erase the blush of pines,
the lonesome mouth?

OLDER

Hannah wants to swim all the way to the rocks, no stopping, no wading, no floating, no giving up and walking on the beach. We do it. Our slippery legs touch when we flail, about to sink, when our eyes are in the water and we don't see each other. I mention the tasteless water. She suggests different strokes as we tire of dog paddling, butterfly, freestyle. We flip on our backs, our sides, dive and wiggle like otters. We make it. The rocks are green to hold us mermaids, breathless and thrilled. Hannah says she's always wanted to, a way of defeating her body and defeating the lake, that tiny strip of lake that couldn't drown tired, young us.

We climb the rocks and talk about anything we want.

People understand marijuana does "stuff" to you. Some people say "good stuff," others say "bad stuff." I rarely find people who understand it isn't the marijuana I'm fighting, who understand plants aren't lazy or careless or forgetful, who understand that people pull triggers so they can blame

guns.

I have never let marijuana do “stuff” to me. But I’d like to. I’d like to know what my older sister means by “love” and “peace” and “relax.” I want to smell like sweat and incense, talk about music like it’s heaven, see visions and dance, I mean really dance.

“Big sister” is very different from “older sister.” You don’t say of an unrelated close friend “she’s like my older sister,” you say “she’s like my *big* sister.” That means size, like they can carry you, like they do. Older, that’s just numbers. Think: numbers don’t actually exist.

Hannah sang at my high school graduation open house. I knelt in the living room listening to the soft charms of her smoky voice. The black guitar nearly drowns her, but her voice rocks like that wagon wheel, like she sways the guitar on her knee, hey, hey, mama rock me....

When we were all younger, I found a folded paper inside the frame of Hannah’s fantasy oil painting. She had written a short note in pencil, hidden it as a last testimony. “In case I die,” she wrote, “I want my family to know that I’m dancing in Heaven.” And I thought, “I should write a note like that,” because, you know, I wanted to be her. I put the note back. I never did write my own.

We climbed the rocks and we didn’t talk about the future, we didn’t talk about life.

Cannabis Sativa: Acapulco gold, Panama gold, African black, Canadian black, Panama red, Zacatecas purple, Indian hay, Texas tea, Mexican locoweed, Aunt Mary, Mary Jane, Mary Warner, Mary Weaver, MJ, J, Juanita, Greta, sweet Lucy, baby, mother, rainy day woman, fingers, fatty, homegrown, broccoli, herb, root, hay, bale, hemp, wheat, grass, bush, flowers, weed, ragweed, killer

weed, gigggleweed, green, red dirt, brick, bomb, ace, grunt, joint, stick, joy stick, kick sticks, charge, pin, number, gauge, pot, roach, saffrafras, dry high, smoke, twist, messerole, reefer, muggles, boo, doobie, snop, kif, *bhang*, *djamba*, *ganja*, *grifa*, *grillo*, *maconha*, *moota*, *mu*, *panatela*, *pode*, and *sinsemilla*. She smokes it in an efficient water pipe; it's about as high as you can get.

Doctor of medicine, William Kissick, once wrote "We owe the largest debt to [drug addicts, users]...whose stumblings, stupidities, weaknesses, and agonies make books on drugs inevitable. And we wish with all our hearts it were not so."

We swam and climbed the rocks and it was the first time in five years that I could enjoy my older sister. But we couldn't talk about anything *I* wanted.

Traveling broke has its own mystique. It makes my older sister feel like a Martin, a twisted sparrow, turquoise and flying, guitar case in hand, a solitary dreadlock behind her right ear, a medicine wheel ingrained on the left retro auricular. She rides on trains, makes love in tents, waits tables in Oregon, gets banished from Montana, her hair is liberated and oily, her legs are thinner but that soft packet over her lower abs remains.

People do drugs because they're poor or depressed, people do drugs because they're rich or bored, people do drugs because they're sick, because their parents hate each other, because they are curious, because they need forgetting, because it's cool, because it's stupid, because they loath themselves, because they love themselves, because it "alters the mind," because they're adults and can do whatever, because it's better than cigarettes, because it's rebellious, because they're finding God, because God doesn't exist, because they, because them, because us, because it.

I don't know why my older sister does. I know exactly why.

It's one of those lazy days after Christmas and we're watching Batman punch people, when Hannah wanders into the dark room, flops down, smiles widely, and starts braiding a bracelet. I don't realize she's high, or that my little sister Katie can hear her swearing to herself (Katie told me "eff, eff, eff, eff"). I only notice Hannah's fingers are frantic and refuse to braid.

That was the Christmas she offered our cousin secrets in her suitcase. She's never offered her stash to anyone else in our family. He said no; it was obvious he was going to say no. Our cousin wants to be in law enforcement. I have no idea why she picked him, except, perhaps, his circumstance suggests to her he wants it. Our cousin lives a run-down, small-town life, the recession life, where he wakes to gunshots and learns nobody thinks he can learn for the Latino in his blood. But Hannah lived a nice-town life, the stable life, where she woke safely and cried at funerals of elders, not teens. Our cousin may live on the streets where she gets hers, but our cousin has none of it in his blood.

I want to talk to Hannah about Hannah. I don't. We talk about water instead.

My older sister was the greatest painter in the world. Her command of oil conceived in high school; she was swelling enough to show, though a few years away from birth. She gave herself two months at art school before she aborted. Now she bakes clay beads to sell at festivals, if she remembers in the buzz that she's selling them, not giving them away. I don't know the last time she wielded brushes.

I have an ancient sketchbook of hers, from when she wore flowers on her dress and read

books about talking animals. I draw on the pages she left blank. Mother hangs remains of high school inspiration in the basement stairwell, in the abandoned red room. Katie treasures that painting I found the note in. Looking again I can't find it anywhere. Did Katie lose it? Did my older sister throw it away?

Marijuana is mislabeled as "highly addictive," and "deadly." Marijuana, compared to legal and illegal substances, is one of the safest drugs in the market. It is impossible to overdose and most people suffer only mild withdrawal symptoms if they decide to quit. Kids my age, well-read and researched (but, like me, unsmoking), mock my misgivings. "At least she isn't doing *hard* drugs," they insist. I don't know if this is true. Spoons are missing from our silverware drawer. Do you know how to cook heroin in spoons?

Hannah told the best stories about llamas. She threw me into epileptic spells of laughter which I physically could not stop. We played cards in her bed until midnight, secretly, muffled giggles in pillows. She introduced me to books. She taught me lying for fun and lying for real. She put the first marker in my hand, made me draw a grass-skirted girl she named and wrote adventures for.

She hated, hated, hated us for "ruining her life." I hid with Katie in my room. We didn't want to be alone with her screams and accusations coming up the stairs where it didn't have any place to go but our ears. Our parents (honestly, it didn't take them that long) became patient, hard and quiet like they were telling her secrets, and I can't decide what kind of love it is that makes you stand in the kitchen watching while your daughter destroys your hostas in the side yard, while she curses blurrily, frivolously, at your hand, at your home, at your life.

Those days she lived sullen in the house, Katie and I forgot we existed. We lived

submarine—shy hermits escaping to school, to as many hours of homework we could pretend to have. I rehearsed what I would do if Hannah came flailing at me, at Katie, at mother, rehearsed where I would strike, what I would say that could make her stop like my fist made her stop when we were younger. But she wasn't that girl I punched for hitting me with a water balloon like a rock in the back. This person in our house wasn't making water balloons or writing mystery stories about girls in grass skirts. She had stopped making. She had stopped telling.

Nothing much happens during the flight. It is the morning, the day after when she crashes that I learned to fear. It wasn't that Hannah was changing. She was losing.

So I don't really care what the scientists in California or Pennsylvania or Britain or Amsterdam say about multifaceted causes and benefits and tolerance. I have lost my big sister. Now some stranger moves her legs, runs her mouth, makes everyone believe Hannah is alive, but I know she's dead, she's been dead years and I watched it, and everyone tells me hope and patience, and I try, I really do, but God, how will I ever get my Hannah back?

I don't want us to talk. I want to tell. I want to say things like "I hate you" and "you had the *world*, you blind waste of talent" and "it's the middle child in a three-sibling family that's supposed to go crazy, haven't you ever taken psychology?" I'm the big sister now, or the non-sister, because I can't carry her, I don't know how. I wish it were me, the middle child, but I'm so glad it wasn't. I believe I will hear tragedy soon—I believe that any day I could answer my phone's static tones and cry over the bloody bashed body that everyone thinks is my older sister. I want to tell Hannah that. I want to tell her I can imagine perfectly that vodka and nicotine death. I imagine telling her the truth: that I want this to happen to her, to us, and she won't be dancing in Heaven, and I won't have to

remember who dropped me, abruptly, falling into everything after alone.

We climb the rocks. We talk about waves. We walk back on the beach and she takes her dog
and she leaves, I leave.

ICARUS

I wasn't sure what you'd do—

to wish your body harm
as a form of luck

as every luck in the Universe seems to

What you'd do and wouldn't—what you don't and wouldn't drop
Luck drapes your shrugging shoulders
and I wasn't sure you would—

We want all possibilities
here,
open toward just enough echo,

and I wasn't sure—there was a door beneath me, wanting closure—the ground
doesn't exist in “all possibilities,” doesn't
in the over-there

I wanted closure—you wouldn't close any doors

A ricochet bone catches balance—after falling through too many doors gravity catches
you —pain is the absence of choice—look over-there, doesn't exist—I wanted closure for
your heels here—I think you missed standing—what you wouldn't and would kick over—I

wanted closure for your toes, without cracks, a slab of echo, no filling—

