

Silence is the original piper.

The snow fell up to Odell’s hips. To walk she had to swim. Crumbs of swallowed sound led her on.

The crunch and sizzle of her limbs treading snow were instantly couched in more snow. Odell sat standing up, such was the snow. Such snow that Odell teared up on a laugh.

On this day the world was a white wishing well sinking each tossed coin of noise. Silence shimmered. It blinked and spun and granted wishes.

Odell yelled and it fell like soft yarn to the ground.

Ha! Odell ha-ha-ed.

Heeeeh! Haaaah! Hoooooooooooh! Odell hee-haa-hoo-ed.

Frost-feathered tears perched on her numb cheeks.

Help me! Help meeeee! Odell help-me-ed out loud, finally, into a bone-white carpet of air-borne secret keepers.

I don’t know how to live!

I don’t know if I can!

I’ve never been good at it!

And I’m not getting better!

Deep echo-less-ness all around.

It made her belly rise like sourdough and her voice, her voice raw and baked—broke bread with itself.

Who is speaking!

Silence

Whoooo is speakiiiiiiing!

Silence

ooOoo

o!

Whoooooo

oooo
ooooo!

oooooooo!

oooooooooooo

oooooooooooooooo!

oooooooooooo

OOOOO

There's no sound anywhere. So what she hears must be her. Half-mute and tone-deaf Odell. Odell the girl who was required to join the church choir and ordered to lip-synch the hymns.

Dark voice moves up her throat like wine flowing backwards. She leans into the burp and yawn of Ahhhhhhh and blue kiss of Oooooooooo and cracked smile of Iiiiiiiiiiiiiii

Sounds start sounding within the sounds. Something like a song. It shocks her down to the numb raised nubs of her toes.

ooOoo o!

oooo ooooooooo!

Whoooooo oooooo! oooooooooo oooooooooooooo!

oooooooooooo

OOOOO

Is. Singing.

Something like a song.

Odell shakes hands with her teeth. Fingers her mouth roof. Vaulted not like a dome, as she thought. But arched gothic, ribbed. She tickles the wet wrinkles behind her front teeth. The contact sends cold waves of bat wings for minutes after.

Clicks and clicks click into place in her mouth: a black box, closed and opened, empty and full, unfolding layers of sound inside, sound lived in, a kind of home. All of her grown so loud so suddenly. She nearly gags on heartbeat.

Odell tries not to move. Tries to tree. So as to not scare off this rare throat creature. She sees her vocal folds are a wild animal. Are sunless fluttering eyes locked with what she can't see.

Her wet throat, right now, is staring into every seen and unseen thing around her. Aspens have eyes where they self-prune. Her mouth eyes flutter again. She thinks butterflies, how they have eyes on their genitals.

Please please please don't go

I've never heard

I've never heard before

I've never heard like

When Odell finally moves it's to rip down her snow pants. After the piss, another stream. A hot red tuber rooting through the white snow.

Her blood. She hadn't known it was her time.

NOISE IN THREE PARTS

THE BIG BANG DID NOT BANG

At first, not a bang but a hum. And to begin, no hum but a space. A mouth becoming a mouth in the act of opening. Somewhere in there, in the first there, space sticks out its black tongue and time blows razzberries. How they mouth fart and ha ha against expanding skin of a pregnant belly they share. Static and white noise and radio and cellphones come later. For now, that first now, there is a very singular very low and high tone. A note: to play off. The hum descends lower and lower as it cracks space wider and wider as its ringing rises higher and higher coiling time tighter and tighter. The hum traverses itself with echoing steps. The hum is all around and inside and through all things. But it is also nowhere. Because there are no ears. You could say the sound cries to itself. But you would be human. You are not part of this song for a very long time.

PROTO COCHLEA

I thank something for sound. I thank something for the something sensed by bony fishes 400 million years ago. No surprise one of the first organs on this freaky tilted Earth was an organ for balance. The “balance labyrinth” as it’s called in old sea kin. It wiggled their bones with knowing waves as their bodies moved through water. Try taking that to the mud banks. It’s especially hard to stand up with only thin air calling to you. Air just doesn’t carry as much energy as water. It doesn’t wiggle the bones so stirringly. But we came up here for a reason, or season, or pants or knives or wifi or bassoon. So much later than fish, the eardrum shows up. Bits of jawbone swim up the skull, unite with inner labyrinth. Spiral open. We muddy ones become terribly sensitive to air’s transmissions. We wiggle our bones ourselves to release the pressure.

SOUND NOW

You gotta give it the bumble and lift of a dent. Sheet kindly lent, said Joyce, not singing “Lead, Kindly Light,” because you kinda gotta lightly not wreak what you’ve been sung. So just recall. Your mud-sunk ancestors heard because they put their jaws to the earth and shivered. Sway a little in a wind from nowhere. In a hum you come from.

Odell and Her Big Black Dog Play Telephone

Odell and her big black dog like to play Telephone mouth to mouth. Well, to be exact, there's a hole in between their holes. Odell makes two loose fists of her hands, puts them to her lips, one fist hole joined to the other, and whispers lonesome high winds through their knuckled tunnel. Her big black dog latches his teeth onto the last pinky knuckle, swallows and returns each sound, deepens each seagulled bellyache. The hole through her fists becomes a flesh cable, buzzing songs with a pulse. Flesh cables, you know, operate through their spaces, their holes. Flesh, you know, is genius at holes, spaces. Odell and her big black dog face to face breathe-sing through and into. Her fists vibrate like earth around a lively blind mole. Like this they go back and forth for whole dog hours into nothing but this. Odell is the first to choke. The big black dog is always the first to laugh, in gravel-shot growls, re-inventing rhythm. Odell's big black dog loves to pulse laugh-growls into her open mouth in perfect animal time. He loves the wide shining algae blooms her eyes make, her breathless sunset face, her throat's tight ropes, the way she pulls away to cough and hiccup with tears in her smile creases: the best way to defeat Odell.

Aunt Rut (Pronounced Rroot)

Aunt Rut has an accent. No one knows from where. My mom, her sister, didn't have it. Really her name is Ruth, but she doesn't like the *th*-sound there. She says a *th* after *u* sounds like a bullfrog's throat throbbing against dry grass. This made perfect sense to me once when I was six and never again.

A letter came in the mailbox for Aunt Rut. Her name spelled the way she speaks it. I held onto it until she returned. She went away for a purple spring—a euphemism, we suppose, but no one knows for what. How was your winter, she asks, when she returns. She's not sun-tanned but her smile unfolds like slow waves and clinks of ice.

I show her the wrinkled cream envelope with her name handwritten. I'm in school, a very good reader, and I feel I have to tell her that the chosen spelling of her chosen name is confusing. Rut, if you're a Rut, people will think it's rut pronounced rut. And not what you think.

She gives me a hooded blank stare.

People will think Rut is rut. Which isn't good.

What's not good, she says.

Rut. It means something...else.

Any ting means some ting else, she says.

Yeaah, I guess, I say. But this thing isn't a good thing. It doesn't have good... connotations, I say slowly, trying out the last word for the first time.

Aunt Rut smiles, slow as my speech. Says, Yeah okay, there are co-nations. So what. Rut is my Rut. Any not good ting may not be a not good ting.

My mother, her sister, never used triple negatives. Where the hell does Aunt Rut think she comes from?

Aunt Rut is wearing threadbare pea-green petticoats she picked up on her "purple spring" and snacks on toasted pumpernickel coated with pickled mackerel.

She says, you know Haysus? He would have pronounced my name Rroot.

Where did Aunt Rut pick up Jesus? Never mentioned him before.

The way Haysus says tings is up for anyone, she says. She coughs a crushed cinnamon laugh from who knows where. I breathe it in, slowly. Expect to sneeze, but none comes. Instead, a melting in my rib cage.

She smiles weird and I smile weird.

I shut up and hug her, like I've been taught to do. But this time it could mean anything, any ting, I think, and smiling itself is weird after all.

Aunt Rut Laughs And Farts

I saw an angel, I tell Aunt Rut. She tells me, Seeing an angel is like seeing your eyes blink.

I saw a tiny man, built like a pinecone, running between the rosehips. Seeing a tiny man running, says Aunt Rut, is like a heart that beats off.

Aunt Rut, I say, I heard the most beautiful song. It fell like black piano keys between my sleeping blonde lashes. Some mix of molten hums and star-pulsed soprano winging down to feed on reindeer moss. I woke up in a country I've never known.

Hearing the most beautiful song, Aunt Rut says, is like sneezing. You should say excuse me.

I say, Stop minimizing my experience Aunt Rut. I'm trying to tell you something really extraordinary.

A white fox saunters up to Aunt Rut and sniffs her big crooked toe before wooshing off and vanishing between birches. Aunt Rut laughs with so much joy she farts loudly, so loudly, it's clear seeing the rare fox you've waited for is like laughing and farting.

Greta is the Essence of Greetings

When the old girl test-smiles in the mirror she knows it's time to scrape off the plaque of a 7-year winter. It's time for a brightener, greetings and visitations dammit! But outside, still snow rags and undarned gray socks of sky.

Odell would like to sneeze yeast on all this murk, watch it bubble and belch into lavender and dandelion brews.

What Odell really needs is Greta. Odell doesn't even have to ring her. Greta rings Odell. That's Greta for you.

Greta's name is the essence of greetings. It is a greeting's throaty root, sung origin. Greta's name is a wet loogie full-throated into an open hand in good faith. Greta, the tongued sap of long-awaited welcome, she never fails to ask: How was your winter?

Such a long fucking winter. They each burrow a cold nose into the other's neck, and exhale warm mmmhhhhs like goldenrod pollen dusting their goosebumps.

Greta is here to prepare sunrise for supper. Because sometimes you can't wait any longer for the sun to rise. So you have to dish it up yourself. For tonight's dinner, not tomorrow's breakfast. And swallow whole. So says Greta.

This Greta, here holding a giant gutted pumpkin filled to the brim with beet juice. A chain of reddish crab claws, inter-clasped, crowns her head. A banana in every pant pocket, a purple grape in each nostril. An alive-looking fox around her neck. Greta, here, with lingonberried tits. An orange peel smile. "I'm your sunrise!" shouts an orange-gagged Greta, and her sound waves squirt through the orange peel's pores onto Odell's sad face.

Greta is too much. Odell needs this Greta.

There's a way long pause. Then, Odell hips the door wide open and sings Greta in:
Greeeeeeeeeeeeeetaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa, Greeeeeeeeeeeeeetaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
Odell uses her secret goat voice. Her mountain voice, her metallic voice. Her voice a silver plane streaking blue. Greta opens her mouth-cave in kind, her shining goatness, her throaty shook foil:
Ooooooooooooooodeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeellllll

Greta and Odell plop on floor cushions, a beet juicy pumpkin between them. And bob for pink ladies and golden delicious.

No one gets anything, but somehow their heads come up spitting bright seeds between dark spaces of lost teeth.

By the fire sits a block of ice. It melts in everything's breathing. Out pop three fuchsia spheres from some yesterlife. Luscious pomegranates destined for tonight. Greta winks. Odell sneezes beet juice into her own belly button.

Greta, like most words that come to mean "Hello" (itself originally a cry from across the waters), comes from sounds to do with calling out in weeps and wails and gut-tongues that touch on gods too.

Greta, like most words, is a medium-rare guest. Safely crusted on the outside and blood red in the middle.

So Greta takes Odell in her lap and begins to braid long green stalks of carrots into her cobwebbed hair. Carrot roots of orange, and cream, and bruise purple, and baked lemon. They dangle and knock like sun-struck wind chimes down Odell's back. A clay-caked sunrise spine.

They don't sleep. They set orange and grapefruit and pomegranate skins on fire. They mold gummy golden raisins onto each tooth and smile goofy horizons.

Rooster crow comes, black and red throated. As if these birds needed reminding of their lust for dawn. The old girls blush reds and pinks yet kiss hello and goodbye without alarm. Kiss hello and goodbye with more throat.