

The Audiologist

The thick gray windows never reveal
her shadowy figure. The audiologist
always has something to conceal
behind those windows. She only reveals
to Mom how I did this year. I steal
a look at my audiogram and her checklist.
The thick gray windows never reveal
her shadow figure: the audiologist

and I are at war
over my ears, my headphones, my chair.
First she makes a beep, or a low roar—
and then I'm at war
with myself. Did I truly hear
that or not? My hand shoots up in the air,
volleying against her score
over my ears, my headphones, my chair.

The thick walls absorb my silence.
I cannot hear anything from outside,
except through my ear-burning, tense
headphones. They absorb her silence.
I wrestle with my ears, my conscience,
as I close my eyes to listen, decide.
The thick walls absorb my silence
as her sounds come from the other side.

Practice

I stared at the black telephone
in Grandma's house
a bike ride from home

The receiver drooped like a brick
as I watched the slow wheel
whir back into place to "0"
after each number I dialed

In the dining room
I held it upside down
near my body aid

Exposed for the occasion

I stared at the kitchen
almost warped linoleum floor
a yellowing white

And waited
a loud ring then three ripples

Then a man's voice said Hello

Hello

 Hello?

 I stared
at the lid of holes
choked with brown dust

This is Ray

Oh Ray Raymond This is Dad

I squinted at the smooth tear
under Grandma's old chair

Dad

Yes yes you understand me
This is so great
How are you doing over there

I wondered what kind of things
would he say on the telephone

It's hot here

He laughed It's hot here too

I never heard his laugh so
close in my ears

Ray you ready for your word

Yeah

Okay here we go Superman

What

Superman

I closed my eyes What

Superman Su per man

What

Superman Su per man Superman you know
It's a bird it's a plane it's Superman

It's a word I know that

Superman Can you understand me

I thought No why do I have to practice

What is it now

It's Superman It starts with a S

Stupid man That's not one word That's two words

No Ray Listen Listen now Superman
He's from the comics

The receiver turned hot in my hand
finger bleeding with sweat

I don't understand Dad

No Try one more time Superman Su per man
He flies like Peter Pan

Duperman Beaterman That doesn't sound like a word
Super man Superman Ray

I stared at the cradle

Well I I can't understand you

Okay Bye bye now

I wished

my body aid alone
on the kitchen floor
smash

smash it
with the receiver

A Wish, Unheard

Once I saw him sitting in his crowded office from a new distance.
Coworkers were laughing, giggling almost, beside his huge window:
a view of the world grew shimmering through the morning glass.
There were the usual skyscrapers, throngs of shoppers, impatient cars.
As with anything else, he'd ceased to notice; it had always been his.
He doubled over in laughter while others tossed in more jokes.
He did not have to lipread or ask for a rewind: I wanted to sliver
off my ears—forgetting I could catch only so much—and
give him my bloodied ears on a satin pillow and say,
Here. All this is my life.