

## COCHLEA

I

*Today is Rachmaninoff's birthday,*

and his piano concerto plays  
from the rusted record. On that day,

seven horns are stolen from my closet.

Until they return,  
the oboes will fill in the space.

They are not quite the same  
as horns because the sounds are not like

when you sing in the bathtub,           so I leave

my ear at the beach;

hoping

I hear           the burglar's steps.

II

You say,  
*How do you connect your ear and brain?*

It is like a tin can telephone

vibrating on the beach over miles    and miles.

While I drew a treble-clef

on your arm in a bed,

the sand covers my ear. I will find

star sand in it.

I say,

*Do you know that star sand is dead calcarina?*

It is a type of foraminifera,

a small shell.

I learned about it when I was young.

III

When I was nine,

you gave me a little jar of star sand. Seven  
little stars

were in colored sand with small

bivalves.

I shook it on a bed  
before the sunset.

I had a surgery to pierce a tiny  
green tube into my eardrum because

I had too much water in my ear.

I could not hear,       but I liked to sit

under the piano in the summer.

IV

There is a cochlea deep inside the ear.

When I hear           Rachmaninoff's piano,  
I feel all the notes

absorbing through the cochlea.

And you sometimes blow  
the breath into my ear and whisper,

*Treble-clef.*

The cochlea likes it.

V

Still, my ear is searching for the burglars  
like a lighthouse—like radar

alone on the beach.

VI

When the burglars play  
the horns by the seashore,

their naked  
feet splash in gentle waves.

They find the cochlea and put it on the table.

They set fire to their grills  
and open bottles of beer.

My ear is by the black-green shells,

carefully listening to            their sizzling.

The midnight wind opens the curtain.

You turn off the record and touch  
my earless face.            Your lips move...

I hear  
          nothing.

## AN IMPROVISATION

My fingers tap the ivory keyboard. Scimitar  
nails tick triplet beats. My high heels trample

down the earth. Crescendo  
notes leap

at the maestro whose pomaded  
mustache flips. He sneezes. I blast

fireworks of silvery trills that vibrate his crimson  
bow tie. While I turn a page, the bass clef

howls and my hair rises against gravity. I am shocked  
by the electricity. When smoke

whirls around my head, my fingers  
flash like needles on the black keys. My hips leave

the chair and I fly over amber  
hills like a swallow

cutting the mist with its face,  
wings in the chilly autumn morning. The maestro taps

his pencil on a desk. My fingers freeze  
on the keyboard. A feather falls into the mud.

## BY THE WAY

One quarter  
of my father's skull is in the refrigerator.  
It is not with cartons of orange

juice. It is with other skull  
fragments in zip-locks. All the plastic  
bags have barcodes like two pound

sugar bags and strongly  
scented Japanese oranges. The orange  
peels are between my mother's nails. Summer

gusts throughout the apartment. My sister  
pouts, "What about my wedding?"  
Three tea cups clatter

in the kitchen. My mother  
sobs, "Your father and I planned to make orange jam..."  
From my father's mouth,

he dribbles bloody saliva. Tubes upon tubes  
wind through his nostrils. He wears  
a diaper that my sister and I

bought on Tuesday morning.  
In the drugstore my sister said,  
"My fiancée has bladder cancer."

A disabled father lies  
down in the aisle while a groom  
carries a colostomy bag

and bible. My sister wears  
a crystal sparkling  
wedding gown. My father

occasionally sings Bach. I ask,  
"Is your voice harmonized in your  
imperfect skull?" He squeezes my hand twice.

## **RADIO TOWER**

*after 3/11/2011 in Japan*

*Run up to the hill,*

I repeat it from the radio tower.

The tsunami slithers over the seaweed garden.

A child is held in its mother's arms.

They are almost        at the hill.

When the microphone slips from my hand,  
clay seals my mouth. I hear

Wagner's aria in my skull.

      Clovers grow. Their dewdrops

glitter under the stardust. I want to be  
promised to return home like bubbles in the sea,

like a sea gull,

like everyone else.

## DUST FALL

When there is no  
poem in a starless night,

I search for a water lily. I follow  
the long radish roots into a deep

pond. No light. No life,

but I hear my heart beating.

I want to breathe one more time.

Then the water beads

rise against gravity to the lighthouse.  
Plumes of iridescent

dust fall onto my legs. I stand

and watch first the moon,  
and then the earth slowly

disappear into the dark matter.  
Everything is like crushed

green eggshells in my hand.

After the small particles  
smolder, another

cosmic explosion swirls.

I celebrate

being a part of it.