

bird story

It's the year twenty one thirty seven and music is defined as the act of sucking entire flocks of birds into a vacuum cleaner. I'm a janitor and a small helpful man, and I work at the music school where all of the children in their yellow uniforms learn how to be walking around outside with vacuum packs strapped over their shoulders to suck in little flocks of bluejays and sparrows and finches that dart around in the garden from tree to tree. I like to break for lunch beside the upstairs window where it is okay for me to be watching them run around with their vacuums in the sunshine. My favorite food is a kind of snack called star flakes which tastes like a salty ocean breeze because it is made completely out of starfish protein. My best friend in the whole world of this building where I work is named Samantha twelve because her parents named her Samantha and because she is the person who teaches children how to suck up specifically twelve birds. She has got her own classroom and while I am prowling the white halls for the messes that are made occasionally after a child collapses, Samantha twelve teaches her class. And I think that it is good for these children who are girls to be taught about the practice of taking twelve birds out of the air at one time and sucking them into their vacuum-sealed containers where the birds are wrapped snugly in foil and slotted one bird beside the next bird, because the feeling of getting twelve at one time always makes my whole heart do a deep blue noise down to the very soles of my feet and I smile to know that I am not alone in feeling this way. Because these girls are so young and there are so many things in the world they have not experienced like climbing a tree or betting on stocks, and I look at them and I know that in their lives they're going to catch so many birds, that for these girls whose ponytails are allowed to be long, it's going to be pretty much one bird after another all throughout history.

Samantha twelve who is one of the best friends in my life is telling me a story over my bluetooth earbuds. I'm lying in bed with my earbuds in and it's midnight. I know that somewhere around fifty thousand other people are listening to her podcast besides myself, but I'm trying to pretend I'm not thinking about that. I have a very sincere facial expression. Tonight she is telling the story of the first time she is catching birds. "My grandmother, I remember, picked me up and sat me on her knee. We were living in a log cabin, I don't remember where exactly and I don't remember what the name of the state was. She pointed out the window and said 'Isn't it such a sore day? Would you mind looking around for some berries to make some jam?'" She loved to make jam and I thought she could probably have made jam out of anything. I could have brought her a pile of rocks and she'd have made jam out of each rock: that's how experienced she was. Well, people looked very experienced back in the day.

I'm a birdcatching instructor at the national academy of birdcatching, and I specialize in the catching of specifically twelve birds, and I teach this course because, well, girls need to learn the bird tricks just as I did on the day I went hunting for berries. I was about the same age as those girls. But I knew even less than they do about the art of getting many separate birds to be in one place, and I wore my hair very long and I always brushed my teeth. I helped with the cooking. My grandmother had said to me: that sky today sure looks sore.

I went out into that woodland to gather some berries for her. I knew that she loved to make jam because she always became very quiet, standing at the kitchen sink in the late evening, the blue tile sink. She'd wash the fruits clean. I slipped my boots on and walked outside. The first thing I noticed was the hushed silence. The stillness. I walked and walked until I came across a sort of cone-shaped bush covered in red berries, and I stood in front of it and at the top of the bush was a little sparrow and the sparrow was telling me that it felt very sad and that it was not having a very good day. And I asked the bird, why are you having such a bad day mister bird, and the bird said to me, it is because the sky is too big and too sore, and nobody wants to eat me. So i'm just sitting here and i'm completely free. I asked the bird why it was that the sky had suddenly become very sore, and it said that somehow the sky had doubled in size overnight, and had become twice as wide. And so I asked the bird if it wanted to come back to my cabin with me and have my grandmother put it in her mouth, and it said that it would like this very much. So I cupped it in my hands and walked back to my cabin and when I arrived I found my grandmother standing next to the window. The little sparrow looked at my grandmother and then looked at me and said, that can't be your grandmother. I said, it is though. It said no, but are you going to put me in her mouth anyway? I said yes, but that's definitely my grandmother. I opened my grandmother's mouth and put the bird inside. And it took a few minutes, but she seemed to come all alive, as if animated from within by some new water. And she very slowly sat down on the floor. Maybe then it began to seem true that this woman was not my grandmother. I wasn't sure. She looked unfamiliar, and the bird inside of her mouth may have been right.

Over the course of a week and a half I collected more birds and they were all too happy to have me close my grandmother's mouth shut on top of them. By the time she contained twelve birds, was sure of it: this woman was not my grandmother and never had been. I wasn't angry about it. I just knew that this was some woman who lived at the end of my street and whose house I passed by every once in a while on my way home. Instead of standing in front of her and looking up at her, I glimpsed her occasionally through her front window, a very kind old

lady who always seemed to be moving, always getting work done around the house, always busy with something or other. There were twelve birds inside of her, and all of them knew me, but the old woman didn't know me and I didn't know the old woman, and sooner or later a lot of people wanted to know about this happy situation we'd found ourselves in because of the birds.

It's important to remember that in the end, almost every bird in the world would like to be in a mouth, and deserves to be in a mouth, because most of the sky has become wide and strange, and the birds need to be taken down out of it because they are overwhelmed by the possibilities in its wideness. I work at the national academy of birdcatching where we have got vacuums with synthetic mouths inside of them for you and your child to use during your allotted afterschool hour to try and suck up some birds and give the musical bird-sucking a good long try. But if you are right now feeling disappointed because you are thinking that this podcast has all of a sudden become an extended advertisement for my school, I want you to understand that i'm a real person just like you, and that right now i'm lying on my bed, with my feet propped up, just like you, and that the only difference between us is that i'm talking and you're listening, which, as far as differences go, is really a negligible difference. The point i'm trying to make here is that we live far away from each other and we feel totally fine, and we're going to continue to feel fine, and there are animals whose bodies are smaller than ours. But in the way of one moment following the next and the day to day, we'll eventually drift so far away from each other that we end up in the exact same place all over again, and that's not something to feel happy about or to feel sad about, but it's just something to prepare for, because it's going to happen, it has always been bound to happen to each of us, so we had better keep listening to me talk, and we had better not any of us get lost in the woods at any point, or try to look around for birds where there aren't any birds.

I hope you enjoyed this podcast. I'm Samantha twelve and I would like to wish each and every one of you a deep blue and wonderful sleep. I love you each and every one.