

Lisa Nold
from *Birdsongs East of the Rockies*

Hooded Merganser. Lophodytes cucullatus. 5'8" Female. Found at the coffee shop at South Station where I am still working.

One hundred fifty-nine pounds. Wears a cape, with hood (purely coincidental). I've listened to her songs on several occasions, but today she's singing about the bone spur in her left heel and the never ending *you never felt anything like this, Edwin, not in your entire life* pain. I've heard her sing like this before, so I don't take notes and instead allow the words to flow over me as I observe the terminal. I must admit that quitting the firm has done wonders for my research. I've discovered that there was in fact no freedom in freelance, and without the burden I've been able to push my research to new heights. Yesterday, for example, I spent three hours with *Athene cunicularia*, commonly known as "Len," listening to his detailed account of the molting process of the Siberian Ostrow. It was a tough listen, but it deepened my understanding of the sounds that pass through his windpipe. The aspirations alone are something to admire and I would share them with you, only *Lophodytes cucullatus* is now shaking me by the shoulders. *Hello, Edwin! Where are you?* But my vocal chords are limp because who do I see crossing the buffed granite of the central terminal, but *Cupitous bulwarkius!* I'm using the word "see" liberally here because I don't actually see her as much as I see the blotch of her. I also smell the fragrance of lilac that coaxes my nerves to in her direction. I don't mean to be rude to *Lophodytes cucullatus*, but I've been waiting a year for this moment, so I drop my pen and microphone and sprint across the concourse.

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Hello! I say. I've grasped her by the shoulders, but due to my height and the size of my hands it looks like I'm about to push her down. Maybe she gets this impression as well because she jabs me in the gut.

Nevertheless, I hold on until she finally looks up and says, *Oh, you*. This isn't an ideal reaction, but it's something and I take it as good. As she looks at me I can tell that she is a mixture of excited and shocked, excited being the bigger emotion. *Edwin?* she says. *Edwin Peterson?* The memories are no doubt flooding her mind as she takes me in. First she examines my *Wood Stork* t-shirt—*Mycteria americana*, by the way, the lofty and dolesome bird of the southeastern coastal swamps—and then she slowly considers the lenses of my glasses. Maybe she's recalling her wading pools comment, which was really very witty. Regardless, the questions are now pouring out of my mouth and the answers, to my great relief, are all affirmative. *Yes*, she is back in town and *yes* she is back for good and *yes* she is working on a new production of *Manifestations* and *yes* it's opening soon and *yes* she would like to have coffee soon and *yes, yes, yes, YES!*

Fox Sparrow. Cupitous bulwarkius. 5' 9" Female. Goddess. Found on the esplanade with yours truly exactly one week later.

One hundred twenty-seven pounds. Gorgeous crimson silk dress the fringe of which rises and falls at the curves of her calves. We're linked at the elbows and I'm glad that I can't see her calves, or for that matter any other exposed portion of her body. Not while touching. This would be too much, so I bring my gaze upward, toward the watery plane of passing sailboats. She tells me about *42nd Street* in Phoenix, *Cats* in Duluth, and *The Admiral of Canterbury* at SUNY

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Purchase, the prestige of which she describes in painstaking detail. She also tells me about *Calendar Time*, a show in which she danced to—of all songs—*Lullaby of Birdland* and I'm thinking, *that's it! We're fated*. And I croon a few lines to seal the moment. *Have you ever heard two turtledoves, pittle and coo when they love. Cupitous bulwarkius* smiles in a stop-it-right-now kind of way, and even though her eyes are hidden by the black plates of her sunglasses, I can tell that she means business. I'm embarrassed, but she doesn't seem to notice because she goes on about how she found a great apartment on Commonwealth Avenue. She doesn't invite me over per se, but she walks me through it with her words, unfurling the floral curtains and exposing the balustrades and moldings with the typically effusive adjectives that one finds in most birdsongs. She says that she has been commuting from this apartment to the Needham Heights theater where she performs. This, I realize, explains her commute through South Station. She asks if I plan to see the show and I chuckle to myself because I've gone every night since it opened. I don't tell her this, however, or describe how I take my seat just after the lights go down and leave just before they come up. I omit these things to spare her from my obsession, only, as she stands in the sunlight against the stark blue curtain of the river I'm tempted to tell her everything. I'm tempted to tell her that I've been hunched in seat Q7 biting my knuckles as she bends and rolls around the scuffed stage. *Magnificent*, I whisper upon this recollection, but she doesn't notice because she's too busy telling me that I must come to the show, but to *make sure* to tell her which night. Then, in parting, gives me a quick kiss that perforates my soul.