

On the Sleeping Bear

i. Piping Plover

Peterson's Eastern Birds describes you in unremarkable terms:
The color of dry sand. The map says, *Breeds very locally within dash lines on Great Lakes.* But we see you as rare, as someone the bluejoint reedgrass shades and shelters even as it tries to slow the wind moving the dune. The tiny tracks you leave. The vast dunescape in which you breed. You and the grasses, so busy.

ii. Pitcher's Thistle

Cherry orchards and vineyards in deliberate rows, asparagus beds and berry fields on dunes that extend miles inland hold the Lakes in place. Native thistle, you are the flower my sister came from Canada to see. You with your hairy arms, silvery stems extending your taproot down for years til once in your life you flower pale pink and set seed June to September on the foredunes of the Upper Great Lakes.

iii. Port Oneida Cemetery

On a clear morning the headstones of those dead since the 1860's name the remains of those at rest as men or women, the grass and pansies marking the place as not to be disturbed further. Yesterday fog was so thick I couldn't see Glen Lake below me, The Narrows between its two chambers just a yellow smudge. And outside of Empire only my bare feet sensed the huge clammy dune between Lake Michigan and I. The blowdowns in the woods looked like smoking timber. But those names — so legible today on the sun-warmed headstones — were they assigned at birth and the roles that accompanied freely embraced? Or were those names hard-won, the result of reaching toward a mirror always fogging over?

iv. Ghost Forest

It's not a forest of dead, haunted things. The sand and wind bury full grown trees that later are revealed bleached, leafless, a perch for birds. Everything marks the earth: Look at my sister's heel marks in the dune. In Manitou Passage a freighter leaves a wake. Who drew the glyphs on the Empire Bluffs' striated faces? Look at the lines on Lake Michigan's bottom — longer than any Ginsberg or Whitman wrote punctuated with boulders. Look at the waves writing and rewriting survival advice as they wash over fully clothed Mennonite women sitting at the water's edge.