

“Growing Deaf”

Underwater, I could still hear music,
the shrill cries of my friends, the school
bus clearing its oily throat: muted
voices wavered by my ear, like sunfish
gossiping near the dock or small-mouthed bass
coughing in the shadows.

I circled toward the beach, trying to escape
the killer arm of Freddy Kollmorgen, but
surfaced six feet from him, looking the wrong way.
He fired the waterlogged tennis ball, heavy
as kryptonite, knocking me over
like a cardboard duck—

and something broke. My left ear hammering,
I limped through drums up the beach, slid
on my bike and pedaled home. Thirteen
and ignorant of pain, I curled in bed
until my sister screamed,
the pillowcase soaked in blood . . .

. . . Today, leaning from habit my right ear in,
everything sounds underwater now—your coral laughter,
my friends mouthing like trout—and I remember
Freddy Kollmorgen, imagine him pitching to his grandson,
the boy round-eyed, waving his plastic bat,
indestructible . . .