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## Little Island

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## Little Island

### Abstract

After spending two full months living on a remote island off the coast of Maine, I had a difficult time adjusting to mainland life again; the noise, the people, the lack of birds a shock to my system after getting used to such a different way of living. In this piece, I wanted to capture the feeling of becoming part of Petit Manan island, trying to learn the language of the land and the birds, and then the feeling of loss and change once I left. I hope readers can experience the feeling of falling in love with the island along with me as they read the poem.

### Keywords

Petit Manan Island, birds, puffins, MCINWR

### Disciplines

Creative Writing | Ornithology | Poetry

### Comments

Written for ENG 302: New Poems, New Poets. Based on a research experience with the Cross-Disciplinary Science Institute (X-SIG) supervised by Natasha Gownaris in Environmental Studies.

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Leah Nath

Little Island

boardwalk greasy with entangled seaweed, the rickety path to my summer blossomed open towards the ten acres of land yanked out of the ocean floor. with virgin hands in a house of experts, the endless waves surrounding us mimicked the vast open emptiness of my mind  
as we endeavored to catch all the numbers raining down from wind-borne wings for the next two months

sometimes, it felt like nothing existed but sound on Little Island:  
the terns' screeching caws and smarting smacks over the head coupled with their chicks' hoarse and ceaseless braying underfoot,  
the puffin moans and guillemot twitters carrying across the waters, the sparrow and petrel songs whispering through the night—my  
existence was seeping into the endless vibrations and reverberations of foreign languages, all words  
lost  
on me, but the meaning  
known,  
all the same

the constant cacophony only served to make the rare moments of quiet that much more deafening, like when i held my first bird:

the adrenaline pounded through the blue rivers of my hands, my hands wrapped around the delicate doll-skeleton of a tern, sweat clumped the feathers surrounding my neon pink-tipped fingers and slimy, regurgitated, beautiful bird breakfast sat on my lap (one filmy fish eye pressed into my mother's retired scrubs and the other staring unflinchingly up at me). my insides were dominated by the beating of my blood in my eardrums and the throbbing drum of bird blood beneath my fingerprints inside of that musty, tool-scattered red rain shed when our irises  
knew  
each other for a moment

and, too, when

standing at the top of our 130-step, 170-year-old, second-tallest lighthouse in Maine,  
binoculars and clicker at the ready,  
surrounded by water and water and water,  
sky and sky and sky,  
staring down at the haven of dirt where our oft-treked paths were etched, squiggly and ant-like in the towering grasses, and my breath left forgotten on the rusty artisan stairs—  
the force and power of the wind whistled a drowning and desperate symphony of empty sky into me as though yelling a love letter to nothingness to make it better heard (the romancing of the air is written into my lungs now)

worst, when the banks of floating sea rolled in, pushing the mainland smell of pines out to be replaced by petrichor and the melancholy scent of the color gray, we  
sat, trapped, inside for fear of forcing the cold to eat at the chicks unnecessarily, and cowed helplessly by the cloying, shrieking laughs of gulls. finally creeping out to greet the cautious sun and kiss our adopted children hello again, finally breathing in free-range air, finally

holding our downy darlings once more

i reached down to grab chick B, nest 5, plot 2, thirteen grams (less than a single teaspoon of sugar), wingspan 23 millimeters, but my hands flew to my throat, noose wrapped around my esophagus and brain fogged over with the smell of stale bird poop on my clothes (why are there so many flies?) mouth open, clogged full of maggots dead, i didn't hear anything at all right then, forgot the rules of ~~life~~ death; thrown from the nest and left drowned, i was surrounded by the indifference of the earth and the water, the nonsensical pattern still itself, but with an appreciation of its necessity all the same

the scale managed to tip with time, as another chick fledged, and another, wobbling and unsteady, on young wings, adolescent and innocent, children leaving me an empty-nester on the island Mother of Survivors

by the time july began to die, the silver sci-fi government-owned boat was drifting away from Little Island's little white house, our little house decorated with a large family of Cheez-It boxes, blush birthday streamers, decades of bird lists, drawings and names and poems, a washed-up lobster skeleton; the wind of Milbridge serenaded me for the last time, bringing the melody of the island all the way to the shore of the mainland

then, step off the boat, onto unsteady feet and an entire continent, more grounded and farther away from the salt of my veins than i had been in months; now, trees, roads, and utter, breath-stealing stillness; i listen to the nothingness and know i've become deaf without my little island, the dream of the summer's aria rattling around in my mind forever