

In summer, in the swell of mid-afternoon, engage each person in the house in an absorbing activity such as drawing pictures, lining up toy cars, napping, or playing chess. Slip, then, quietly away—as though to use the bathroom or fix a snack. Find instead a comfortable chair or a sill on which to seat yourself. Stare beyond the window into the shimmering heat. Stare out until you forget that you are staring. Someone may discover you there and interrupt your reverie; allow them to speak until they are satisfied or quiet. Stand up then, and stretch, and yawn. Walk to a different part of the house. Stare out a different window.

Abandon important belongings in difficult spaces. Place your favorite necklace under the couch. Leave your keys in the crevice between two balusters of the staircase. Store your transit pass at the bottom of a bag of bread. Avoid activities of habit as you work, in hopes that you'll forget your random granaries for a few days or weeks at a time. Go about your business and your days. When you bend one day to lift the flap beneath your couch, or stretch to dust the balusters, or reach the end of your loaf, come running. Yell to anyone who will listen: "Look! Look! I found it! I found it! I haven't seen this thing in forever! I've really, really missed it!"

Run everywhere you go. If you must cross a street, run across the street. If you must cross a field, run across the field. If you must cross the kitchen to the sink, run across the kitchen to the sink. When someone rings a dinner bell, run to get your dinner. When someone points up toward the sky, run to see if it's airplane, planet, or cloud. Run up the stairs, run down the stairs. Run through doorways and around blind corners. Run to put your shoes on, then run in your shoes. Run for a quarter mile, run for a mile. Run for eighteen inches if that's all there is to run.

Touch things throughout the day. Check your motion and the motions of colleagues and passersby to carefully, lovingly, feel the heft and the texture of items unfamiliar to you. Stop a stranger and pinch the fabric of her shirt between thumb and fingers. Run your palm for a few minutes over the bark of a pine or an oak. Linger among the indentations that sofas, carpets, and clothing leave on your skin. Press gently down on the surface of unidentified food. Set a bug on your forearm to feel its skittering legs. Scrunch things up that will be scrunched. Dip your hands into a bowl of water.

Sit quietly at the edge of a lively conversation. Maybe the conversation occurs at a dining table, maybe it occurs in a sitting room, maybe an airport lobby or a library. After listening for a very long time in silence—you have watched intently but unobtrusively, absentmindedly moving food scraps from here to there on your plate, lifting books from the shelves and setting them back—suddenly ask a series of increasingly pointed questions about a trivial detail of the conversation. Once your questions have been answered, return to listening in silence. After awhile, without fanfare, stand up and run from the room.

Make a plan to stay awake until midnight. Or all night. Let everyone know that you're going to stay awake until midnight. Or all night. Get board games out, rent movies, purchase snacks. Eat the snacks instead of dinner. Run around a bunch doing this and that, never settling for long into any activity. When darkness falls, put the first movie on. Fall asleep.

Walk to a creek in a wooded area. Hunt around in the underbrush until you've collected a pile of medium-sized sticks. Situate the pile on the creek's bank in a location permitting a straight channel of water to left and to right, and plenty of small available stones nearby. Throw one stick as far upstream as you're able. As it drifts downstream, take aim, and attempt to hit the stick with thrown stones. Continue to throw stones as the stick drifts past and downstream, until it's out of sight. Throw another stick upstream.

Embrace unpleasant weather. Slush, for instance. When there's snow on the ground, and rain begins to fall, head out the door to play. Ride your scooter or bike around in the slushy backyard. Stomp your feet on patches of snow that haven't yet sunk into puddles. Choose to ignore your own soaking clothing and shoes, your own wet hair and cold cheeks. Chant your experience of the slush to the slush. Explore the puddles with your feet and your hands. Dip your knees in the slush and your elbows also. Sing to the slush. Sing lovingly to the slush.

Believe in the inner life of inanimate objects.

Practice belief. When a friend, a relative, or a complete stranger brings new information to you, insist to yourself that they have come to you with facts and only facts. Do you feel incredulous to hear that the moon is a planet? That there is a mirror world of diamonds beneath the sea's surface? That the man teaching you how to skip rocks is a six-time national champion in skipping rocks? Let drop your doubt: believe it. Practice incorporating this new information into your working concept of the world. Repeat what you've learned to anyone you talk with—for days, for weeks, for a lifetime.

Gather what is yours. Put it in a place.
Identify that place as a special place and
announce that what's in it is yours. Protect
what is yours with boldness and with vigor.
Protect its place.

Refer to whichever route you follow as the shortcut. When walking among familiar buildings and landmarks, abandon all sense of the efficient organization of space between those buildings and landmarks; traverse that space instead by an itinerary that suits you. Head left of the path to loop around an oak tree. Walk further left to follow a path that trends directly away from your destination. Turn right to visit a favorite flowering bush. If walking with others, you may wish to run the whole way, ensuring that yours is the quickest route. Let everyone know that you are taking the shortcut. Get there first.

Revel in slips of the tongue, your own and those of others. Revel not from unkindness, or love of the failures of others, but rather from delight in what the language we use can make possible. If you accidentally say too instead of tattoo, say card when you meant to say far, or say slop making traffic instead of stop making traffic, let your laughter ring loudly and long in the moments thereafter. Do not correct yourself, do not apologize for the mistake; celebrate it instead. Memorialize it as a habit of speech, returning often to its rich display. Savor the malleability of language, loved; savor what slips from its place.

Make up the rules to the game as you go.
Change them to suit your needs as the game
continues.

Swing for awhile. From what? It doesn't matter. Swing from a branch, swing in a hammock, swing down the monkey bars. Swing on a swing. Swing on a star. Swing high, swing low. Swing one time only, or for an hour in meditative calm. Swing with determination. Swing lazily.

As you wait for something to arrive or conclude—an appointment, the end of a journey by transit, a class session's conclusion—insistently query as to whether your wait will be ending, and when. The interval is of your choosing—every three minutes, every eight minutes, every six minutes and twenty-two seconds—but once you've established it, keep it with punctual fervor. Ask the receptionist, ask the flight attendant, ask the teacher: is it time yet? are we there yet? is class over yet? when will it be time? when will we get there? when will class be over? Let time pass in silence. Ask again.

Walk around reading all day. Maybe you read from magazines, maybe you read from books, maybe you read from just-received mail or a set of instructions. Step slowly, gingerly as you read, without the attention to motion your motion suggests. You may walk and read inside a building, you may walk and read on a road. You may wish to carry a bookmark in your free hand, as though at any moment you'll place it in the book and shut it, with satisfaction, and walk on then with renewed buoyancy in your stride. You may wish to walk with your free hand outstretched, keeping walls, and people, and vehicles at a safe distance. You may wish to whisper the words aloud as you read them. You may prefer to read the words silently to yourself.

Grab a passing phrase and make it melodic. Perhaps a nonsensical phrase (number friend seven), perhaps a coherent phrase (where is the bus). Give to the phrase an upward lilt along with a concluding drop—like arpeggios practiced successively through every key. Repeat the little tune you've made until, slowly, others take notice. They may stand as they notice and listen, they may join in. Sing the song louder and louder, with greater and greater insistence, until it has taken your entire being over. Stand up, wave your arms akimbo, and run in small circles and figure eights as you repeat the singing of your phrase. Spin and sing and spin and sing and spin and sing and spin. Collapse.

Ask for stories from the childhood of anyone near. Ask, for instance, for every story your middle-aged neighbor remembers from the year when she was six. Then, from when she was eight. Then, from when she was nine. If you meet with refusal, don't be deterred—merely inquire of a different age, a different year, a different place and time. Ask acquaintances, colleagues, friends of friends, people working in public. Ask in any circumstance at all, and memorize all that you're told. Ask grandparents, ask uncles, ask postal workers and strangers on the bus and the ferry. Ask and remember—then contemplate what you've heard, and ask some more.

Pick up a good stick when you see one. Give it a thorough lookover for cracks, assess its diameter and its heft. Possibly swing the stick once. Trail the stick behind you while you walk. Brandish it at oncoming strangers, as though you hold a light saber or a sword. Use it to knock aside small pebbles and pinecones. Twirl it, stir it in water. Leave the stick in some convenient spot, telling yourself you'll pick it up again the next time you walk this direction. Forget.

Let the free and discarded items of the world become your treasure. Amass it wherever you go. At the doctor's office, request toys from the toy chest. At the insurance agency and the bank, gather stickers and cards. At any office or shop in the city, you'll find plentiful handbills and fliers. Take one of each. Pick up rubber bands, hair bands, pins. Collect bottle caps, playing cards, balls. Bus transfers, balloons, milk carton tops, twist ties, receipts; pebbles, shells, seedpods, petals of plants. Take ketchup packets, take napkins. What the rest of the world abandons shall be your prize. It shall fill your pockets, pile up in bowls, rest on tables and shelves. It shall serve as decoration of your personal space. Cherish it. Savor its feel. There is little that does not deserve the celebration of your gathering hands, the validation of touch.

Walk to the nearest tree that will hold your weight and begin to climb. Climb as high as the strength of the branches allows. Proceeding slowly, moving about the circumference of the tree as needed, climb until you've reached the canopy. Imagine that you are gigantic. The tree is your body, extending into the ground. Prolong this feeling of hugeness by gazing at clouds, waving branches as though they were arms, considering people below as though rabbits or squirrels. The world is small, very small.

Swing higher and higher, until it feels as though one more push will send you wrapping backwards around the supporting bar of the swingset. Keep swinging even then, to experience the thrill of that possibility, the threat of it, too, the uncertain and unknown within simple physical limits. How would it feel to be upside down? To be weightless once again?

Sit and stare, for a long time and with
apparent disinterest, out an available window.
A car window, perhaps. A bedroom window
or a picture window, if not. Or else, the little
window on the landing halfway down the
staircase in your grandmother's home. Do
you see anything out there? Do you see
anything in there?

Close your eyes. Now, you're invisible.

Insist that you were awake the entire time. You don't remember falling asleep, so these people telling you that you fell asleep must be playing a trick on you. You've got to let them know that you're on to them. Maybe you're in a different location now: a bed instead of a moving car, a car instead of a friend's living room, a different city entirely than you knew. Maybe you're in the location you were, but now it's dark outside, the daylight is gone. What kind of evidence is that, when all you recall is being awake, and you're clearly awake now as well. Let them all know. Never falter. You were awake the entire time.

You are waiting—waiting for what? For snow, you are waiting for snow to begin. Snow has been forecast for just after nightfall, falling, it will fall through the night, the season's first snowfall. As wintry dusk falls over the street, you settle into a chair with a view of the window. You let your attention drift to the school day tomorrow—will the snowfall wipe it away? You remember that you are waiting, waiting for snow to begin. You focus again past the window and consider the dull gray sky. You let your attention drift to the temperature—is it close enough to freezing for snow to pile up? You remember that you are waiting, waiting for snow to begin. You focus again past the window. The sky has grown dark, now. You let your attention drift to the quantity of light—will you see the first snowflakes falling without turning the porch light on? You remember that you are waiting, waiting for snow to begin. You focus again past the window, where no snow has fallen. You let your attention drift to the radio

On an inclement morning or a wintry afternoon, arrange to acquire a stack of retail catalogs. Lie down on the carpet, stomach pressed to the floor, legs stretched out behind you. Spread the catalogs out in front of you. As you leaf slowly through the pages, use a cheap ballpoint pen to circle, in rough, misshapen loops, anything in the catalogs that appears remotely appealing. From time to time, pause in your rampant circling and daydream about upcoming birthdays and holidays. Believe that what you circle you will receive. Circle at least seventy percent of the items in each catalog.

Practice taking idioms literally. When told to calm down, for instance, slowly lower yourself to the ground while repeating calm, calm, calm, calm, calm. If someone says chill out, proceed to the refrigerator and open the door, visibly basking in the now-distributed chill. When asked to hold your horses, find your toy horses and hold them out in plain view. The world must know—must learn—that its language doesn't make the sense it thinks it makes, but a different kind of sense.

Provide a running commentary on the status of your body. Narrate with particular attention to detail and to sequence your experience of eating, bathing, digestion, and using the bathroom. Narrate in private spaces and public locations. Wonder aloud why you're the only one relating your experience thus.

Spend a morning, an afternoon, even an entire day bickering with any person who enters your sight. If another soul dares attempt to speak to you, fight back with all the petulance in your heart. If another soul dares not attempt to speak to you, punish them for the oversight at once. Whenever possible, dredge up days-old grievances and list them off to those whom you hold at fault. Snipe relentlessly at any person who appears to be in a calm or happy mood. It will not stand, this calm. It will not stand, this happiness. Not in the face of the high-speed scenery you're riding today, the high-speed scenery of your shifting interior. Let us all have a view.

Shake the soda can. Shake it, shake it, shake it, and shake it some more. Hold the soda can out and lift the tab.

Treat the world like the napkin it is. Begin with the sleeves of your shirt and your shirt's lower hem. If you haven't got sleeves, your forearm will do just as well. Wipe the orange juice, the coffee, the syrupy crumbs of the pancake off in these places. For the foam from toothpaste and shaving cream, the shower curtain is perfect, or the side of the porcelain sink. If you find yourself eating a powdered jelly donut on public transit, your book or newspaper will wipe things clean; if you haven't either, use the standing pole. Out of doors, press your mouth against a tree. Or into the grass. Or even the dirt underneath. Get down there, press your face in. Rub it around.

Smile with your legs, your arms, your shoulders, your torso, your toes. Every part of your body is part of your face.

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, however involved, if you notice the sky, stop suddenly, and sprawl on your back—arms outstretched, mouth agape, body limp as though dead or unconscious—and stare upward, up at the sky, the still and silent sky, still and silent mirror to your stillness and silence.

Spotting condensation on any glass, climb up next to it. Trace your finger through it, push it around. Trace your finger slowly, to feel both the soft, cold wetness of fog and the cold, brittle hardness of glass. Trace your finger with a sudden jolt, to feel the sensation of slashing without damage or harm. Draw stick figure cartoon panels. Misspell words. Design intricate visual tapestries. Run from room to room in the building and draw on as many windows as possible before the condensation fades and returns to the air. This is where you learn what's ephemeral.

Make lasting rituals of your extemporaneous responses to peripheral phenomena. If, while walking past a Thai restaurant two blocks from your home, you hold hands with your friend and sing, then the next time you walk past that Thai restaurant with that friend, be sure that you also hold hands and sing. If you find yourself dancing slightly to the sound of a passing train, call that your train dance and repeat it every time a train goes past. If, once, you carelessly drop a chair to the floor while certain people converse nearby, drop another chair each time you find them talking. Honor the accidental in the ambient. Make it endure.

Chase any bird that touches the ground in your vicinity. Be they robins or ducks or eagles or crows, give chase. It is your holy responsibility to chase the birds. Chase them with a net, chase them with a stick, chase them with your bare hands if that's all you have. Chase them with the absolute belief and conviction that you will catch them. Every one. What will you do with them once caught? Nevermind. Your responsibility is only to chase the birds.

Love something intensely. For instance, love swings, or turtles, or cherry crisp. Seek out swings on every outing. Venerate turtles who sun themselves on logs in the park lagoon. Beg for, bake, and devour abundant crisp. But then, on an ordinary day, stridently deny that you love that thing, even a little. If you wish, deny that you've ever encountered that thing at all. Curtail with tears all evidence to the contrary. Dry your eyes and carry on with your ordinary day.

Get worked up about a swimming pool. When you pass the swimming pool on foot, stop in your tracks to calculate and stare. Let images flash past your eyes of your frolicking self. You: dog-paddling in circles. You: taking a cannonball leap from the high diving board. You: emerging from under the water in a splash of chaos and light. Imagine yourself in the pool with friends. Imagine yourself in the pool alone. Imagine yourself in the pool with horses and dogs. Tell anyone who will listen, or tell yourself, that you have a mind to knock on the owner's door. You will seek permission to swim in their pool for today, only just for today. Decline all opportunities to actually knock.

Insist that you'll do it later but that you simply won't do it now. But what are you so busy doing now? Nothing, nothing at all. It's only that you don't feel like doing it now.

Keep score in your head. What you score matters even less than whether your accounting is accurate, which matters not at all. If you're living with others, keep score of who uses the bathroom first in the morning, who takes the most or the lengthiest showers, who opens the fridge the most in a given day. If you're running, keep score of how many runners you pass along the way, as opposed to those who pass you. If you're driving, keep score of how many vehicles pass you on your left, as opposed to those you pass on your right. Keep score when others don't realize that you're keeping score. Announce scores from time to time, especially when feeling aggrieved.

Every day, at least once per day, list aloud everyone you love, in the order that you love them. If, during the remainder of the day, or even during the act of listing, the order in which you love those people shifts, stop everything, stop everyone, at once. Recite again the list reordered, top to bottom, including every name. Recite your list especially when among immediate family, or with close friends, or with small cohorts of colleagues. Let everyone know where they stand.

In the afternoon as the air heats up, walk down to the creek. From the bank of the river or from the streambed, gather stones. Gather big stones first, stones the size of footballs and soccer balls. Place them at the bottom of the water in a broad semicircle. Gather middling stones next, stones the size of softballs and baseballs. Stack them between and atop the larger stones. Gather small stones after that, stones the size of hackysacks and ping pong balls. Finally, gather stones small enough to skip across water, marble-sized stones, handfuls of gravel and silt. Adjust and add to the semicircle of stones until every gap is filled. Sit down behind your dam, in the reservoir. Sit down and cool yourself off.

Walk to a field and lie down on your side or your stomach. Imagine that you have grown small, very small. Prolong the imagination by focusing on the size and the difference of various grasses, or stones, or moving living creatures. The world is huge.

Get your whole body down on the ground. Get down on the rug, get down on the boards, get down on the linoleum, the shag carpet, the tile. Get down on hot sand, get down on wet sand, get down on cold blowing sand. Get down in the snow, or on ice, or in mud, or in grass, or in ashes, or leaves. Get down in the loose, rich soil where everything grows. Get down in the gravel. Get low. But what do you do when you're down there? Anything you want. Anything. Push things around for a bit.

Cultivate and sustain a belief in miniature people. Assume that they are always just out of sight, living parallel lives that will, as a matter of course, occasionally almost intersect with your own. Carefully record the vanishings of any and all small objects: location, description, ownership and time. Investigate openings, holes, and possible passageways in the natural world as well as in the home. Get on your belly with a flashlight and peer lengthily, longingly in. Consider the architecture of the underside of a field, or a wall between two windows, and construct in imagination the labyrinths in which miniature people live and through which they travel, which you can never enter at your present size. Daydream about the small hardships they face, and the pleasures of being tiny. Daydream about the chances of your becoming miniature one day.

Lick the bowl, lick the beater, stick your finger deep down into the frosting. Eat the cookie dough but never the cookie. Roll the scraps of pie crust up and pop them in your mouth. Eat loose candies found under chairs, on the sidewalk, and in grass. Eat butter straight from the butter dish, whipped cream straight from the nozzle. Lick milk, as it spills, from the top of the table or the edge of a chair. Chew the gum you find stuck under desktops. Eat what the world offers, without restraint. If, however, you are given food you've never eaten before—however carefully presented, however meticulously prepared—refuse to take a bite. Do not even take one. Not without a fight.

If everyone else is happily engaged in activities which they enjoy, announce that you are going outside to play. You may harbor a hope that someone will join you, though you know in your heart that nobody will. Pick up your bat and ball anyway and play self-pitch. Holding the bat with your weak hand, toss the ball up just high enough to give you time to wrap your strong hand above the grip and hit the ball. Hit as many balls as you have on hand, tracking in your head how many are hits, how many outs, and how many home runs. Use invisible runners to track the scoring. If you hit too many home runs, turn around and bat from the opposite side. This is how to keep things honest in self-pitch. When you've hit all the balls that there are, walk to the fence, flip the latch, and collect the balls that landed in neighboring yards, chucking each one from its landing place back to home plate. Take care to close the latch when you come back through: sometimes, there are dogs in that yard.

Gently, gingerly edge open the locker room door—then leap all at once to the pool deck, both feet off the ground. Run, run, run alongside the pool, as close to the water as you can manage. Every so often, walk a few steps to ensure that anyone watching will notice that you have been walking, not running. Run, however, directly to the low diving platform. Climb the steps and walk to the lip of the board. Bounce up and down a couple times, then stop. Bounce a few times more. Stop again. Stand still for awhile, as though surveying the fitness of the pool to greet your entrance into it. Finally, take a few steps back and run to the end of the diving board, surging toward the water with your arms stretched forward and out, your legs flat and parallel to the water, for all the world like an oversized flying squirrel. You will hit the water belly first. Do not complain. It is called a belly flop. There is no other way to enter the pool.

Kick them under the table. Kick them firmly, but not hard enough to hurt. When they look up, meet their eyes but say nothing. Kick them again.

Allow yourself to be overwhelmed by sleep.
At any time and in any place. In a park, at a desk, in a moving automobile. Beside a river. Awaiting a bus. In the middle of the floor or in a corner by the window. At the dinner table—especially at the dinner table. Maybe smile a little bit at anyone around, as you catch yourself drifting off. But then, simply let your face fall forward, pull your arms up around it, and go to sleep.

If there is company over into the evening, excuse yourself at last from the conversation and behave as though you're preparing yourself for bed. Brush your teeth, wash your face, change into your pajamas. After awhile, wander back into the sitting room, rubbing your eyes, to tell everybody good evening another time. Walk forthwith to your bedroom and close the door firmly, switching off the hallway lights as you exit. Then, very quietly, open the door to your bedroom and come back out. Take a seat at the top of the stairs, or on a chair in a nearby room, or on the floor by the door to the sitting room. Listen to the conversation from that distance. Put your head down against your knees. Listen halfway.

Insist so strenuously on being heard that you forget what you'd meant to say.

When the snow melts and the rain falls, walk to the evergreen woods and gather pinecones. Carry them to high ground an armful at a time and pile them up beneath tree ferns. As friends arrive by different paths from distant points in the woods, allow them to occupy first the opposing high ground, next the floor of the ravine. When everyone has amassed a cache of pinecones, remove your coats. Run this way and that way using trees for cover, first tentatively and then with abandon. Don't throw at the head.

After a heavy rainstorm, proceed to the seashore. If there's no seashore near, head for the storm culvert. If there's no culvert, find the closest gutter and drain at the edge of the street. You will find water rushing in at high volume. The torrent is carrying pinecones, carrying trash, carrying tiny flotillas of evergreen needles or masses of twigs, carrying driftwood. At the seashore, you'll find a new streambed eroding the sand. Crouch beside it and watch the water flow past. Crouch beside it and imagine that you are quite small. You may wish to imagine that this fresh stream is the size of a mighty river. And you, you must be the idle god of this river, presiding over the close of an evening's abundance. You may wish to remain where you are until dusk has settled—until it is entirely dark.

Plug in the simplest stereo/cassette player you can find, and gather a stack of new or used blank cassettes. Lie stretched out, face down on the floor, feet pointed away from the stereo. Tune to any radio station and put in a tape. Press the buttons for pause and record/play, then wait, and wait, and wait for a break in the music, or to catch the first note of a song you know, index finger poised above the pause button. Wait for hours. Wait all through the rainy afternoon.

What you have to say, whisper it directly into the ear of your listener. Get right up close to the side of their head, cup your hand into a c, and wedge that hand between your lips and their ear—a funnel of sound. Whisper then—loudly, silently, stridently, demonstratively, whisper what you have to say. Maybe it isn't a secret at all. Maybe you'll subsequently whisper the same into every ear in the room. No matter. Get up close to that listening ear and whisper.

Whatever it is that you have, set it out before you. Set it out on the floor, on the table, on the driveway's packed dirt, or on any available large, flat rock or pavement. Set out your gems, or your spools of thread, or your empty canisters, or your poems, or your photographs. Pile them all in a heap there in front of you. Then, begin to sort. Sort your belongings into lines or shapes or groups—but especially into lines. Sort them by color or shape or size—but especially by color. Once you've sorted everything that you have, rearrange what you have. Change the pattern. Move the line.

Sit silently in the back seat all the way home.

Hold a private, pensive enthusiasm right up at the surface of your eyes, your face, your personality. When you pause in activity, and momentarily gaze across a room, the interior you're actually gazing into becomes nearly, though not quite, perceptible. It fills you up so that you almost float.

Watch the rain for awhile. From a covered porch, from under an awning, from beneath a canopy of branches and leaves. Sit, and watch, and listen to the drumming, flooding world. It is wet, it is loud, it is near. It will always be there.