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Pin a Person to the Earth

1.

A long time and a little time went by. The main characters were of a pale but ruddy countenance, like milk and blood. We were supposed to buy things with a minimal impact on aquatic life, but sometimes we did not. I dreamt of a ghost asking: *Do you really think this is the only place left to live?*

I saw a girl's hand, held, outstretched, to a wolf. I read about a rabbit, a three-legged cauldron, bright carrot stew. I heard about a wolf with his face made of rabbits, walking through a banquet hall.

Children sang a song about a feather bed: *It was made from the feathers of forty-seven geese, took a whole bolt of cloth for the tick!*

They shouted the word SCRAM.

Little cartoon animals cried, *Oh dear! Oh dear!*

A hawk soared, screeching, clawing its way through the blacky-blue night sky.

I drew the moon: in a jar, in a box. I felt arrows leave and enter my skin. I dreamt of a boy standing alone at the top of a hill, one paint-white blot of a star.

2.

I talked about interspaces and portals, the underworld. You talked about eclipses, pulses, trines, supermoons, water signs. I talked about your belt that was a vortex that was a belt—and took it off of you. I took my clothes off, too.

It was 10:10, 11:11. Clouds went by in stripes. I ate something, just to take its color into myself. Bright blots of berries stained the floor, behind the triple-locked doors of an office room. Two people who

had only just recently met lay on a sheet, tracing dot-to-dot drawings on each other's bodies.

It is 12:34, you said, and everything is as it is, is as it is supposed to be.

3.

We had the same fever dream as children: infinity like an endless rectangle pressing in from all sides. I made hearts out of construction paper and pinned one to your chest. Sharp stars were embedded in my stomach, like glass contained in metal. I felt lines of anxiety, like walking into a tiny, fanged sea.

4.

I told you about the woman I'd loved: how she appeared in dreams, in classrooms and passages, in between, in the search for the middle.

Your laughter sounded wholesome—a wooden table in the afternoon; good, brown bread. I thought you were innocent in a way I was not.

5.

I made up stories about ghosts to get some distance: their runes and ruins, their workhouses and orphanages, their hieroglyphs and mines, their hobo signs.

We decided that ghosts try, but fail, to speak in: argot, shibboleth, béarlachas, rövarspråket, dulcarnon, pidgin.

That they suffer from the knowledge though not the symptoms of: consumption, botulism, boredom, fanaticism, trench mouth, plague, ague, water on the knee, hoof-and-mouth disease, ptomaine poisoning, ignorance, arrogance, the lines of the space between us.

I listed for you what ghosts cannot see: spiderwebs, glass jars, samovars, astrocytic endfeet, blood-brain barrier, horizon, human bodies and the ways they connect.

I dreamt, that night, of ghosts asking us to please stop trying to appropriate their ghost culture.

6.

We drove past a sign in Chinatown that said:

Chair

Table

Booth

I said I repeat it to myself like a mantra—and felt relieved when you did not laugh.

7.

We looked at a picture of orphaned bats in swaddling clothes. We said we'd be their parents if we could. I pictured their baby-bat voices, triangulating, ricocheting off of walls. I read that bats, dying, dry up like crumbling flowers and leaves.

8.

There was another supermoon. There was another full moon. There was a pink moon, and I tried out ghost language myself: *Do you really think that this is the only place left to live?*

9.

Everyone crawled around, hunched in, protecting soft, vulnerable internal organs. We were all unaware of our own potentials. A doldrums mentality seemed the only way to think. I dreamt of ghosts saying, *If you are going to live, you cannot stay here!*

10.

I drew a picture of a shiso leaf. I cut tiny holes in the paper. I held it up to the window so light shone through in pale pinks, greens, yellows, blues. It was 1:11, 3:33, 5:55.

I said aloud: I am sending energy to you that I am—that I am—but could not finish the sentence.

11.

I dreamt of ghosts as vessels, whispering words they did not comprehend:

You do have energy!

There is no depletion!

There is no disorder!

It's not too late!

There is no "it."

12.

I dreamt of a hazy girl in a drafty house, standing amidst dust motes in the molecular air. She inscribed lists of numbers on a pad of paper. Faded pencil; neat, even rows.

She was a version of the woman I'd loved. The one who toppled off the edge of the earth.

13.

I thought that *somehow* is one of the saddest words in the human language—and also the kindest.

I decided that, really, I did not have to put away my own damage.

I understood that I did not get to decide how or even *whether*.

14.

I realized that sequences of numbers are unchained energy. Flying minds trying to refocus, recombine. It is here that the dead can visit the living. And for a brief time, pin themselves back to the earth.

15.

I remembered that the best possible outcome includes everything.

I decided that I shouldn't unwrite anything as it is happening.

I understood that there was never going to be a different story—or maybe there was, but this is the one that happened.

16.

A hard-sharp noise, the hit-head dullness of the high-summer middle of a day. Head-swimming in the sun filtering through gauzy curtains, our bodies pressed together, sweating freely, forgetting to hold my stomach in, in the afternoon.

I whispered, without meaning to: *I, just, please*. I looked at you quickly, but you were asleep.

I heard a woman outside, asking: *How can hail form in this heat?*

—and then answering herself: *It comes from a place where it is cold enough to form, then drops through the clouds.*

Far away, a man shouted, *It's not crystallized yet!*

A mixture of late-day light and bird shadows, and maybe everything real seems grossly symbolic in the telling—weighted and heavy in meaning. I might have to spend the rest of my life trying to unwrite and unravel, until all of the threads float free in the breeze.

17.

I thought about how sometimes I feel like most of my soul has been plucked away, leaving a tattered scrap, a dirty, once-red rag

blowing in the wind—then remembered that just the day before, I'd figured out that wasn't true.

Outside the window, a little girl whispered, urgently, *Please, ease.*

After a little while, she sang: *Swinging, swinging, over the Milky Way!*

—and then corrected herself:

*swimming, swimming,
la la la la la!*

18.

A calm, warm day, summer in my childhood. I looked out the kitchen window at faraway hills, blue-gray. I imagined I was a giant creature—gangly daddy-long-legs appendages, leaping from hill to hill. I was eating bread at the wooden table, seeds on my tongue, but somewhere else, also, flying.

19.

A girl lay on the table in a doctor's office, her arms at her sides. *A bier*, she thought. *A coffin*. But at the same time, she felt safe, ensconced. The silk-lined case in a doll museum. Either way, every time, it always came back to this: her lying on her back. The domed pink ceiling.

Today, she thought of pebbles, heavy and smooth, resting on her arms and legs, her stomach. She heard a voice, its lilting sing-song—*the stones and the shore*—some indistinct humming. A second refrain about bodyless fingers. These lyrics made it clear that the stuffing had been removed from the fingers' interiors. It was only straw. Just hay.

The ceiling was gone. In its place, twigs and branches.

20.

I lay in a narrow bed, in a narrow room, feeling myself borne forth. The sun shone in, gentle and warm. Nothing horrible, nothing tragic.

I thought about how something keeps taking people and slamming them against the fabric of the earth—

And also that it is trying to shake from them something good. Something already there to begin with.

21.

I walked through a deli, my dog on a leash, looking for something to drink. We turned a corner, and, suddenly: a cat with a mouse in

its mouth. The cat let its mouth drop open, and out fell the mouse—dead, or maybe just stunned.

For one brief moment, everything froze: cat, mouth open; mouse on the floor; my dog, pushed against my leg; and me—all a queasy tilt-sway under the fluorescent lights.

There was a pause, and then a beat.

I knew, then, that everything was going to be fine. Something sent. Something I could use one day, but not quite yet.

22.

Rear headlights glowed like owls' eyes as we drove over a bridge. The sun was setting, burning pinks, oranges, yellows into the water of the river. It filtered through the car window, stitching over your face.

I thought about how I would never forget how you looked in that moment—your hand warm in my lap, your face to the side, sleeping, as my eyes squinted and closed in the embroidered light.

23.

Something you said, then, when you woke up: *Aren't you glad to be human?*