

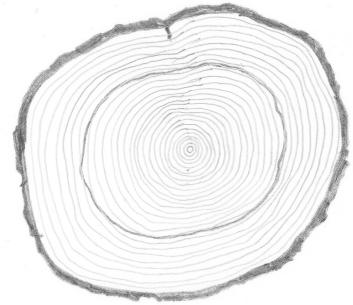


between places

There are words for the kinds of spaces that exist between other places and many of them are about landscape like littoral, ecotone, twilight. In between places there is something solid, a traveler, crossing over. The very details noticed in the midst of travel or shock or bewilderment can hold us fast; lost becomes found, the strange settles into a familiar. In the Black Cuillin of Skye, northwest of where I live, a compass will not work because the magnetic hills disrupt the heart of this simple object that gives direction.

In February 2010, I take notes even when I'm too tired. With my computer on my lap I video a note of each day. My hair is up or down, glasses on or perched, and my eyes are sleep-filled. The last recording, just past midnight and into the nineteenth, is grainy, like an old film, filmed in the dark of his room. The small light on top of the bureau is not up to the job of illuminating. I whisper and sometimes in the background dad can be heard. This is all I will write of this night: how we listen.

On 16 October 2013, the conversation with my mom lasts only three minutes. By evening she's unable to speak and the meds they give her over the next few days are quickly noted and point only towards one thing. Here in these places between lost and found I witness in silence and in deafening chaos and I make up stories that will be memories. Walking upon terra incognita love becomes grief and essay, poem. Each memory forges a new path and this writing acts like a magnet pressed to the face of my compass.



one

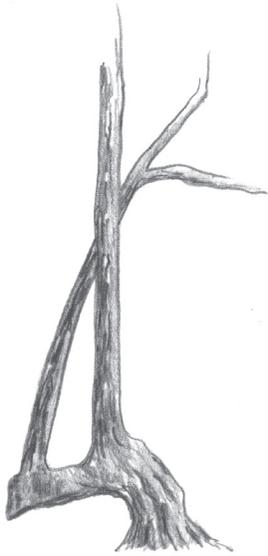
year

what we did not know

On some hills, where rocks balance on inclines, there is a point geologists call the angle of no strain. Rocks repose despite steepness because all conditions allow for rest. I sleep lying down, pace upright, and when I lean I need a wall or a chair or a person to lean against.

During this first summer we dismantle a home and forget how to talk to each other. We nearly break up, more than once, and then it's autumn and we move from Scotland to Chicago carrying four items of luggage, which we hope will last the two years we'll spend there.

Our new apartment is filthy, noisy and perfectly located for you to travel south and for me to travel north. Your train loops the Loop; mine goes to the end of the line and returns. We're a closed system and there's pressure from inside, and out, to break apart our vicious little circle.



ghosts

On the edge of the lake sits a house, half built in depression, half in wealth. With the help of friends her dad raised it from the ground, with his bare hands, in hard times. But that was years ago and now it's the neighborhood eyesore on such a sought after piece of land beside the water. Storm surges beat at her door as her husband locks cupboards and opens drawers, inappropriately. Just before it's razed, I stand on the potholed driveway and can see right through the place, past closed drawers and open cupboards and out to the water. Two blocks away, at seven thirty-one, my mom is dizzy and my dad says he's doing fine but he often says, Honey could you just run and get this for me. This afternoon they've got what they need; I'm on my way home to our apartment and from the L tracks I see lakescapes and skyscrapers and flags flying at Wrigley Field and when I was fifteen my dad nearly died, the lake rose, and retreated, he came back and the lake the lake the lake in all seasons.

witness, dual national

This paper is the size of a truck and used to be a tree. It lies between us, on the floor, and used to be a mulberry growing near here. We sat in its shade, kissed, picked up a leaf, and this found object made it into your art, my writing.

Paper made like this, wisp thin, treelines still visible, is art. And the lifelines of it are pretty: like lips, hips, skin. It's like the place on your back where I touch the shadow cast by your vertebrae after we've made love. You don't let me do this often and today your body is held tight and your eyes are dark and unbound. Our thoughts are brutal, battlescarred, and you've almost had enough of it all. But you're not talking, haven't been talking for a long time. It's your closed hand that gives you away: skeleton bones and thick knuckles, pale broken by red. You don't even know you're upset; I am witness and so live it for you.

There's what's left of a dead tree between us: cut, pulped, reformed. You hold a charcoal in your hand and I have a thin-nibbed pen in mine. Our bodies are connected over this space by invisible threads of fear; I squat, my feet holding down the bark-remnant. You stretch out on your belly, your now open palm splayed on the page like an embossment. Like earth over a new grave. We've never been this close to the end before. If we can laugh it will be okay. A bell rings, echoes through the next minutes. You start in one corner, me another, and we may meet in the middle or you might fly off one edge and me the other.

timescale unknown, as a daughter

You limp and pause. It looks like your hips are sore, like the sockets are too wide to hold your weight. You never talk about your hips. Or your congested heart which struggles, lets water gather in your lungs, your legs. While you are physically heavy, your spirit is light, held aloft, high like your breaths. I can't quite feel that you're here on earth; on some days you're away, simply split between places, between here and somewhere else. Somewhere dead. And then you come back, laughing, eating donuts and drinking coffee, finishing the crossword in a flash, yelling at the sports on the tv, and you're all you dad and you're never going to die.

You shuffle your tall thin frame; you can't quite always lift your feet. They are too heavy, so is your head, and it leads you when you walk. We can't talk about your heart, it's weary, terrified, does it have to keep beating? If it stops, you don't want it started again. It flutters like your hands, trembles to flight. But your heart will keep beating because there is nothing wrong with it besides a little calcification, normal for a woman your age.