

# to touch a ghost

POETRY

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The first sound was the quieting  
of my fingers brushing  
the first, brief shocks of hair  
from your head. Still. There  
when our father said  
we had five seconds to cry  
before he'd get angry  
or cry himself. When the child psychiatrist  
watched you play  
with ghosts, diagnosed  
*seems like a perfectly happy  
child to me. Am I*

both or neither of us  
now? My fingers through your hair  
aren't so much fingers  
anymore. My touch not so much  
touch. Only breeze, your dark hair  
like mine, this absence  
you'll hear now and for the rest of  
our lives. Half-drowned  
tree in the lake shrouded  
in mist. Listening, beyond  
the doorway of that haunted  
shore where you wake  
from every dream, our mother saying,  
*I speak with the dead. If I can*

reach and hold across this always,  
these galaxies, your forehead  
like a steaming cup  
to my lips. If I can mouth my silent swan-  
song into you, know this without

my saying it: Brother,  
lend your ear. There are many  
different ways to sing yourself  
to sleep. Like in your head? Our father pleads.  
*No, she mouths. Like I'm speaking  
to you now. ■*

*Poetry (February 2023)*