

Carnelian

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And not all touches aim to fix. We are forming something anew. I've grown my nails so I can brandish them on my lovers; to pass light strokes over their surface out of boredom or to leave gestural trenches of punctured sin. I often confront our seeking of pain during intimacy within the context of a planet so overburdened with sorrow; others, who cannot sleep out of fear of violence, crave a paradise.

Where did I learn to desire this darker kind of us? From the minutes within the hours of my life, the seconds that compose them both. No sex—nothing, really—without association. You play your video games of war and I think about today's newspapers, how I read that a ten-year-old at a refugee camp in Lesbos attempted suicide.

Later, as you touch me, I am reminded again of the gravity of things. Or perhaps I am unable or unwilling to extract myself from it. Rutilant Moloch creeps over your shoulder, smirking, as you press into me. I dig my eyes into yours and he loses interest. For his dalliance is with the victims, in making victims. We're top safe here.

We're touching the floor of the deep end now, oasis blue and jade, where the pressure's built so high, sounds travel between us like four nocturnal eyes in a cave. I can't help myself—I want to experience the spectrum of what your touch allows, stretch your skin into unrecognizable designs. Shaping you into art will provide the solutions: I am sure. You see, I'm clinging to you as I write these words. I'm no lunatic: even in these lavender days, I won't ask if this is the last time we'll meet, for, now you are part of me forever, forever—my skin has drawn yours, at least in my mind. The thought of this is too appealing for me to think about what rationality disproves. Sometimes I circle my lips and press them onto your collarbone once you're asleep, me like a thirsty leech. What I drink from you pours from my mouth into seeded soil until a formula grows, though it has no shape. Then how to harvest them, these answers? Keep searching.

Now, in the slant of ten o'clock a.m. light, I am spreading my fingers to see the shape my claws form against diurnal white walls. Pieces of your skin lay resting between nail bed and nail. I squander a mosquito between my palms, and a smooth pain courses a spot between my thumb and index finger grown sore from having worked the knots out of your back, mapping the architecture of your unreachable spaces, finding wreckage, unexpectedly. Must have been a rough week. Your bones are thin and frail. I pushed so hard I imagined my fingers probing into your chest through the expanding night of pulsing organ, nails finding daylight again through the bars of your ribcage. Is this from some horror film or from any number of U.S. occupied landscapes? Both. Nothing is ever one way or the other, really. I stretch my claws down your throat to reach your heart, squeezing it to mimic a more pronounced beat. I imagine your blood unfurling over my knuckles; several shades cooler than expected. But—how?—when you're so warm cradling me, and I've gazed so deeply to find you. Come closer.

My hands are shaking. I aim so desperately to help you, position you outside the things you

read and saw this week, catastrophes that find their way in and out of the framework of our intimacy. Our next encounter, the one after that, will draw out the history between us two, in which we push and prod at each other's figures until we see reverberations of ourselves when we look in the mirror, give and take and ebb and flow, not reading meaning into touch but extracting meaning from it, branding it to our skin.

