

Death Masking Love

by Marc Nash

She brought the ends of her fingers to her mouth and moistened them in her warm saliva. The whorls of her prints glistened in the harsh light of the room, but it wasn't her own outlines she was interested in raising.

His hand lay outstretched in his sleep, palm exposed. She splayed out her fingers so as to graze each pad with his. To seal her contours with his and have his sear into hers. She would not allow that we are each born with our unique mark woven into our fingertips. The perfect match, seamless superimposition of one upon the other, must exist. Unfortunately, even in his sleep, his was too broad for her to span with her dainty little hand.

Undaunted, she caressed her index finger downwards and began to trail the creases and wrinkles across his palm. She wasn't a trained chiromanist, but maintained her own superstitious credo of the significance of the lines. The heart, the head, the life and the fate were all crucial concepts to her, just they didn't give up their runic braille quite as easily as the digital phrenologists claimed. Instead the lines were tiny windows into how sensitively a man used his fingers. Whether the ridges and folds suggested a tendency to a closed fist, a restlessly flexing tension; or a more open handed receptivity. The portents on this one were good.

Having criss-crossed his hand enough times to make him flinch it reflexively, she carried on down the exposed wrist. Veins and arteries picked out against his pale skin. The hair there so fine and blonde as to efface itself, unlike on the reverse side of the forearm where it flourished like jungle vines. But here, the red and blue lines stood out like a road map. The major trunk roads of pulsing blood and the minor tracks back to the heart. She knew that a wedding band was always worn on the fourth finger, because people believed

it used to have a vein leading from there all the way to the love muscle. With this mish-mash of venous vermicelli in the wrist, she couldn't be sure how they could have traced it so limpidly.

There was always something too fragile suggested by the upturned wrist, too vulnerable, so she moved quickly on. She found herself at the elbow, and wondered at the change of topography. The permanent fold there raised a livid red scale. Yet here was the most symmetrical set of feature on the skin. Here you could witness the cellular architecture of the human body in all its intricacy. Tiny parallelograms, each with a facility to shrivel or stretch, to concertina and overlap their neighbour. The shuffling orchestration was simply divine. She licked the elbow with her tongue in appreciation. It tasted of interrelatedness.

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When she woke up, he was gone. He hadn't even extinguished the overhead light, though it was morning and ribbons of light were streaming in through the blinds. Lashing her to the sheets. Seems like they weren't a good fit after all.

She stared at the indentation left in his pillow. The case rucked where it had cradled his head, bearing the sunken contours from the downward pressure. More wrinkles and creases, only this time turned inside out. Lacking for the supporting body they served. The vacated lines, the abandoned seams, having opened the quarry of her own body up the night before. The death mask of another potential relationship, pressed down with airless finality. Once, just once she yearned to wake up and find the smooth impression of a fully-drawn face still lying on the pillow next to hers. Not having to commit the features to her wistful memory, but to be able to revisit them afresh everyday, in the flesh.

