

Scratch

by Sharanya Manivannan

That November I washed
my hair with rabbit's blood -
just once, just to tell you I had
done it. You met me at the
airport, unwashed and sleepy
off a late night flight that blurred
into dawn, and I told you this
then. Seven in the morning,
your country, with its highways
so neat they bewildered me in
the taxi home; still full of my
month in the monsoon, my hair
still smelling of blood and oil
and nine kinds of winds.

"I have something to show
you," you said, and opened
your palm. In it lay a small,
hard crescent, translucent where
it wasn't flaked with red. A
toenail, one I must have cut
weeks before, sitting in the
centre of your hand like a
little sickle. "It was painted,"
you said. "You cared for it."

This was romance to me,
playing at the morbid,
asking if you would eat
my ashes if I died first.
The curls of hair I kept
in a pouch for years,
breathing you in like
an old religion. I loved

it. I loved you.
I did not know then that
there is only so far you
can scratch before you
haemorrhage, that however
tight the lid of skin, you
cannot stop the seep.
I did not know then
that we would both
draw blood, that we
would both
bleed.

