



David Shook

Massage Therapy

The difference between a masseuse and a massage therapist is a hand job, Katherine explains over dinner.

That's why we go to school, she says, to learn to unravel the nerves' tangles through the body, how to best flex

the thumbs, to tell them they're relaxed when they fart. I want the horror stories of the business: men like yetis,

feet thick with callus or bloody as steak, thighs like barrels, women too skinny to rub, boys excited by third-person touch.

She tells me, instead, of a woman she rubbed today, who removed and folded her robe with Katherine in the room.

I want you to see me, she said, pointed at a crescent-shaped scar an inch right of her navel, took Katherine's hand and

pressed it to the fibrous mound of tissue, like a thumb-thick centipede had crawled between the layers of her skin and with

its armored back stretched her epidermis taut with purpled capillaries. Cancer, she said before she lowered her face into the green table's

face-hole, with such detachment that for fifty minutes Katherine imagined a team of neat-mustached surgeons. Their leader, a scalpel in

his latexed left hand, pulls with his right the disease's name from somewhere in her belly, letter by letter on a fine thread of flesh —

the first C in Times Roman, the A in Bell Gothic — dripping bile and thinned blood. The letters cinch at their middles as they whisper through

the womb's new mouth, and by the time the R's Caslon tail slips into the cold fluorescence of the operating room, Katherine had unknotted

the woman's neck. She touched her shoulder to tell her that the massage was over, that when she was ready she could leave with her new body.

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