

The Pillow

I am not used to this heavy feeling all over. This is not like the press of her head at night, this sensation of sinking with nothing to catch me. Something foreign skims my side, and for a brief moment I believe it is her hair, wet from the shower, coiling damply against a sheath worn so thin that I almost, for once, can feel something for myself. But whatever is touching me is close, too close, so I focus on the hands that are gripping me because they are familiar, even if their tension, their roughness, is not. I need to remember that they are her hands, Laura's hands; I have heard him whisper her name right above me before she retreats, burrowing deeper into my drowsy protection. She has carried me with her everywhere tonight, kneading me, putting me somewhere and then coming back, smoothing the new cover. It is very new, hardly washed, still crisp with a sheen; faint whiffs of some solvent are discernible, not yet replaced with soap or sun or the mildew that creeps in on little salamander feet. She pulled it from the back of the closet to replace what had been stripped from me a few hours before. Strange hands took hold of me then, not like Laura's, whose fingers have one callus each at the tip, but are soft everywhere else. These hands were coarse, snagging in their haste, and something thrilled in me – for something different, the unexpected, for something that was mine alone – but their touch was the difference between a nurse and a lover, though I still do not know who is who. But they did not want me, those hands were reaching for different plunder. I lolled there after they had gone, a placeholder, for when Laura walked through the door, I was waiting. I am waiting for her to pick me up, to pull me close again; I feel her holding me but there is no confidence in my sanctuary and she will not lay her head down.