

JANINE & THOMAS

FEEL THAT

Something in Janine's jaw is throbbing. She drops her chin to her chest and then rolls her head in a great circle. Her shoulders and neck feel tight. —Jesus, I'm stiff, she says.

Thomas is lying on her chaise, reading a fat book on shamanism. He looks up. —You want a massage? he asks.

—Oh, God, she says, —would you?

So he begins to dig around in her neck with his fingers.

—Ow, she says. —Yeah. There. Feel that? Hang on.

She jerks her head to one side, gets a loud crack out of it.

—Fuck, she says.

—Feel better? Thomas asks.

—Sort of. She sticks her elbow out to one side, rotates it in the air. —It's this fucking job. Sitting at a fucking desk all day. It's messing me up. She extends her arm and her wrist crunches. —I miss my yoga class.

—Don't you have a DVD?

—Yeah, she says, —but that's such a pain. The mat's all in the closet, and I need to like move all the *furniture*—besides, it's not really the same as working with like an instructor and a partner and all that.

She remembers doing a fall, her partner behind her, his hands holding her arms, his feet against her tailbone. Her shins and feet pressed against the floor. Her sternum pointing at the ceiling. Feeling like her whole body was opening.

—I just need to go back to it, she says.

She knows that she will not do this. She had to quit the class when she lost her job at Perihelion. A money thing. She's making an OK salary at Big Shoulders—she can pay her rent and all that—but she's officially had to cut out all *inessentials*. *Yoga's not inessential*, she tells herself sometimes, *we're talking about your body here*, but every time she decides to actually go down to the studio and writing the check she pauses, she thinks about the other ways she could spend that money, and she holds off. Every time.

She moves her shoulder up and down; things in there crunch against one another. She reaches around to try to feel what is going on with her shoulder blade. —Fuck me, she says. It's weird, not knowing what her body is doing. Her body has always been a kind of safe harbor for her, the one thing that was *hers*, that she had control over. She remembers skateboarding, age fifteen, sixteen. The way it gave her a focus in the storm of adolescence. She remembers fucking up a trick, falling off the railing and down the concrete stairs, shredding the flesh on her arm. It hurt, but it didn't hurt that bad. It hurt, but she could bear it. This is a thing for a sixteen-year-old to learn about pain. She remembers standing in her bathroom the next day, checking out the field of tiny scabs with a mixture of fascination and pride.

It was her queer friends, though, who taught her the most about the body. At twenty-one she was staying with an older lesbian couple, rent-free, doing a little housekeeping, making vegetarian meals, spending the rest of her time reading her way through their books. Sometimes, in the afternoons, the couple would have sex on a mattress in the sunroom, among the plants, and Janine was invited to watch them, she would get herself off watching them. She learned some things there, in that room, leaning back in her chair—there were some fucked-up things about that situation, to be sure, but in that room she learned the ways that sex can be a celebration of the body, and the ways that kind of celebration can be *defiance*—she learned that no matter how much a culture tries to erase you, you can have this thing, this thing that is *real* and *yours*—

—It's just so fucked up, she says, —to feel *alienated* from your own body. I mean, being in this body *hurts*. I don't remember my body ever *hurting* before. Not like this. Not all the time.

Thomas puts his hands on her shoulders and digs his thumbs in. —The Zen teacher, Shinryu Suzuki? He said that when you feel pain it doesn't mean that you're alienated from your body.

—Oh no? Janine says.

—No, Thomas says. —It's when you're so used to the pain that you don't feel it anymore. *That's* when.