

Touch

written by

Madison L. Kilpatrick

Original Short

madisonkilpatrickstories@gmail

02.28.21

Made in Highland

OVER BLACK:
SUPER: **"Just about now"**

FADE IN:

EXT. BEACH - MEDITERRANEAN - DAY - ESTABLISHING

A gray day. EDM festival revelers frenzy from beach to dunes to forest's edge. Low clouds press heat back down over brown bodies worshipping gods of sun, sound, sex. A CLAP releases blessed raindrops onto this Zion-celebrating-victory vista. YEAH!

BEACH

SUPER: **-ALIA (REG, BACCHAN)**

OVER: the low womp-womp of house music filtering through a trance's deep waters.

ARTIMA (20s, all-racial, braided-rows into long dark curls) floats in a rave Bermuda spot: a small void-cocoon unconsciously created by crowds to cushion someone totally out of it.

Eyes closed, face to the sky, swaying to the bass that sings up through her feet and out her skull, Artima doesn't consciously react as a HEAVY DROP splats a shoulder then rolls on, but GOOSEBUMPS cascade like fireworks over her arm and body.

A warm breeze cools other rivulets of rain and sweat but still no awakening, until a DOLLOP finds her closed EYELID: Artima's eyeball quakes beneath; the eye flutters open; the drop's fractures find perches on lush EYELASHES.

OVER: Just then *the* SONG fades up from smoldering to inferno.

The BPMs and storm stimuli fully smash Artima's daze. With a shake, rain and sweat fly from tossed hair and a body come alive. She wrestles her whereabouts into existence or her existence into her whereabouts and cries one word:

ARTIMA

Dios!!

As if awareness and speech destroys some spell, people engulf her. Jolted about, she struggles, anxiety rising, then moves--

ARTIMA

Rafa!?!?

--whirling revelers fall to the wayside as she bowls through a press of flesh. HANDS, hands everywhere, FEELING on her.

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ARTIMA

Rafa??!

But the SONG, crescendos --its sonic mastery mainlines everyone's brain, including hers. The joy of sound sweeps Artima up: a lost girl-in-a-daze dancing, hopping, laughing, reaching fingers to find the gray sky.

A SERIES OF SNAPSHOTS: forever emblazoned into her hippocampus.

--bodies grinding.

--smiles beaming.

--friends hugging.

--eyes locking with hers.

END SHOTS

Even so, Artima's adrift feeling ricochets so she slides off through CARESSES, GRASPS, and fingers tracing her BELLY CHAIN. She skies over the crowd, bobbing to CROW for her best friend. Nothing.

A sketchy STRANGER, not the good kind for Artima, grabs her HAND and tugs her along, possessively. She becomes dead weight, yanks it back, falls against the legs of revelers, rights herself, finally recalls it's the 21st century.

She crouches to pull out her cell. The heaving crowd flushes her along its arteries as she tries to focus giant PUPILS. She flows with the go.

ARTIMA

Who the high am I?

Then, yet another HAND snakes out from a circle of flesh to clasp her bicep, almost knocking her phone away. Artima fights the vice, no luck; her eyes follow its form until she EXHALES:

ARTIMA

Rafael.

RAFAEL(29) the center of an anemone of boys, draws her inside. He mouths 'Arti' as he pulls her into that party hug of long lost loved-ones for long seconds. Over-enveloped, Artima shrugs free and cups Rafa's face.

ARTIMA

Rafa! Where's our circle?

Rafael nods, and with only a squeeze here, a half-smile there, a half wave goodbye as consideration, he pulls her away.

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FROM ABOVE: Rafael makes a bee-line to somewhere, Artima in tow.

On the way, they twirl, dance, and jump to yet another SONG of a young life's summer.

THE GROUP

Rafa leads Artima right to their friends: TOMAS, TRAVIS, ELLIA, MARIA (all 20s) who've added a few new FRIENDS(1-3).

Ellia waves, sandwiched between her boyfriend, Travis, and a Friend 1.

ELLIA

You guys! -

--and that's all that's needed. Artima's FINGERS slip loose from Rafa's, and the duo merges into old friends and new friends to TOUCH hellos and lift VOICES skyward and press their bodies against gravity, praying to sound and butterfly-kissing life to the fullest.

RAFAEL

(to the gods)

Amazing!!

The friends collapse together, converging for chatter, high-fives, hugs, and laughter.

TRAVIS

(hugging at all)

We're all amazing stardust!

He kisses ELLIA again. MWAH.

MARIA

We are?

TRAVIS/TOMAS

Forever!!

They sway together, encircling their festival possessions.

ARTIMA

To stardust love!

THE GROUP

The love!

TOMAS

Wooooo! Arti!

FRIEND #1

You guys are the best! So you guys just travel around like this? Like in a group? For real?

Artima smiles at them, then at Rafa --irresistible-- but he looks past her. She turns: there's a GUY. She grabs Rafa.

ARTIMA

Wait! Now?! Seriously?

Rafa winks at her, blows a kiss, and is gone.

FROM ABOVE:

Rafa fetches a new FRIEND#4 into the group of friends. Another lost one, now found, and shyly happy about it.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

The day, into night, into the dark hours of the morning has ended with the gang and friends #1,#4 in a puppy pile chilling, observing the universe from a hilltop park.

MARIA

Hey. What's all that white stuff.

TOMAS

You're kidding, no? Such a city mouse. That's the Milky Way!

ELLIA

Damn.

FADE TO:

WHITE SCREEN

SUPER: **"-LATION (ISO, DESO)"**

FADE TO WHITE: then a black and white image of a mega-virus FADES UP. Suddenly, it goes from frozen to jittery motion.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLIA/TRAVIS APT - DAY

A hungover Ellia drowns in a pool of white soft blankets on a poofy couch. O.S., a door CLOSES. Looking worse for wear, she grabs her phone and texts.

GROUP TEXT:

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ELLIA(text)
*Why. Why did we text Tony yest-
 We're goin thru it.*

Ellia limp wrists her phone back when it buzzes.

TOMAS(text)
*Did no partyn for over a week.
 Come on. Had a blast. UR BF was
 the huge joneser btw, mirror*

ARTIMA(text)
E, U guys OK...

RAFAEL(text)
*Aft our brunchday funday I had
 more fun...*

Ellia texts.

ELLIA(text)
*Whore - immune sys sux. Big da F
 sore on my lip. Hurlled over it*

TOMAS(text)
Heave

Ellia looks about to. The SORE. Texts.

ELLIA(text)
yea gross. Not a cank. ugly sty

MARIA(text)
Do lips get sties?

TRAVIS(text)
No more snoggin on me.. EDM ho

ARTIMA(text)
Harsh... slap him

Behind texting Ellia, Travis enters unseen--

ELLIA(text)
*Chkn ass is pukin in the BR. Say 2
 my face, br -*

--and jumps her, smothering and comforting her with countless kisses.

ELLIA(text)
- assjgli

Travis rolls off and buries himself under the covers too, finds his phone.

ARTIMA(text)
??

TRAVIS(text)
*Jokin'.. slobbered her with love
and kisses*

TOMAS(text)
Gaggingly typ

EXT. CITY - DAY - ESTABLISHING

9 a.m. rush hour. Packed sidewalks.

STREET

Artima waits at a light. A clueless PEDESTRIAN, crossing on red while on their phone, is about to be smoked by a turning car. Off a sharp HONK, they freak out and jump into ARTIMA, who sees it coming--

ARTIMA
Death wish much? Pay attention!

--and maybe, accidentally knocks their phone to the ground.

PEDESTRIAN
Hey!

But Artima has kept it movin' on into the crosswalk. With a smirky eye-roll, and to prove a point, she says loudly:

ARTIMA
Siri. Text Ellie-May... Lunch,
question mark?

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Sea of cubicles.

At hers, Artima's phone dance-vibrates on her desk. She glances at it as she types in high work-productivity mode.

ARTIMA
Travis. Huh...

She picks the phone up, reads.

TRAVIS(text)
*Shit spread... folks, Tomas,
WTF...! el's pretty shook*

ARTIMA

No.

She begins to gather things to go, pauses to text.

ARTIMA(text)

Im coming

But before she can finish getting ready, BUZZ.

ELLIA(text)

*No!!***EXT. ARCTIC - DAY**

OIL WORKERS gather together to gruffly argue, roughly divided into roughnecks and bosses. Some of the workers and one of the bosses have STIES or BOILS on hands or faces.

OIL WORKERS

(Russian, English subtitles)

What is this illness?!

OIL WORKERS

(Russian, English subtitles)

The oil! You make us work with
poison!**INT. HUT - SIBERIA - DAY**

Wrapped up head to toe, A MOTHER OF THE YAKUT PEOPLE sets her CHILD (3) to play alone in the family home. The boy has a strawberry growth enveloping the corner of an eye.

YAKUT MOTHER

(Turkic language, English
subtitles)

Stay inside, my little one. Play.

She backs out into the cold, locking the toddler alone.

INT. ARTIMA'S APT - DAY

Alone in her small apartment, Artima worries in front of her laptop.

ONSCREEN: her friends sans Ellie and Travis arrayed on Zoom.

MARIA(zoom)

Adult chicken pox is a thing,
right?

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TOMAS(zoom)
Not anymore, really.

ARTIMA
This can't be anything. Right?

TOMAS(zoom)
...Remote was smart.

Not the answer Artima needed to hear, she slumps. She looks to RAFA, stoic and quiet in his zoom square.

ARTIMA
You OK Raf -

Ellia and Travis CHIME into the zoom.

ARTIMA
Shhh!

The couple goes video live and basically look like hostile-poxed first graders: dabs of pink and white medicines dabbed on sores in furious hope.

There are many. A PEA-SIZED ONE, lathered in white, sits on Ellia's lip.

No one can speak. In the quiet, Ellia, eyes already red and puffy and poxed, starts crying.

ARTIMA(v.o.)
Shit. Those would be angry
uncovered.

It doesn't take long for Ellia's crying to prove her right.

TRAVIS(zoom)
Only us?

Silence again presses through the feed... until four heads nod on camera.

ARTIMA
I was saying earlier - It's likely
nothing. Like chicken pox, yeah?
El? T? What do you need. We got
you.

In answer, the couple hugs and sobs into each other.
ONSCREEN: MARIA breaks down too--

MARIA(zoom)
--So sorry!

Her zoom SQUARE goes dead.

TOMAS(zoom)

Hang tough. We love you but chat isn't helping. Let's call this. We don't know shit. It's all conspiracies. I'll look more into it online. Tele-medicine your docs. This may be a thing, may -

Finally, RAFA--

RAFAEL(zoom)

What do you mean, a thing!??

No one replies, again that silence. Artima stares at Tomas' screen: the unsaid in HIS EYES terrifies her.

TOMAS(zoom)

Like I said. Let's reconvene on it.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Artima plies the city's sidewalks again. She wears a face mask and carries cloth grocery bags with gloves. There are fewer people, like a weekend morning.

OVER: YELLS of a crowd in shock and pain.

A MAN bolts out in front of her from swanky bar's French doors.

ARTIMA

Hey! Watch it -

He pukes to the accompaniment of more WAILS from inside.

Artima's anger flips to fear. She lets her eyes follow the horrific sounds: in the bar, crowds surround several TVs. A WOMAN grabs her mouth and runs farther inside.

Hypnotized, Artima's feet follow her eyes inside.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Artima doesn't get near the aghast and crying people but finds a place where she can stand on her toes and see.

ON TV: left split screen, a world infection heat map with deadly red circles pulsing, the largest draw her eyes to RUSSIA and ASIA. Smaller ones to the west. Details are too small to read. On the right, a "Graphic Nature Warning" quickly flips to slides of sties, boils, welts advancing to multi-cellular, blood-marbled, jumbled up, lumpy growths on hands, upper bodies, necks, ears, eyes, lips, jaws...

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Artima's WAIL of horror joins the others'.

CUT TO:

NEWS MONTAGE - WORLD VARIOUS - DAY

-- Cities devoid of people.

-- Hazmat suited soldiers seal a door from the outside. Slap an infection sticker on it.

-- Militaries attacking citizens to drive them indoors.

END

INT. ARTIMA'S APT - DAY

Artima has curled herself into a fetal position on her couch to WEEP alone --almost. ON HER LAPTOP: Rafa cries along on FaceTime. He, alone on a makeshift space in his mom's garage.

OVER: From her TV in the b.g., news reports drone on to hammer at their hearts and spike Artima's hysterical crying and anxiety --forced quarantines, afflicted children, island camps, mass graves, protest, violence, crackdowns... collapse.

For long moments the friends' heaving falls into sync; as has happened often over the last month.

ON THE TV: another "Graphic Nature Warning".

OVER: A report cuts through the misery:

VOICE

Our world's ocean of hurt
continues to rise inexorably,
sadly, with no end in sight.
Tragically, the infected have
begun to take matters into their
own hands in attempts to save
themselves... or a part of
themselves...

Against every instinct in her body, Artima struggles up and looks at the TV: she screams.

RAFAEL(FaceTime;o.s.)

What? What is it!?

Instead, Artima searches wildly, ravaged with devastation, for her remote.

RAFAEL(FaceTime;o.s.)

Let me see!

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ARTIMA
No! Rafa. No!

RAFAEL(FaceTime; o.s.)
Arti. Do you want me to see it
alone?

Artima stops. She finally looks at her best friend. They stare at the mess of themselves. She thinks:

ARTIMA(v.o.)
*God. I haven't seen his dimples
in weeks.*

Without a word, she grabs the laptop and turns it to the news.

ON TV: massectomies --scooped out eyes, missing jaws, gaping noses, cleaved shoulders, missing skin.

OVER: Rafa PUKING, which suddenly ends.

Artima SLAPS her laptop closed. Weeps.

INT. ARTIMA'S APT - NIGHT

Artima huddles in bed. Using a pen light, she examines her phone:

ON PHONE: a text to her circle friends "Hello?"... Unanswered by all, left on read by Tomas for days.

DING: an email ICON. A message from RAFA.

ARTIMA
Why am I getting this now if you
sent it yesterday?

She opens it. Reads:

SUPER: *I can't, A, I'm sorry. It's on my body. Had to wrap my dick, mask my nose, now this horror. I'm gone now. Rafael out. You'll get through, I know it! For me! Please! Tell the others I love them. Please understand, Arti. Sorry forever, Rafa. Remember me...*

The tsunami of hurt is indescribable.

FADE TO BLACK

SUPER: **-ENCE (SCI, EMERG, PENIT)**

CUT TO:

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INT. ARTIMA'S APT - DAY

FRONT DOOR

Artima, sitting, presses her back against the door, terrified, weepy-deranged. Outside, someone starts pounding and wailing through the solid door:

RAFAEL'S MOM(o.s.)
(blubbering; unintelligible)
Rafa... He...

Hard to tell. Then, clarity:

RAFAEL'S MOM(o.s.)
(outside)
He needed you! Rafael! He's gone.

And then quiet.

INT. ARTIMA'S APT - DAY

Daylight tries to lay siege to Artima's room, Artima herself, but she's fought hard to keep the world out. In the gloom, there's no telling what's bedding, what's clothes, what's Artima on the bed.

For some ungodly reason though, today the world beyond the bed wins. She moves, struggles to sit up.

FRONT DOOR

A ghost-wreck, she's donned a plastic gator over her face and neck, a turtleneck, long-sleeved gloves, sweats, boots, plastic-bag booties. She adds goggles and a bandana on her head.

No skin sees the light.

She moves aside sheets, curtains, blinds to peek past cardboard. Eventually, she opens the door to drag in several bags of deteriorating food goods.

KITCHEN

Still covered, she separates out the rot-entwined from the edible; double bagging the former and washing the latter many times thoroughly.

She lets the sun invade elsewhere and sets the good stuff to disinfect in the light.

Then she cleans everything else.

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TABLE

Stripped back to house-clothes, Artima ponders a banana. Suddenly, she gets up to go grab a pair of disposable gloves. She pauses at putting them on, sets the gloves near the banana, and opens her laptop instead.

ONSCREEN: the deceased lists.

Tear drops fall occasionally --the time of sad rivers long gone-- as she finds their names one at time: **"Ellia Pacheco"**, **"Travis Beaureaux"**, **"Maria De Silva"**, **"Rafael Rodrigo"**.

--No Tomas.

ARTIMA

Just us two. Talk to me, Tomas.

She grabs her phone and texts.

Absently, Artima reaches to casually wipe a tear, her hand freezes away from her face. She rolls up her shirt to the inside, wipes it away. She goes back to the laptop.

ONSCREEN: she closes the death list briskly, opens a window, pulls up her email: it is flooded with conspiracy subject lines. She searches for "Tomas". Her inbox clears except for a new email atop old ones, subject: "Me".

Artima BREATHES over the silence, staring at the note's subject for a long time. In the right moment, she stabs it open--

ONSCREEN: Tomas with a bloody, tendrilling, glob mass, subsuming skin from his eye to neck.

Artima manages to stab at her laptop and slam-scroll Tomas up and out of sight. Below his image is a WALL OF TEXT.

Artima pants in distress, not wanting to birth the truth. Carefully, so as not to see Tomas again, she finds the top of the text and reads.

SUPER FLASHES OF KEY WORDS, POINTS:

"Tactile Contagious Tumor Disease, TCTD"

"Tundra bug spreads by touch."

"Scientist fight deadly contagion..."

"20% INFECTED GLOBALLY; 35% OF DEVELOPED WORLD"

"...98% progressing to symptomatic disease, so far; 2% carriers."

"Surgeries just hold hope's hand for a little longer walk--the plague bug consumes regardless."

"The worst dagger isn't TCTD's persistence, but that it's rarely fatal."

"...never metastasizes to anything vital"

"...grows and covers upper bodies until they mimic the heads of those fluffy, puffy fancy goldfish. Except hideous."

"Suicide"

"...hide...scrub...cover..."

"Don't be a statistic"

"Get tested"

"Believe the pictures of patients in plastic cages."

"Understand the big pile of gray dust and crumbled bones next to the old power plants."

"...TCTD feels like spiders always crawling and nibbling over more and more of your face."

"Have to help"

"I do Believe science might come through..."

EXT. CITY - DAY

A metropolis dead. Boarded up. Piled trash instead of cars; on cars. Rats. Birds scavenging in clean, crisp air.

SUPER: **"They don't; scientists fail."**

Wait, HUMAN MOVEMENT. In the distance, a blue-suited FIGURE with a sealed-on white, fishbowl helmet strolls through the apocalypse. Farther away, digging around, ANOTHER.

ONCE-AFFLUENT STREET

One of these hermetically sealed, wanderer, space-people sits still on a bench in a once-nice-area with closed businesses and a city view. Inside the helmet: ARTIMA.

Occasionally, she shifts from cataclysm viewing to scrutinize ad hoc signage, for long periods, hanging or flapping here and there around her: **"Covered Touch"**, **"Clean Touch"**, and most frightening, **"Touch"**.

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NEIGHBORHOOD STREET

Artima ambles through the skeletal leavings and deserted gristle of her city's TCTD pandemic. She slouches along. No happiness, no wonder, or curiosity. Just moving.

Often, she doesn't SEE anything. But today, as she glances up from encroaching weeds, MOVEMENT catches her eye --a young girl, SARA(10), watches her progress from an upper window.

Artima goes still; the girl ducks away; Artima stares for ages. No hope. She moves on, stubbing her feet into deteriorating roadway as she wanders solitarily homeward.

ARTIMA(v.o.)
Life. Folks don't look out much
anymore... Can't blame them. The
scars run deep and deeper... I
should steal a cat....

EXT. SARA'S HOUSE - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS - OUTSIDE SARA'S HOUSE - DAY

STREET/FRONT YARD

DAY 1 - MORNING. Ever the voyeur or optimist or lonely, Artima finds herself, still mopey, in front of girl's home. She leans against a car, white fishbowl helmet minutely searching the home for signs of life --none today.

DAY 2 - BRUNCH TIME. A foggy mist condenses on Artima's helmet. She looks into the car for anything interesting, while anxiously and frequently checking the home's windows.

DAY 4 - LUNCH TIME. Artima approaches briskly, then calms her marching form to meander in front of the home. Her shoulders have lifted. She whistles --nothing to see here.

ARTIMA
Just a girl, stalking in front of
a home, hoping for someone to
acknowledge her.

DAY 6 - AFTERNOON. Artima studies bugs in the yard across the street. She glances up to see Sara's window shades flap against the window, as if someone peeking didn't want to get caught.

DAY 8 - TEA TIME. Success! After a stretch of waiting, SARA looks out. Artima waves; Sara waves back.

DAY 11 - TEA TIME.

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Artima, in the yard, mimes for Sara, who gazes, rapt, from her upper-room tower: not communication attempts, fun mimes. Stupid caricatures plucked from a memory bank of indie flicks, cartoons, dumb comedies...

Sara particularly loves when Artima traps herself in a faux box and can't get out. Today, from behind her window, she laughs at one such thing, then freezes in kid-fear. Beat. GIRL-DAD(30s) shoves the blinds fully aside.

It's clear he wants Artima to skidattle even before the "go away" sign.

DAY 14 - Artima doesn't give up, and pulls her own *Love, Actually* scene, flipping cue cards to the Girl Dad perched testily in his window:

ON CARDS:

- 1) "Hi, I'm Artima"
- 2) "With any luck, we can be mime friends"
- 3) "So let me say, with no BS--"
- 4) "because it's a pandemic"
- 5) "I'm down with that"
- 6) "Your Juliette's balcony is swell"
- 7) "But make my busted, lonely heart gold."
- 8) "Please? Thoughts?"

DAY 16 - They've come down to the first floor! Sara beams waving, basically jumping out of her skin on the other side of a giant window; her dad, arms crossed, looms behind frowning.

THROUGH WINDOW:

SARA
Hi, Artima! I'm Sara!

BACKYARD

DAY 21 - ARTIMA'S POV: Inside, the sunny day and the backdoor's square panes leave Girl Dad half in shadow, half sectioned up with wiggly shade-lines. His smile still hangs upside down.

ARTIMA

In the yard, nude, she shivers and removes her helmet for full inspection.

DAY 23 - ARTIMA'S POV: through the backdoor, GIRL DAD, in close now, eyes raking up and down.

GIRL DAD
(through door)
You understand.

ARTIMA

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She steps back from the door, nude again, and into full view. Her suit piled behind.

ARTIMA

Or you're a perv. I've been free
the whole time. Obvious.
(twirls; lifts voice to sing)
The hills are alive with
everything but humans...who've
gone into hiding like moles...

FRONT

DAY 26 - From a makeshift seat, suited-Artima laughs at some father-daughter routine just finishing inside.

ARTIMA

Bravo!

GIRL DAD

(through glass)
OK. THat's it Sara-girl. Say
goodbye. Homework time.

SARA

(through glass)
Ooooh... Pleeese! Dad...!

But she's already stomping away as she asks.

ARTIMA

That was nice.

Girl Dad lifts his bare hand to press it against the inside of the window, palm flat.

Artima, shocked with surprise, lifts her blue-gloved one haltingly to press-match against his. 1/8th" of glass becomes a mile.

BACKYARD

DAY 27 - Artima, nude, stands in another part of the yard. ARTIMA'S POV: This time, through a broad window, Girl Dad is nude too. Artima smiles, twirls her finger.

DAY 28 - Artima cries, a weighty sobbing. The back door opens and Girl Dad exits quickly, sneakily, in his own blue suit to match hers. He grabs her HAND, and she almost collapses at the feel of it. The tears are joy.

END SHOTS

INT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

Artima's helmeted-head tilts back like she's examining the dark recesses of the crowded shed's roof. THROUGH THE HELMET'S GLASS: the closed eyes of ecstasy.

Girl Dad roams his hands over her body --body-gloved first base-- until it's too much. Artima pushes his hands away, presses her's to his chest, leans her helmet against his so they can examine each other's faces.

EXT. SARA'S HOUSE - DAY

DAY 34 - Artima's astronaut jaunt trips up as her mind recognizes that something's wrong, before it can tell her what.

This time there's no one to hold her as she gets close enough to read signs shoved in front of closed blinds: "**Fuck You!!**" She's on the ground before she knows it.

ARTIMA

You cannot!

BACKYARD

She rushes to no reprieve. "**Fuck off!!**" Greets her here too.

SERIES OF SHOTS - SARA'S HOUSE - DAY

Over several days.

--Banging on doors.

--Loitering.

--Peeking around blinds into dark nothingness.

--On her knees, weeping, throwing her helmet off.

ARTIMA

WHAT'S HAPPENING!! TALK TO ME?!!
WHY??!!

END SHOTS

INT. ARTIMA'S APT - NIGHT

Artima paces, lost in her own apartment. Inconsolable:

ARTIMA

They can't be for me.
(MORE)

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ARTIMA (CONT'D)

(back)

Of course they're for you, crazy girlfriend!

(forth; mumbling)

...hope floating on a sea of despair! Sunk!

(back)

...snatching a morsel from the starving.

(forth)

Loser's probably not even single!

--she freezes, then half-mad she begins tearing the place apart looking for something.

EXT. APT COMPLEX ROOF - DAY

In her helmet, Artima shields her eyes; she shifts her gaze until she spots something. She bends to pick up a black camera case. In moments, her long-lens sting operation is a go.

THROUGH LENS: Sara's house is the same, signs, no life.

SERIES OF SHOTS - CAMERA STALKING - DAY

--Eating and watching. Artima tosses a wrapper into a PILE.

--Rain. A war between water on helmet and scanning.

--Darkness falls. THROUGH LENS: much the same.

--Colder. She scans, sets camera down, paces for warmth.

END SHOTS

ROOFTOP - DAY

THROUGH LENS: a barely perceptible movement of blinds.

Artima sets her camera aside, raises her face to the sun, and clinches her fists.

ARTIMA

No doubt, asshole!

She grabs up the camera.

THROUGH LENS: a shift of the blinds; Sara's soft eyes peek out to search for a sec. Even at distance, BOILS can be seen on Sara's nose and eyelids.

Artima screams--

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ARTIMA

Nooo!

--and half drops, half tosses the camera, BREAKING IT against the rooftop tar.

For long seconds, it seems she may mimic the camera's fate with herself on the sidewalk below. Then she sprints for the fire escape.

EXT. CITY - CONTINUOUS

Artima runs, HUFFING, her breathing intermittently fogs her helmet. OVER: the pumping of arms and legs add CHAFFING beats.

She runs from the implication; she runs to the answer.

INT. ARTIMA'S APT - DAY

Artima sits at her table, helmet off and sweaty. She stares, unmoving, at an array before her: box, packaging, a device. The contraption has a spatula attached to a cylinder. It looks like a warped, white, skinny screwdriver with a ball on top.

It's powerful. It's the first time she's seen one opened. The fear of it has locked her inside of herself.

A DROP of her sweat PLOPS on the TABLE to break the silence.

The surprise of it unlocks Artima's lizard brain, and she darts a hand forward to grab the thing and scrape her skin. Without a pause, her thumb STABS the button:

ARTIMA

Didn't need to. If I got it, I'd
join them. Simple. I can't be. I
can't. Red or green. Red or green.

She sets the test down to wait.

ARTIMA

Red I'm a monster, Typhoid Arti.
Red, maybe a murderer of my
friends. Red... Sara....

On the table the test clicks ready: RED.

INT. TCTD RESEARCH FACILITY - HELL

A plastic cell among many, privacy an afterthought --within, Artima.

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She's strapped and harnessed to a degree that moving is a dream. Robotic machines POKE, PROD, and SAMPLE, making no effort at comfort.

Most of this doesn't register on Artima's FACE, although at times some of it brings relief:

ARTIMA
Touch is touch.

She shifts her eyes. ARTIMA'S POV: On her plastic, a screen print of Tomas, infected, but his good side, in a cage of his own.

ARTIMA

She GASPS: The pain, when delivered, the pain brings memories.

FLASHBACK - LIFE AND LOVES VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

--Rafa dancing, dimples smiling.

--Tomas telling a smart joke.

--Artima egging Ellia on to meet Travis.

--Her parents getting into the car at college.

--The human world: concert, beach, New Year's, greetings at the airport.

END FLASHBACK

The machines withdraw, taking their treasures for analysis.

ARTIMA
Whatever it takes, you hear me!
Whatever it takes...!

Her constrictions loosen. Through all of this, her eyes have been dry. Not many tears left. She lets ONE fall down her cheek now, carefully treasuring its pathway. Touch is touch.

ARTIMA
(whispers)
As long as there's one person on
Earth who remembers you, it isn't
over.

FADE OUT.

THE END

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