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Cassandra Atherton
Without a Trace

I trace you with tracing paper. I trace your lines and your curves. I trace your thoughts and desires. So I end up tracing myself. We become René Magritte's *The Rape*. To other people's eyes. I try to trace the essence of you. Your voicebox telling me it is impossible as I attempt to trace your Adam's apple. I hold it down and slip my pencil around it. Kubla Khan's *Pleasure Dome*. My pencil perforates the paper. Your fingers slip down to my hips as you encourage me to lie on top of you. The tracing paper crinkles. It is a thin barrier between us. But I can see you beneath it. I can just make out your shape. Outline. My pencil-thin line unbroken. Like a crime scene. You are my victim. You lie down for me. I think of us on either side of the paper. You pressed up against the shiny side, me on the matte side. Our imprints waiting to merge. But we become two different sides of the same piece of paper. I am your inverse shadow. Your opposite. I line up our noses but then my legs are much shorter than yours. If I line up our toes then my head will rest on the silky paper of your chest. So I line up our hips. And rock you awake. So that I can trace every inch of your desire for me. To keep an accurate record. Scribe. 'Cuckold me,' you tell me. But we are way past that. You roll us over so that I am beneath you. The paper crinkles again like *Boxing Day* rubbish. And I feel my ribcage; a gilded cage for my heart. I am constricted. Boa constrictor. Accordion. Flattened. Doughy thighs cushioning my blue shins. I trace you with tracing paper. I trace you for the time when you are gone. Your shape. Your fingers. The slight curve of your hip. I trace all your lines and curves. I trace your thoughts and desires. So I end up tracing myself. And all I see is that I have blunted my pencil.