

THE BED

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It's not her bed. She doesn't have chic aubergine bedding like this, let alone such a nice, firm, multilayer mattress. Her own pillows are small, square and slept completely flat, barely thicker than a blanket; the pillows that are sharing this unfamiliar bed with her are long, large and buff-looking. Squeezing them requires some force, and when you let go they swell like the belly of someone taking a deep breath. Even when they're just lying on the mattress, these pillows seem to project something. Each of them is unique: the fragrance of pine or peppermint, a soft-grained texture to the down or a well-placed fold in the pillowcase. Or they're lying in a specific position that's wholly their own. It turns out there are lots of ways for pillows to lie on a mattress. Modestly, pulled back against the headboard, or playfully, each corner pointing in a different direction, or with the assured elegance of a woman who enjoys being looked at. The owner of the bed isn't around. It's quiet: no footsteps, no running water, no gurgling coffee machine. She hears a siren in the distance, but so faintly she has to strain to hear it. No cars, no talking people. The city is far away. When she rolls over onto her left side, the bed heaves a sigh. She takes a pillow into her arms. It fits perfectly in the hollow between her nose and knees. When she presses her stomach into the down, the sheet slides off her lower

back. She quickly pulls it back up, over her shoulders. She tilts her hips. The pillowcase is made of supple linen with the scent of summer. She presses her nose deep into the fabric, expelling as much air from her body as possible. She is content. The temperature of the bed is exactly right. Her left foot pokes out from under the sheet but the cool air is pleasant in combination with the luxurious warmth of the pricey down duvet. She stretches out her foot and spreads her toes. She smiles when she feels the pillow expanding in her arms. She can tell it's a confident pillow – it likes getting attention and knows how to respond to it. It arches into her hands like a cat in heat. Reflexively she begins to caress it. Caressing and being caressed aren't far apart. Her fingertips start tingling. The sensation rises through her knuckles up to her wrists. The seams in the pillowcase reach for the lines on her skin. It feels like the most natural thing in the world to wrap her legs around the pillow and start rocking softly. As if her lower body and the pillow are breathing in each other's direction, in an almost invisible dance under the duvet. If the owner of the bed were to walk in right now he wouldn't notice a thing, so subtle are their movements. She's not surprised when she feels the tip of the sheet sliding down her spine to her tailbone, where it lingers and circles

a moment. Then it slides down to her thighs and via her knees and calves to her ankles, the soles of her feet. It creeps between her big toe and the one next to it. Her toes grab hold of the sheet. Her leg muscles clench.

The mattress clearly has a hard time keeping still too, it's coursing with excitement. She looks at the mattress, and the mattress looks at her; an encounter takes place. That does it: the latex top layer peels away from the other layers like Velcro. It begins to transform, twists itself in slow circles into a serpent of cloth, an arm that curls around her neck. She nods. This is just right. She takes the arm and drapes it around her breasts. The arm doesn't cease its slow circling, more like churning now, completely focused on touching her skin – all of her skin. There's hardly a part of her body left that's not being touched. Something taps on her shoulder. Are those fingers? She tries to count them. Dry, silky fingertips that hover just above her skin, then briefly touch down, that seem to be stroking against her with a horsehair brush.

There's a tongue. No – several tongues. More tongues than fingers: four, five? She can smell their pleasure as they lick her tailbone.

She arches her hips. A second pillow pushes her shoulders deep down into the mattress so that she rolls over onto her back. She spreads her legs, but the pillow won't be told what to do. It just thrums gently against her thighs. Is that a cocky grin? Is it teasing her? She looks at the landscape that surrounds her body, just as alive as she is. There are pillows that pounce on her with unbridled enthusiasm, pillows that grind on each other and pillows that watch. The tip of the sheet has nestled into the back of her knee. The purple bedding is flushed pink in some places, and vivid red in others.

She smiles. The tongues can come inside.

They take their time. They move deliberately, with a building rhythm, and they keep moving until it starts getting warm inside her; a thick, hot liquid fills her belly and streams into her chest and legs, reaches for her nipples, laps up against her forehead, climbs down to her toes, drips on her eyebrows, her earlobes, tumbles down her side in tiny shudders and finally leaps up and disperses. She grips onto the wooden bed frame, which clings to her just as hungrily. She feels herself contracting and washing away, becoming a wave in a rippling lake.

She keeps her eyes closed. The pillow throbs warm and wet between her legs. She'll stay like this for another moment, she gestures towards the bed. The bed nods.