

Le Sucre Brun

by Marcus Speh

This is what I heard, okay? The camp hadn't been built for women like her, women who smiled and averted their eyes. When they took her hair, she smiled and looked down. When they took her clothes, she smiled, looked away. When they took her necklace, a simple chain with a heart-shaped ruby, round like a kind thought, she smiled a strained smile, held onto it with long fingers used to pen and paper, said: Do you really need this? It's my mother's. They took it anyway. She still didn't look at them. One of them gripped her head with hard hands and bent it upwards: look at us. She closed her eyes: I can't. Why not, they said. Because, she said. There was something in her face that made them stop. Instead, they brought her to the commandant, who had tweezers in his drawer. When the commandant pried her lids open with steely thumbs, she screamed.

Later, they found six scorched men, five soldiers and their commandant, on the floor, baked brown like chocolate-colored cookies. The woman was nowhere to be found. This is what I heard, okay, the camp just wasn't meant for her. Nobody smiles around here now, no one looks away.

