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All morning Losh refuses to look at me. At lunch time, I go to the school library and look up anything I can find on rape. There's not a lot. I find one book at the back of the shelf, which looks like no one has taken it out. I think this is an adult book and not meant for us but for the teachers. I page through it, I'm embarrassed. I don't want anyone to catch me reading this. None of it tells me what actually happens. It's all about reporting, going to the police and counselling. I read that it's an attack of some sort, something that shouldn't happen to anyone, like being mugged or murdered. I keep turning the pages. My body goes rigid. I feel light-headed and out of breath. This is about me ... it's about...

I shut the book. I tremble as I push it to the back of the shelf. I hope the teacher on duty hasn't noticed me, and what I've been referencing. I walk to the door, holding onto the books shelves. Feeling comes back into my body. I return to class as the bell rings, determined to speak to Losh now. I want her to know that I am on her side even if I haven't got all the pieces of the story right. Something terrible happened to her – but still some part of me can't help feel like maybe it was her fault in some way. I hate myself for thinking this but it's like there are two people in me arguing between themselves. The one keeps asking the type of questions Aya or Mummy would ask. "Why did she start wearing lipstick?" "Where did she get that scarlet dress?" Red clothes by anyone's standards is a very bad thing. Whenever Mummy and Daddy see a girl or woman in red high heels or wearing something in this bold colour they comment that *she only wants one thing*. I have no idea

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what that one thing is but I can tell it's not good. Mummy also hates the crimson tones of henna hair dye. "Look at that bitch," she'll spit. "Face is so black and hair is so red, looks like a damn prositoot."

I know what prostitutes are. I looked it up in the dictionary too because Mummy is quick to call women that. To me these *prositoots* just look like people who are poorer than us, vendors selling samoosas on the street or begging for money, nail polish chipped on their fingernails or on the toenails of their ash-dry feet. Or they look like women who can't afford the Inecto dye Mummy uses, but I can never say that.

Throughout the day, I try to catch Losh's eye. I want to speak to her. Even though some part of me is doubting her, the conscious part of me wants to tell her that I understand. When she goes to the toilet during science, I ask Ma'am if I can go too and run after Losh. She slams the door on the cubicle and I stand outside, struggling to find the words to talk to her. "Losh, please, I want to help you..." A loud flush drowns out whatever else I want to say. The bell rings for our next class and I leave because it's maths and I don't want to cross Mr Naidoo.

It goes on like this the whole day, Losh avoiding me. When the bell rings for home-time, I find myself waiting for Zay outside the gates. While we don't spend any time together, we are still courteous towards each other, passing greetings, nods and smile. Sometimes there's a certain meanness that has passed into our interactions, her stopping by with her friends and making fun of my soggy sandwiches or Aya's knitted cap. She laughs, I don't. Maybe I've been imagining it?

She's walking ahead of me with her friends. I call her name. I wonder if she'll ignore me. She says something to her group and walks towards me, leaving them behind. The expression on her face holds remnants of the old Zay and I feel better, more trusting. I haven't had anyone to talk to for weeks now.

"Do you know what happened to Losh?" I ask her, tentatively. I know I should try to make conversation but I don't feel like that right now.