

## Between shelves

There is a toenail on the carpet. I'm where the crime and general fiction sections intersect and there's a whole, ripped-off toenail between the shelves in front of me. Definitely a toenail. I can tell by its thickness, yellowed ridges, blooded edges that would have once upon a time gnarled into flesh.

So careless of a person to leave a piece of them behind like that! I wouldn't. Aside from the littering and hygiene issues, you don't know who there is to come after you, who will use your cells—a criminal mastermind, an errant police officer. A witch, perhaps.

Maybe your toenail will form part of someone's doll and you end up with a twitch in the night, which is actually daytime their time because you are in Perth and they are in Buenos Aires now, and the doctor you go to calls it "a mild Tourette's" but really it's voodoo sorcery and neither of you grow aware of this, not when you suffer night sweats, and not when your death certificate reads "heart attack" even though the coroner has never seen a heart bleed out from such a diagnosis.

I can't just leave it there.

I pinch up your DNA in a handkerchief. I'll bury it at home, in the strawberry patch with last week's chicken bones. It could take years for the keratin to break down in the soil, but at least you will not be affected by an unknown magic.

Although, I can't help but wonder.

I wonder if it matters that you and your nail have been separated—I mean, for the purposes of the afterlife. It is an entire toenail, after all. If your toenail's buried here and you are somewhere else, does that matter in your faith? Do you believe in after? I'm not sure I do, but I am curious.

I've dabbled a little myself, in witchcraft and the like. I could try to find you, reunite you with your disconnected piece. I could scry—and maybe place an ad in the community news. You'd notice an ad like that, being the one to lose the nail. So careless of you, it was.

Having visited my library, you would live close by. You could come to mine. I'd ask about the circumstances of your loss over tea.

No, I couldn't possibly post it! Ever since the change, I don't trust the postal service, not with precious things.

I'd make a special tea. It might smell strange, but that's the blend. It's old. I don't get many visitors, you see, and your arrival would be momentous—my first reunion of a toenail with its body—and, seeing as that part of you is dead, I'd have to help you there too. The hemlock in your cup should do it.

Then you would be in the strawberry patch, with your toenail and the chicken bones from last week's sacrifice, intact and ready for whatever's after. Be sure to tell me all about it.