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## Sanskrit Arms

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## Sanskrit Arms

### Author Bio

Kathryn is a junior majoring in English with a concentration in writing.

# Sanskrit Arms

Kathryn Bucolo

I am thinking about how my blood is O positive, how clear some humors look puddled on my skin, how many new alabaster scars I'll have on my arms by tonight. I am thinking about these things on a Thursday and wondering just how many more puckered mouths can rise on my arms, how much more flaking skin I can peel off my arms before I become more reminiscent of a sycamore tree than of a girl.

Sometimes the blotches are big.

The ric-rac currents of spots on my arms, from my elbows to my shoulders, are my penance, my humility, and my shame. They are my brands, like seals on my dented skin, forever marking my doubt and hatred of myself. They are my passive remarks on my worth. They are choppy dissertations on my paranoia.

I am thinking about the blood drive coming next Wednesday and how I'll have to roll up my sleeves or take off a jacket and unveil these unhappy, scabby arms to some young girl, fresh out of nursing school maybe, with her hair pulled back and closely fitting plastic gloves and I can see the wince forming at her face—the epicenters her slightly agape mouth and widened brown eyes. She'll pretend she doesn't see those little hunchback scars and she'll look down and away. She will have to touch my marks, my splotches, my skin. But I have seen that nurse's face before—in my friends, people in the frozen food section, and the mirror face of my mother.

These convex-concave spots are worries, and they are what I will be thinking about tomorrow and the next day and my wedding day.

\* \* \*

My mother saw them all the time—maybe even more so than me. I could never help but notice her disgust, or concern, or annoyance.

“Baby, that looks like it hurts—why don't you stop honey. Please stop. You're such a pretty girl. It's just—it looks so sore.”

She wanted me to be pretty.

She wanted me to be pretty so much.

She wanted to dress me up in black and green and red and gold plaid Christmas dresses and go to those fancy tea parties with the sugar cubes and teach me how to smudge on eyeliner and straighten my hair and

show me that when painting nails you always go bottom to tip and never start half-way up—that's what her grandmother Dot taught her. I met my great grandmother Dot in the picture on our dining room buffet service. She wore a blue jacket. Powder blue.

My mother was not calling me pretty now.

She'd seen the marks—like rain drops on the windshield, like litter on the turnpike—scattered and messy.

I knew what she was saying.

She was telling me that I was ugly.

She was telling me that I had ruined myself; some kind of temple, some kind of prettiness was gone. She didn't want to take me to any more sugar cube tea parties.

She tried to reach across the table and touch me, but I just slid away, recoiling as if touched by something hot, like a slug when you pour salt on it.

We used to live by a marsh. My younger brother and I would torture those slugs—those nasty orange pus-sacks that lay swollen under stepping stones. "When it rains, it pours, buddies!" They'd shrivel and ooze and sometimes you could hear them hiss—their skin crackling and liquefying as my brother and I clinked salt shakers.

Was I the slug now?

More or less. She was disappointed.

She didn't want her pretty daughter to have big welt scars. Iridescent spots and discolored skin weren't what she was hoping for her first born daughter. Her daughter named for purity.

But I couldn't stop them.

I tried to compensate. I avoided t-shirts. I wrapped myself in two towels after showers—one for me and one for my arms. I would shift and cover these arms any time I caught my mom looking. I took to wearing sweatshirts all the time. You see, Mom, it's okay if I'm not pretty.

Then I got my hair cut short. I started wearing skirts every day. I fostered a shoe infatuation. It got me some compliments and some borrowed time to fix myself. You see mom, I can try—I can be pretty if you want.

But I couldn't stop me either.

I once had a friend; I wondered about her a lot. She was an elusive person who had painted herself over so many times, trying to hide, never realizing that the paint was actually eating away at those precious walls she'd built around herself. Or maybe she did and that's why she kept painting. She told me once that she had a condition—it was rare. More psychological than anything else, she'd said. When she was a kid, she pulled out all her eyelashes, both of her eyebrows. She told me she couldn't stop herself—

she'd see her eyelashes and eyebrows growing back in and she had to pull them out. Her face was completely smooth. Very pretty though, I thought.

But my arms...

My mother, she couldn't forgive me for my Sanskrit arms, coarse like gravel with the scabs. She'd never plucked her eyelashes out—she didn't know what it was like. She didn't know that some things weren't about choices. That if there were no choices, there were no answers. There weren't any answers.

And believe me, I tried to find them.

I wore long sleeves to bed. I tried to do my homework when other people were around. It has been my New Year's resolution four years running. I talked to myself, I talked to God, I talked to my mother as if she were on the other side of my bedroom mirror. But my arms...

When I was little, I wrote a poem that my mother thought was good. It was about stars. I remember it was short, scrawled out on a piece of notebook paper in my wiry hand. My a's always looked like u's. My teacher told me that "only liars don't connect their a's at the tops", so the a's in my poem were dark and deliberate, forced attempts this time. The stars, I said, were the dots and dashes of some heavenly Morse code, a language only God could read and understand. In the sky, He told us everything—all the truths we could ever want. But we just didn't have the technology or the will power, or the purity or something to decipher His twinkling binary. We weren't good enough. I wasn't good enough. My mother thought the poem was good. She noticed the darkened a's.

Sometimes, the blotches were big.

Big swollen mouths glistening on my arms, corrupting my skin, making me nervous. The ones on my shoulders didn't hurt as much—the skin was tauter there. The ones on the undersides of my arms hurt a lot, though.

She didn't have to say anything. At least not with words.

My mother's face was the mirror, and I was the terrible fish.

Sanskrit arms—what a cheery euphemism!

Little stamps of Elephant man visages on my shoulders.

Ring around the rosie, a pocket full of posies...

Caked-on concealer, the ashes.

Inadequacy, what a thoughtful word.

But not enough to decipher Sanskrit, I'm afraid.

\* \* \*

I am thinking about how my blood is O positive and about the blood drive coming next Wednesday. The lady will have on her white rub-

ber gloves. She will have on a blue uniform and have her hair pulled back. She will be pale and young, right out of nursing school maybe. She will say “Don’t be afraid; it doesn’t hurt that bad at all. Just a little prick.” And the truth is that the prick, the slow insertion of that needle into my arm will hardly hurt at all. It won’t hurt my tough, stiff, battle-torn skin enough to make me wince. I’ll feel the pricking needle—I’ll feel it moving into my vein, easily slicing through the thin walls ready to catch my blood, but I won’t think it hurts very much at all. I’ll even reach out and touch the clear plastic bag hanging from my arm, heavy with my salty, irony 98.6° blood.

It won’t even bother me when the pale, hair-pulled-back girl comes back and warns me to “close my eyes a little, some people don’t like to see the needle come out.”

But I will. I will watch it.

I will feel the release of the pressure from that metallic finger in my vein and I will smirk a little when it finally slides out. It won’t hurt me at all. I’ve been through it so many times before by my own penance-seeking hand. Pricks on my arms are just inaudible sounds.

But then she will have to touch me with her own fingers. I’m sorry I’m so ugly to touch, really I am. She will have to touch my arm with a little cloth and sponge—a little white cloth and a little blue sponge and she will touch my skin from behind her white gloves and my arms will hurt. They will hurt so much. I’ll want to pick open the scabs on my arms and I’ll silently ask to donate more and my arms will be throbbing with nerves and I’ll wince at her plastic touch—a touch that will so easily draw a wince from my face. Foreign fingers touching my leper skin, I can feel the bumps burning hot under her finger prints, the nerves billowing out of my pores.

My mother will say it is so sad, but I will ignore it.

She’ll tell me I am a masochist

and I’ll say, no, I’m not.

I’m your daughter, your ugly daughter—I’m sorry for wincing at the eyeliner. She will reach out to touch me and I’ll recoil as if touched by something hot, slinking away as a slug gagging on salt. She’ll look at my arm and comment on my picked-at scabs, some of them infected, some of them morphing into gleaming white scars. To match my wedding dress, of course. She’ll see them; I’ll simply stand up and move away, thinking about the darkened a’s in that poem I wrote so long ago in a wiry hand that has since been forcibly changed and imprinted on my arm. It seems to be in some kind of Morse-coded, Sanskrit, malfunctioned binary kind of font—spotted as the eye of a lily, stripped as the skin of a sycamore.