

Touch

by Megan North

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Workshop C

1. INT. KANE'S BEDROOM - DAY

A man and a woman lie on a crisp, white bedspread, mirroring each other in the foetal position, facing outwards. A hologram of the time appears and an alarm rings. KANE (30) swipes his hand through the hologram and the ringing stops. He turns to his assigned wife and stares at his fingers inches from her skin. They flicker with movement before he pulls his hand away.

His movements slow, Kane stands and presses his thumb against a panel on the wall, his thumbprint glowing green. A mirror appears from the panel. Kane observes his reflection. His young face appears haggard yet handsome. Kane brushes his fingers through his short, brown hair and touches his neck, where an ugly scar sits from his collarbone to his cheek. In his reflection, Kane's assigned wife stands behind him. He nods to her in greeting, but she turns away in silence.

2. INT. ASSEMBLY POINT - DAY

Kane's door to his assigned room opens. He walks out while adjusting his Guardsmen uniform around the collar. Others begin to leave the rooms and Kane soon blends into a crowd where everybody keeps their distance carefully. Kane reaches a line leading up to a check-in counter with a clinical officer behind it. The large, metallic hall is silent. A speaker crackles on the wall and a holographic picture of the GOVERNOR (50) appears, staring down at the citizens.

LOUDSPEAKER

Give thanks to our Utopia. Our  
Governor and saviour bids you a  
good morning. Citizens are reminded  
that the physical touch law is  
absolute. Unable to comply and you  
will be charged with a shot. Our  
laws keep you safe for The  
Contagion ravishing our world.  
Please abide by your mandatory  
check-ins with clinical  
officers. For the good of Utopia.

Kane looks around the room as the hologram disappears. Some citizens echo the morning speech then fall silent once more. A laugh echoes through the hall, catching Kane's attention. A group within another line laugh together, standing unusually closer than others would dare. Kane spots ROSENBERG (26), a young woman with choppy, blonde hair. Kane stares at how free she appears.

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CLINICAL OFFICER

Next!

Shocked out of his wonder, Kane steps forward to the counter. The clinical officer presents a device and Kane presses his thumb against it. The device glows green. Kane turns his wrist to view the chip under his wrist glowing green.

CLINICAL OFFICER

Vital signs good and shot free.

Next!

3. INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Kane knocks on the glass door. An authoritative voice sounds from inside.

GOVERNOR

Enter.

He opens the door to the glass room. The daily lives of the citizens can be seen from a height. The Governor sits behind his desk, watching them below. He raises his head to see Kane with his arms behind his back, standing as straight as a soldier.

GOVERNOR

Guardsmen Kane, take a seat.

As Kane moves to sit opposite, the Governor swipes his hand down the glass desk, and the exterior of the room is no longer in view. He turns to Kane.

GOVERNOR

I have an assignment for you, Guardsman. We have a citizen that we believe is a threat. She received a shot recently under breach of the touch law. You will observe her and report to me.

KANE

Yes sir.

The Governor touches the desk and swipes, enlarging a rotating image of Rosenberg. The desk indicates she received a shot in red typing, though her vital signs were perfectly normal.

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GOVERNOR

She may threaten everything we have worked for. The Contagion is still our there, Guardsman. With just one man infected, we will have an epidemic on our hands. Our Utopia's survival depends on keeping this virus on the outside world.

(sneering)

I've heard the whispers.

KANE

Sir?

GOVERNOR

We keep The Contagion out of their walls to the extent they believe there is no threat out there! They may be safe now, but all it takes is one moron to destroy it all. All that we've built here. Those individuals that send rumours through my people. Hoping for another uprising. Plotting away.

The Governor rubs his forehead, his eyebrows heavy with anger and suspicion. He looks up at Kane and his expression visibly relaxes, as if he only realised Kane was present. He waves his hand nonchalantly.

GOVERNOR

The girl. Sentence her if you must. It may be the very thing we need that will restore their faith. We must keep these people in line, Guardsman. Understood?

KANE

Yes sir.

Kane stands, salutes and approaches the door. He turns around briefly.

KANE

May I ask how the touch law was breached, sir? By the girl?

The Governor watches Kane for any reaction.

GOVERNOR

It was her mother.

Kane nods promptly and walks out of the office.

## 4. INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Rosenberg sits calmly in the small room. Her pristine white clothing blends with the walls, while Kane sits in his black uniform opposite her. He regards her with a frown as she appears neither worried or frightened.

KANE

Octavia Rosenberg. Do you understand why you have been brought in for interrogation?

ROSENBERG

I'm under assessment.

Kane lifts his glove up to expose the chip under his wrist.

KANE

On the 23rd of the Autumn month, your touch-chip was activated. You touched another human. Why?

Rosenberg chooses to remain silent, beginning to stare daggers at Kane. Kane sighs.

KANE

It is our law that no unassigned human is granted the right to touch. You breached these laws. I am to assess you and see if you are a risk. Infected with the virus or not, you threaten the people's safety. If I see you as a risk, you will be sentenced and, according to our laws, put to death by lethal injection. Is that what you want?

Rosenberg continues to stare at Kane. Her glare softens and she leans forward.

ROSENBERG

Did you have a good relationship with your parents, Guardsman? Were they loving? Abusive? Is that why you believe these laws are what's best with us?

KANE

Answer the question.

ROSENBERG

You really can't see past it, can you? There is no contagion. Not for

(MORE)

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ROSENBERG (cont'd)  
years! There hasn't been a death  
that wasn't sentenced by The  
Governor in decades! These touch  
laws are just another way to  
control us. We're not meant to be  
ruled over like animals. This place  
is no better than a cage.

KANE  
(irritated)  
Answer the-

ROSENBERG  
We're human! We were born to touch.  
To feel each other's skin. To birth  
children freely. To make love  
freely. You will never feel truly  
human until you've touched another  
person. If I took your hand right  
now-

As Rosenberg reaches her hand across the desk, Kane sharply  
stands, knocking back his chair. His chest rises and falls  
in anger. Silence fills the room. Fuming, Kane pulls his  
collar away to reveal his scar.

KANE  
The last man that tried to touch me  
was trying to set me on fire.  
Another meager attempt at an  
Uprising.

Rosenberg appears taken aback.

KANE  
My mother and father were a part of  
the 2032 Uprising. The very same  
that swore there was no more virus.  
The one that almost destroyed all  
that we've built. The one that got  
them killed. I would rather die  
than follow in their footpath.

Kane presses his thumb against the panel beside the door. He  
speaks into a recording device.

KANE  
Guardsmen Kane. Interrogation 11400  
complete. Citizen release  
permitted.

Kane removes his thumb and heads towards the door.

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ROSENBERG

My mother.

Kane pauses. He speaks without facing her.

KANE

What about her?

ROSENBERG

She was dying...I wanted to hold her. She needed it.

Satisfied at her answer, Kane walks out of the door, leaving Rosenberg alone in the room.

ROSENBERG

(whispering)

We all need it.

#### 5. INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Kane watches citizens from the balcony surrounding the cafeteria. His eyes catch Rosenberg sitting with the same people she stood with the first day he laid eyes on her. Once again, Rosenberg laughs freely with her friends, their skin almost touching as they sit beside each other. A young child, no older than three, runs past her table to his parents. Rosenberg watches fondly at the sight of the little boy being held by his mother, her expression falling when she remembers it will not last. Rosenberg presses her hands together, as if to reassure herself with her own skin.

Across the cafeteria, an elderly citizen walks with a tray of food. She stumbles and falls, the sound echoing through the halls. A young man from Rosenberg's group rushes over with no second thought and helps the elderly woman to her feet. His wrist glows red. A Guardsman walks over and records the shot into his monitor. The young man argues with him. He begins to yell as he gestures towards the woman he aided. Furious, the young man shoves the Guardsman.

The Guardsman pulls out a fierce looking weapon, with electrical charges seeping through it. Kane watches the events unfold. He stares as Rosenberg stands from her table, and Kane sprints from his spot. He leaps over obstacles, his face contorted with determination and fear. The Guardsman electrocutes the young man just as Rosenberg reaches the scene. She shoves the weapon out of his hand, and rounds her fist as it contacts the Guardsman's face. Her chip glows red.

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Kane uses his gloved hands to restrain Rosenberg, pulling her away from the Guardsman before he could release his weapon onto her. She struggles against him and yells out to her friend as Kane drags her through a corridor. Her friends at the table are left standing around the young man to protect him, glaring at the Guardsman fiercely.

6. INT. KANE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Kane and Rosenberg come into sight as Kane shoves her into his room. Rosenberg stumbles then rounds on Kane angrily.

KANE

What was that!

ROSENBERG

You shouldn't have tried to stop me!

KANE

If I hadn't, that Guardsman might have killed you on the spot, just as a warning to everybody else who witnessed that...that...

ROSENBERG

Justice?

Kane falls silent, his chest heaving. Rosenberg's expression appears angrier by the second.

ROSENBERG

How can you call yourself a good man, Kane? How can you say you protect these people?

KANE

I do protect them.

ROSENBERG

(exasperated)

You are not protecting them, you're sentencing them! How much longer do you think we'll sit on the sidelines for as your men torture the people we know and love? Virus or no virus. Uprising or not, there's going to be more blood and more death, and it'll be on your hands!

Kane steps forward, his face mere inches from Rosenberg's as he yells in her face.

(CONTINUED)

KANE

You don't think I know that? You think I want these people to die? For you to die? I do what I can to keep these people safe. If it means abiding our laws, never touching or holding another person...

He raises his hands and shrugs.

KANE

...so be it.

Rosenberg falls silent for a moment after Kane's confession. In a moment's decision, Rosenberg surges her hand forward and pulls off Kane's glove. She entwines her fingers with his, taking in an audible gasp at the touch of his cool skin. Both chips in the couple's wrists glow red. Kane looks down at their connected skin, his eyes wide with panic.

ROSENBERG

Tell me now it's all worth it.

Kane's breath is heavy as he struggles to find words. The pair catch each others gaze and slowly move closer. As their lips grow close, Kane sharply turns his head to see his assigned wife calmly standing in the doorway. Her eyes flick from Kane to Rosenberg before she walks out of sight without a word.

#### 7. INT. KANE'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

The alarm clock shows the time as 5.30am. Kane lies alone in bed. His hand twitches as if it misses Rosenberg's touch. The door sliding upwards awakens Kane. He sits up in bed to witness a fully armoured Guardsman charging into his room.

KANE

What the-

The Guardsman raises his baton and knocks Kane unconscious.

#### 8. INT. EXECUTION ROOM - MORNING

The room slowly comes into view as Kane rouses awake. His eyesight is distorted, as is his hearing. Kane lies strapped down onto a bed in a glass room with many Guardsmen keeping watch. He notices citizens in their hundreds standing outside the glass, yelling angrily at one man inside the room. At the front of the crowd, Kane notices Rosenberg's friends, screaming and crying, banging their fists on the glass.

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Kane turns to see Rosenberg lying next to him on an identical bed, strapped down, her face stained with tears. Her short, blonde hair is messy as if she too was just pulled from her bed. Kane's gaze slowly shifts to everyone else in the glass room. The Governor stands in front of Kane, loudly giving his speech. Clinical workers dressed all in white work around the pair. Kane takes in a sharp breath. In the corner sits Kane's assigned wife, as calm as she had been the previous day. Her eyes do not move from his.

GOVERNOR

...You abide by our laws for a reason! They are in place to keep you safe. The Contagion is kept from you by our Guardsmen and our laws. But it is rogue citizens like these that threaten your lives: Octavia Rosenberg, and Guardsman Markus Kane. One of our own, put in place to keep you safe. And now, as you all must, they will receive the penalty for breaching our utmost law. For the good of Utopia.

Rosenberg struggles against her restraints but to no avail. Her friends whack their bodies against the glass, their cries and pleas for Rosenberg heard above all others. Kane watches as a clinical officer walks up to Rosenberg with a needle. Rosenberg's eyes are fixated on Kane's. Her lips pull back to bare her teeth as the needle is pushed into her skin.

Kane stretches out his hand as far as it can reach. Rosenberg does the same, and the tips of their fingers touch, their chips glowing red for a final time. Rosenberg's eyes begin to flutter. Her friend, a large bald man, headbutts a standing Guardsman and steals his baton. He hits the glass over and over, desperately trying to get inside. More and more citizens gather in revolt at the sight of the young, innocent woman receiving the lethal injection.

Kane feels a sting in his arm but keeps his eyes on a drifting Rosenberg. His eyes start to fall as he hopelessly tries to keep his sight on Rosenberg. He sees the woman for one last time as his eyes finally shut, with an uproar of voices soothing him to sleep as the glass shatters all around him.

**FADE TO BLACK**