

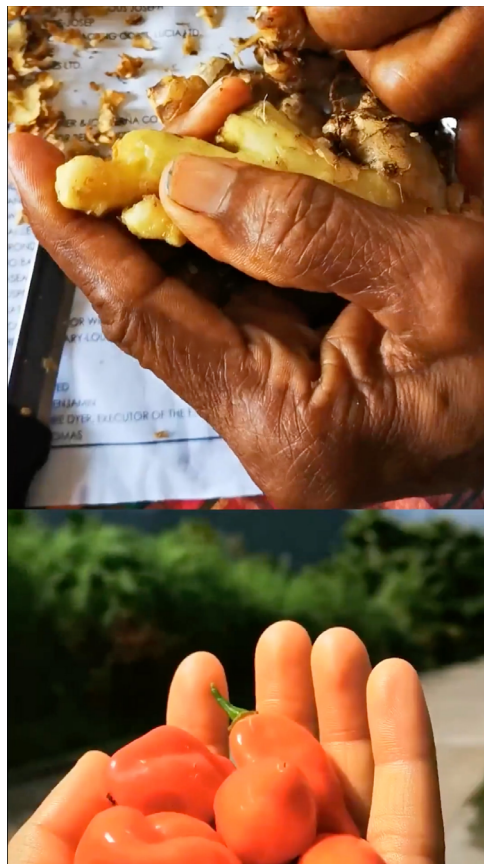
STILLPOINT
A MAGAZINE IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

RING THE BELL

ANNE MARIE WIRTH CAUCHON

It is just dawn and I'm longing for the arms of another, toes brushing in sleep, breathing low and steady. Or for my friends in the kitchen, their hands gentle on the bulbs of garlic, on the ladle, on the cup of wine. But for now they are alone like me: tender, wounded beasts on the other side of this tiny screen that glows like a lighthouse, like a beacon in the night.

"How are you?"



Toudi (still) – Balla Mal Kassé

Scraps of their words reach me, but it's that careful embrace that I crave: to be cradled like I cradle my child. To be held, rocked into the long silence of sleep with tender devotion. Instead, I sleep alone. And wake in swirls of words and words, only words, illuminated. Words, as they say, like a prison house, keeping forever out of reach that subtle, sweet susurrations of breath or fingertips at the nape of my neck. Or the nape of yours.

There are, they say, gifts in solitude. Even in grief the pieces rearrange, make a newly unique pattern. I keep waiting for us all to arrive there, on the other side of these two long years of loss, of disappointment, silence and separation, of touch confined, so often, to the screen. But as this liminal time of illness and longed-for care morphs and persists, it seems, *touch*, or *being-together-with* remain hard-won at best, impossible at worst. In our fourth issue exclusively for our friends and supporters, TOUCH, we seek ways toward a renaissance of tenderness, of care, of touch, whether in togetherness, or solitude and separation. We seek ways toward changed forms of community, solidarity, expressions of love that lie outside of language, changed notions of what, exactly, it means to *touch*.

And so I'll evoke an image—or perhaps it's a proposal, a salve, or simply inspiration—hidden in one of the lesser-known meanings of the term *touch*, an image as an attempt to imagine ways toward a renaissance of care. *Touch* can be a series of changes in the art of Change Ringing—that is, bell ringing—of a length just shorter than a peal. To ring the bells takes a group of people who stand, *not* touching, and create unique patterns, permutations of sound that ripple out without substance, yet are present. As they ring, the players are focused, coordinating carefully with one another to maintain the uniqueness of each sequence. In this way, together, they create music that is not music, moving from that first moment of contact between the clapper and the sound bow, traveling through the air, to finally touch the eardrums of passersby, of anyone in earshot. More than mere words, less than a caress, perhaps. The bell's touch and joyful ringing reverberates, makes contact, discreetly touches and unites all who are in range to hear it, the ringers as well as those at a distance, and those who, like me, believe we are alone.

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