The ‘hap’ in ‘happy’ and ‘happen’ comes from Old Norse *happ* and Proto-Germanic hap, meaning *chance, luck, fortune, fate, to come to pass, to be the case.*

One is *happy* when something lucky *happens.*
If a person is *unlucky*, we can call them *hapless.*

That luck and happiness were once two sides of the same coin is evident in other languages too: *félicité*, for example, and *Glück.* Perhaps because for so much of time, people have felt that the events and things that lead to happiness were subject to laws beyond their control, beyond the grasp of their understanding. In other words, *out of their hands.*

The word ‘haptic’, though it arrives from a very different branch of the language tree, also describes a ‘coming into contact with’. Describing things which relate to touching, feeling, and grasping, its origin is the Greek *haptein*, which means »able to touch« or »to fasten/bind«. The same root gives us ‘apse’, which refers to a loop, or arch, as in ‘synapse’: the link between two nerve cells.

While talking, he takes her hand and begins to massage it. He presses his thumbs and forefingers into the little morsel of meat that webs between the root of her thumb and the root of her forefinger. A sensation like a yelp. Echoes of it up to her shoulder, in her chest.

He looks up into the ceiling as he speaks, still needling her hand, stumbling as he attempts to translate thought into language, and from his language into hers. When he pauses to think, his hands pause too. He frowns. She does her best to let her hands remain limp. His fingers and thumbs move to her fingers. He studies the articulation of each joint carefully. Then he tugs at each one, falling quiet to listen as they pop gently in and out of their sockets.

According to a brief internet search, there is no real etymological link between *hap* and *haptic.* Old Norse and Greek are very distant cousins. Still, even fictitious connections can feel good.

To articulate: »to divide speech into distinct parts«, but also to »unite by means of joints.«
What separates is also what connects?

He lets go of her hand, and they lie on their backs, gazing up at the ceiling together. In a second, she will pull up the sheet, and they will turn toward each other, murmuring the usual things, touching with hands that are just hands again.

Text by Bryony Jean Dawson