



Skin to Skin

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The sun burns my skin as my sweat washes away the sunscreen lotion. The grass sticks to my slick legs, but I can't get up. The kids surrounding me are so loud. It makes my ears ring. When you look at me all the noise and wetness and sun go away. It is just me and you.

I teeter along the sidewalk. You follow me, laughing and grabbing my waist. Everyone must hate us right now. I would hate us if we weren't us. But we are. Your fingers loop in mine as you pull me into your chest.

I feel your heartbeat under your flannel as we become more tangled in my sheets. I can't stop hearing the beat. The feeling of your chest comforts me, but the wool tickles my earlobe. I pull away, but you flip over on top of me, putting your ear to my heart.

The slimy rag makes my skin crawl, but I keep on scrubbing. The last table of the night won't leave. You want another soda. A third plate of fries. Then a slice of blueberry pie. I tie my apron tighter, making my waist ache. You smile at me as I put the tray down.

You haven't answered my calls for three days. I don't know where you are. I can't eat or sleep. I ignore my mom's calls. I wrap my sheets around my body. The cotton tickles my sunburn. I am beginning to peel.

I pull on my skin, watching my body cover the floor. You must have met someone else. Probably a blonde. A girl whose skin tans, not burns, in the sun. And doesn't get ticklish from your flannels. Someone who doesn't make you get angry. I don't sweep up my mess as I bring my palms over the dull pain in my heart. I wish I could just pull it out instead. Later I dream of the bloody organ, separate from my body, flapping in the dead skin before me.

The hole in my chest is getting bigger. I spend my nights kneeling

on the floor, thinking about how much easier everything would be if I was gone. I sit on the window ledge, pulling my knees to my chin. They are still scabbed from the kneeling. It looks like I was praying.

We are running towards the ocean, inhaling the salt. It makes my eyes water. You look at me, wiping my tears away. Hand in hand, we plunge into the water. It's ice cold. We see my mom in the sand, her skin cooking under the sun.

I watch the water boil and put my hand over the pot. The steam burns me. You pull my hand away and kiss it. We pour the pasta in together. I pace around the table over a hundred times. You call me to try the pasta. I tell you that it is ready.

The velvet feels soft under my hands. I love your steering wheel cover. I drive back to my house, and we sit under the stars. We drink apple juice as you tell me about your father. I tell you about mine. We wonder why these men don't love us.

The wood chips prick my skin, making me bleed. The machine pulls the trunks, grinding them into nothing. You tell me to step back, but all I want to do is get closer. My eyes widen at the pile of chips you have amassed. I think one of them is in my eye.

I catch the bus at the last minute. The rain soaked me, stinging the fresh cut I got from you yesterday. You put your arms out, covering me with your coat. I am warm now. I still feel the hot blood dripping down my leg, but you hand me a bandage. It's purple.

I can't stop crying as I run to your house. You are waiting in the front for me, your arms inviting and draped with a blanket. I haven't seen you in weeks since first semester ended. I need you to harm me so I won't harm myself. But all you do is wrap me in the soft wool and bring me inside. We sit on the carpet, talking about our brief time apart and how we need each other to feel whole.

My skin wrinkles up. I have been in the bathtub for too long. I run my hands over the bottom of the tub, feeling the creases in my fingertips. I am starting to shiver. The water is growing cold. I want my mom. I want

you.

I curl up on the floor. I don't have the strength to pull myself onto the bed. In my dreams, I can still see my dead skin piled up next to my heart. My cheek relaxes on the planks of wood. The surface is cool. I like that feeling. I use my towel to cover me. I am going to sleep.

No one knows that I stopped taking my pills. The bottles are starting to build up on my nightstand. Their smooth eyes try to plead with me. But their side-by-side shoulders make me uneasy. I kick them all away. Now there are more things to add to the chore list. It would have been your day to clean up around the house. It's Thursday.

I am running along the curb, trying to get away. My shadow follows me. I can't escape it. The wind burns my eyelids and I begin to tear up. The drops run down my cheeks, leaving a salty taste in my mouth. Now I need something sweet. I think I see a lemonade stand.

I can't fall asleep. The room is too dark. I raise my hand to my face, but I can't see it. My thoughts are the only thing I can see. I close my eyes and my vision fills with purple and green swirls. And your face. I put out my arms to grab them, or you, or anything else. They return empty-handed.

Someone pushed me into the pool. I think it was you. The shock paralyzes me. I sink to the bottom and pull my knees to my chest. My shoes are filled with water. I am so cold. I can't breathe. The chlorine stings my eyes. I think I can see someone coming down to get me.

I stand over the fire you built, adding more branches to build the flames. They keep me warm, and the smell reminds me of our fight. I would rather sit on these burning coals than see you again. I don't have time to make that sacrifice because I think I see you coming through the trees. I throw another twig onto the pit and turn to run.

The glass slices my palm in half. The blood drops stain the carpet. The towel wrapped around my hand turns pink. The culprit lies oblivious in the sink. It's not its fault that you threw it at me. You make me clean it up. My hand feels warm, and the last thing I remember is holding

bleach to clean the floor.

The brush burns as I push on my belly, but I continue. The hot water makes the red skin tingle, but I keep on scrubbing. Trying to get the dirt away. To get you away. I throw the brush to the side and curl up in a ball. I think I'm bleeding now.

I wish you would stop brushing my hair. I can see the strands falling to the floor, surrounding my bare feet. But I can still see my blue nail polish. You tell me that I need cut my hair how you like it, but I don't answer you. I think my big toe is chipped, but my vision is blurry. It's hard to tell since you shattered my last pair of glasses.

The red liquid won't stop running down my chin. I think my nose is broken. I use my hand to feel my nostrils, but all my fingers return with more blood. You tell me that you are sorry, that you didn't mean to hit me. I wish you would stop talking.

I resent you for hurting me. I resent myself for still loving you. My wrists sting from the rope that you made me wear last night. I wish you wrapped it around my neck instead. You make me lay on your chest again. Your wool shirt still tickles me. You don't need to flip over and hug me anymore. I don't have the strength to move.

My legs begin to shiver on the porcelain. I've been sitting on the bathtub edge for an hour now. The plus sign on the stick in my hand glares up at me. Taunting me. I want to punch my stomach like you punch me. No one I love should ever have to be near you. Especially when I have a choice.

Your soft sheets keep me warm. But I don't forget the cold blade in my palm. I squeeze it, making my own skin bleed. You left me naked and bruised, but I wait eagerly for you to come back. You sit on the edge of the bed. I raise my arm and point the double edged boxcutter between us. The weapon I wield signals the end. I feel the baby kick for the first time as I lunge forward. I smile. I know I'm not alone anymore. 