

He Took His Skin Off for Me



– written by Maria Hummer

Is this what you want? he asked, and I said yes, so he took off his skin for me.

He was beautiful, shining red organs and crisp bones. I stepped forward to embrace him. I felt his naked wet muscles against my arms.

This happened just before dinner. He waited at the table, fresh as the new cut of lamb I bought at market that day. I carried our plates over and poured wine and watched his tendons twitch as he moved fork and knife. Each bite he lifted to his mouth was a delicate rumble through arm, hand, and jaw. When he stood to clear the table, I wiped the tender blood from his seat before he noticed what his exposed body had left behind.

He hung the skin in a closet, taut on a wire hanger next to suit jackets and ties. Sometimes in the morning, through the slit of my eyes in bed, I saw him lift the skin from the closet and hold it to his frame as if thinking, is this what I feel like wearing today? Is this the correct mood? Then, remembering, he slipped the skin back into the closet and removed a shirt instead.

People commented on his different appearance but they couldn't quite put a finger on it. Have you lost weight? they'd ask, scratching their chin.

In a way, he'd say. Smiling a red smile at me.

Such a short sentence was unlike him. He loved words, loved using different ones to say the same thing again and again until he was sure he was fully understood. But he either had less to say now, or he felt that he was already saying it.

I had to wash our bed sheets more frequently, once a day if I could. The blankets absorbed the smells of his open body and released them during the day, long after he'd gone to work. I showered a lot more too. At night he held me close and in the morning, I peeled away like a sweaty thigh from a hot plastic chair.

Lovemaking was no different. This surprised me, but when I thought about it,, I realized it was the same, just two people showing each other what they look like without skin.

While he was at work, I would check the closet for the skin to make sure he wasn't sneaking it away. He told me once that he wasn't having as much luck with clients. I told him they were the wrong clients.

The right ones don't care, I said. The right ones are good people.

He said we'd run out of money if we only waited for the good people.

I said that was fine with me.

We stopped going out to restaurants or bars and used the savings to heat the house. He got chilled easily and walked around with a blanket on his bare-muscle shoulders, carrying hot cups of tea. He spilled his cup once and got it all over the exposed meat of his leg. He couldn't hide his tears from me because there was nothing to blink them back.

One night we climbed into bed and the lights were off but I could feel him still looking at me, a feeling I got a lot these days. I sat up. I turned on the light.

What? I asked.

I expected him to go, Nothing, because that's what he usually said when I asked, What? He liked to keep some things private because I could see everything else.

But he didn't say, Nothing. He didn't say anything. He just sat there. I watched the pulse on the side of his neck, a persistent quiver of life. I looked at his groin, I looked at his wrists. Everything was pulsing.

He looked at me, wet vein-netted eyes. He reached for my arm with hot red fingertips. He tugged at my skin.

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What are some of the differences between the short story and the film version? Note some and then discuss with your classmates.

The Short Story

The Film

