

# SECOND SKIN



BE CAREFUL  
WHAT YOU  
COME AS.

BY  
ANTHONY KINCAID

## **A Note From The Author**

If you're reading this, you were there.

You showed up for the release of *Black Tongues*, Book Three of *The Lazarus Plague*, and that means more to me than I can properly put into words.

So I wanted to give you something that wasn't available anywhere else.

Not an excerpt.

Not a preview.

Not a recycled bonus chapter.

A story.

*Second Skin* is your release-party exclusive—a little trip into Cypress Parish, a place where things are rarely what they seem and where some changes don't come undone once they've started.

For now, this story belongs to the people who helped me celebrate this milestone.

Thank you for reading.

Thank you for showing up.

Thank you for being part of this strange little world I keep building.

Welcome to Cypress Parish.

Try not to stay too long.

— Anthony Kincaid

October 6, 2026

## **Second Skin: A Cypress Parish Short Story**

By Anthony Kincaid

The air in Cypress Parish tasted like dust and burnt sugar—something cooked too long and left behind.

Lena walked home from the bus stop with her hood up, even though it wasn't cold. It didn't keep her warm. It just made her feel less seen.

The streets were wrong.

Halloween in Cypress Parish was never quiet. By four o'clock, kids usually spilled into the roads—cutting across yards, screaming, dragging plastic pumpkins and cheap capes through whatever mud the week had left behind.

Not today.

The kids she saw walked close to their parents. Hands held. Voices low. No running. No shouting.

No one looking at each other longer than they had to.

It was like someone had reached down and turned the volume knob on the whole town almost—but not all the way—off.

Porches were lit, but the light didn't carry. It just sat there, dull and contained, like it wasn't allowed to reach the street. Decorations were in place—a scarecrow wired upright, orange bulbs strung in careful lines—but nothing felt careless. Nothing felt fun.

Everything looked... assigned.

Placed.

Like it mattered that it stayed exactly where it was.

Her mother had left a note on the kitchen counter.

Gumbo in the fridge. Try it on before dinner. Don't want hem issues again.

Next to it: a folded twenty.

For the costume.

Lena took the money without unfolding it. She already knew what it was.

And she knew what she didn't want.

Not a witch. Not again.

Not a cat. Not a zombie. Not a ghost.

Not a glittered version of something dead.

Every year she put something on—mask, makeup, costume—and every year it got easier to breathe once it was there.

Like the mask fit better than her own face.

She'd never said that out loud.

Didn't plan to.

She grabbed her bike and headed toward the market.

The Piggly Wiggly on Main had the same setup every year—last-minute costumes shoved into a corner near the checkout. Plastic masks hanging from metal pegs. Thin capes sealed in crackling bags. Headbands with ears that never sat right.

A mannequin wore a devil costume—red leotard, cheap horns already bending at the tips.

The sign read: CHOOSE YOURSELF.

Lena frowned. She didn't remember that sign from last year.

She picked through the rack anyway.

Werewolf. Vampire Prince. Glitter Witch.

All of it felt like leftovers. Not wrong. Just... already used.

Already decided.

"They don't carry what you need."

The voice came from behind her. Not loud. Not soft either. Just certain.

Lena turned.

The woman looked old in the way that didn't soften anything. White hair pulled tight into a bun. Skin like it had been folded and kept that way too long. She held a single bag of grits in both hands, like it mattered.

No cart. No basket.

Just the grits.

"I'm just looking for a costume," Lena said.

The woman's eyes were pale. Not cloudy—empty. Like the color had been taken out of them.

“They don’t carry what you need,” she repeated.

Then, after a pause that stretched just a second too long—

“Most places don’t.”

Lena shifted her weight. “Okay...”

The woman stepped a little closer. Not enough to touch. Just enough that Lena could smell something faint and sweet. Burnt sugar again.

“Careful,” the woman said.

Lena waited.

“For what?” she asked.

The woman tilted her head slightly, like the question didn’t quite make sense.

“What you come as.”

No smile. No wink. No release.

Just the words.

Then she turned and walked toward the checkout like the conversation had already ended.

Lena stood there with a plastic werewolf mask in her hand.

For a second, she thought she heard something behind the mask.

Breathing.

She set it back too quickly.

At the register, the clerk didn’t look up. Just kept scanning items like she wasn’t there.

No one asked if she needed help.

No one asked if she found anything.

Outside, the air felt thicker.

The kind of thick that presses in a little when you breathe.

Lena glanced back through the glass.

The old woman wasn’t in line.

Wasn’t at the door.

Wasn’t anywhere.

Her hand slipped into her pocket.

The folded twenty felt heavier now.

Not in weight.

In decision.

Be careful what you come as.

She didn't know what she wanted to be.

But for the first time, that didn't feel like the real question.

She was starting to understand something else.

Something worse.

She didn't want to stay what she already was.

Lena didn't go home after the store.

She rode past her street without slowing and turned onto Bayou.

Marcel's sat halfway down—a tin-roofed building with a leaning sign and windows that never quite looked clean. It smelled the same every time she stepped inside.

Cedar.

Dust.

Something older that never left.

Marcel sat behind the counter, thin as a coat hanger, gray ponytail pulled tight.

Paperback western open in his hands. He didn't look up when the bell over the door rang.

He never did.

She moved through the store without stopping.

Flannel shirts.

Bins of mismatched shoes.

A shelf of ceramic roosters with chipped beaks and staring eyes.

Toward the back—where the light didn't reach as well—was the section marked Formal & Vintage.

Which really meant: clothes no one wanted back.

Prom dresses that had outlived the girls who wore them.

Tuxedo jackets that still held their shape too well.

Things that had already been someone else.

She wasn't looking for pretty.

She found it behind a rack of coats.

A black blazer.

Not flashy. Not theatrical. Just... right.

She pulled it free.

The fabric was heavier than it should've been. Real weight. Real structure. It held its shape even in her hands.

It smelled like cedar.

And something burned.

Not fresh. Not sharp.

Old smoke.

She slipped it on.

It fit.

Not "close enough."

Not "good for thrift."

It fit like it already knew her shoulders.

Lena stood there for a second too long.

Then she reached for more.

A white button-up. Clean lines. No frills.

Black pants—tailored tighter than anything she owned.

Not costume pieces.

Not pretend.

She didn't look in the mirror.

Didn't want to break it yet.

At the counter, Marcel turned a page before he looked up.

“That all?”

“Yeah.”

“Fourteen even.”

She handed him the folded twenty.

He didn’t smooth it out. Didn’t check it. Just took it and handed back six ones.

No receipt.

No bag.

As she turned to leave, he spoke again.

Not looking at her.

“Careful with that.”

Lena paused.

“With what?”

He tapped the edge of his book against the counter. Once.

“The fit.”

Then he went back to reading.

Outside, the light was already thinning.

The sky hadn’t darkened yet, but it felt like it was thinking about it.

Lena walked home with the clothes folded in her arms.

In her room, she shut the door and laid everything out on her bed.

Blazer.

Shirt.

Pants.

Nothing extra.

Nothing playful.

No mask.

She went to her mother’s bathroom.

The mirror didn’t lie.

It never did.

Her face looked back at her—the same one she saw every day.

The one people passed over.

The one teachers forgot mid-sentence.

The one that knew how to disappear without leaving the room.

She held that gaze longer than usual.

Then she opened the drawer.

Old makeup.

Unused foundation.

Lipsticks gone soft at the edges.

A compact of black eyeshadow worn down to the metal.

She took the eyeshadow.

Back in her room, she sat on the floor.

The small mirror leaned against the wall, catching just enough light.

She started with her eyes.

Not heavy.

Not loud.

Just enough.

Dark pressed into the outer edges. Pulled slightly sharper at the corners. Smudged until it stopped looking like makeup and started looking like intention.

A thin line beneath the lower lash.

Not decoration.

Definition.

She leaned back.

Studied it.

Her face hadn't changed.

Not really.

But it didn't disappear anymore.  
She pulled her hair back. Tight.  
Nothing loose.  
Nothing soft.  
Then she stood.  
Dressed.  
Pants first.  
Then the shirt.  
Then the blazer.  
She still hadn't looked in the full mirror.  
Didn't need to.  
Something had already shifted.  
Her shoulders settled back.  
Not forced.  
Natural.  
Her breathing slowed.  
Her jaw set without tension.  
This didn't feel like putting something on.  
It felt like removing something that had been there too long.  
A knock at the door.  
"Lena? You almost ready? Gumbo's on the table."  
Lena opened her mouth.  
The old answer was there. Soft. Automatic.  
Coming, Mom.  
But it didn't come out.  
"Yeah."  
The word landed flat.

Certain.

Finished.

Silence on the other side of the door.

Not long.

Just long enough to notice.

“Okay,” her mother said.

And her voice had shifted.

Not worried.

Not yet.

Just... recalculating.

Lena stepped in front of the mirror above her dresser.

The girl staring back wasn't wearing a mask.

And that was the problem.

Because she didn't look like someone pretending.

She looked like someone who had stopped asking permission to exist.

Lena tilted her head slightly.

Studied herself.

Testing.

“It's just for one night,” she said.

The room didn't answer.

But something in her did.

And it didn't agree.

Dinner was quiet.

Her father was already at the table, spooning gumbo into his bowl like it was a task he'd been assigned. He glanced up when she sat down, did a double take, then looked back at his food.

"New jacket?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"It's nice."

That was the whole conversation. Normal. Comfortable. But underneath it, something had shifted. He didn't ask about her eyes. He didn't ask why she was dressed like she had somewhere important to be.

He just accepted it.

Her mother came in from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dish towel. She stopped when she saw Lena. Just for a second. Then she sat down, unfolded her napkin, and said, "Eat before it gets cold."

No comment. No question.

Lena ate.

The gumbo tasted the same as always—rich, dark, a little spicy. But she ate slower than usual. Not because she wasn't hungry. Because the act of eating felt different. She chewed deliberately. She wiped her mouth with a napkin instead of her sleeve. She sat up straight.

After dinner, she cleared her own plate without being asked.

Her mother watched her walk to the sink. Didn't say a word.

Back in her room, she should have changed. She should have taken off the blazer, hung it up, put on sweatpants, and waited for the evening to fade into bed.

But she didn't.

She sat on the edge of her bed, fully dressed, and looked at her hands.

They looked the same. Same fingers. Same nails—no polish, bitten short. But when she curled them into fists, they felt solid. Grounded. Like they belonged to someone who could hold something heavy.

She spoke aloud, just to test it.

"I'm going out."

The words came out clean. No upturn at the end. No question hiding inside a statement.

She stood up. Grabbed her phone. Wallet. Keys.

She walked past her parents in the living room. Her father was watching the news. Her mother was folding laundry.

"I'm going out," she said again, louder this time.

Her mother looked up. "Where?"

"Just around."

"Be back by ten."

"Okay."

She said it like it was a fact. Not a promise. Not a compromise.

And she left.

The door clicked shut behind her.

The porch light buzzed. The air smelled like wet leaves and distant woodsmoke. She stood on the front step for a moment, feeling the evening air on her face.

She didn't feel like she was wearing a costume.

She felt like she'd been living in something too small, and she'd finally taken it off.

The streets of Cypress Parish were amber and quiet.

Lena walked without a destination.

Past shotgun houses with sagging porches.

Past the Baptist church—TRUNK OR TREAT – 6PM.

Past the convenience store with the flickering sign that buzzed like it always did this time of year.

Cool enough for a jacket.

She wore the blazer open anyway.

There were kids.

Clusters moving down the sidewalks.

Too clean. Too ordered.

No one cut across lawns.

No one slipped through alleys.

They stayed on the pavement. House to house. Door to door.

Like a route had already been decided.

A girl in a fairy costume—wings, wand, glitter across her cheeks—walked beside her mother.

Hand in hand.

The girl didn't skip.

Didn't drift.

Just stepped.

Measured.

Lena passed them.

The mother glanced at her.

Something flickered—recognition, maybe. Or caution.

Then she pulled the girl closer.

Didn't look back.

Lena kept walking.

A block later, an older man sat on his porch with a bowl of candy in his lap.

Flannel. Ball cap. No decoration.

He watched the street like it mattered.

“Evening,” Lena said.

He nodded. “Evening.”

She made it ten steps past him.

“Huh.”

She stopped.

Didn't turn.

Then kept going.

At the corner, the streetlight was out.

Not broken.

Just... off.

Across the street, two teenagers stood by a mailbox.

One dressed as a scarecrow.

The other in a black hoodie with a skull printed across the chest.

They saw her.

The scarecrow nudged the other.

Both went quiet.

Lena crossed.

As she passed, the one in the hoodie said, “Hey. You’re Lena, right?”

She stopped.

Turned.

Looked at him.

“Yeah.”

He blinked. “Oh. Uh. Nothing. Just—didn’t recognize you.”

She held his gaze.

Didn’t smile.

Didn’t help him out.

“Okay.”

He looked away first.

The scarecrow shifted. Cleared his throat.

“You, uh... going to the bonfire later?”

Bonfire.

She hadn’t heard anything about a bonfire.

“Maybe,” she said.

She walked on.

Behind her, the hoodie kid muttered something.

Too low to catch.

Didn’t matter.

Near the end of the block—by the overgrown lot where the Traiteur house used to be—a woman sat on a porch swing.

Fifties. Gray in her hair. A cup of tea held in both hands.

Still.

Watching.

“Evening,” Lena said.

The woman looked at her.

Not quick.

Not polite.

A long look.

The kind that weighed something.

“You gonna keep walking like that?” the woman asked.

Lena stopped.

“Maybe.”

The woman shrugged.

Didn’t answer right away.

Took a slow sip.

“Then keep your eyes forward.”

Nothing else.

Lena waited a beat.

Then moved on.

The question followed her anyway.

At the edge of town, the pavement gave out.

Gravel. Then dirt.

Then marsh.

The streetlights stopped behind her.

Like a line.

Lena stood there, looking into the dark.

She felt watched.

Not by someone.

By the night itself.

And it wasn't afraid of her.

It was paying attention.

She didn't stay at the edge of town long.

The dark felt too patient.

Like it was waiting for her to step forward so it could close behind her.

She turned back.

Walked until the streetlights resumed. Until the distant murmur of trick-or-treaters came back. Low. Controlled.

Her throat was dry.

She cut into the gas station at Parish Road and Main.

Inside, the lights were harsh. Fluorescent. Buzzing overhead like they were thinking too hard.

A single clerk sat behind the counter, scrolling his phone.

He didn't look up.

She grabbed a bottle of water.

Paid.

No words exchanged.

She drank half of it standing by the slushie machine.

Then headed for the bathroom.

One stall. One sink. A flickering bulb that flattened everything into a sick, yellow tone.

The mirror was streaked. Clouded in places where it had given up reflecting clearly.

She didn't expect anything.

Just a check.

Make sure the makeup hadn't run.

Make sure she still looked... normal enough.

She leaned in and stopped.

It was her face.

Same eyes. Same mouth. Same hair pulled back tight.

But it wasn't neutral.  
It looked like intention.  
She stared at it.  
The expression held.  
Didn't shift under her gaze the way it should have.  
She lifted her hand.  
Touched her cheek.  
Warm. Real.  
The reflection followed.  
A beat late.  
Lena froze.  
The mirror corrected itself.  
Too fast.  
Now it matched.  
Blink for blink.  
Movement for movement.  
Normal.  
But the feeling didn't reset.  
That wasn't the face she woke up with.  
That girl had been soft. Careful. Measured in a different way.  
This one wasn't careful.  
This one didn't look like it had ever needed permission.  
Lena dropped her hand.  
The reflection dropped with her.  
No delay this time.  
That should've helped.  
It didn't.

She turned on the faucet.

Cold water. Fast.

Splashed her face.

Rubbed at her eyes harder than she needed to.

When she looked back, the makeup had shifted slightly.

Smudged at the edges.

Still there.

And so was the expression beneath it.

She grabbed a paper towel. Dried her hands. Crumpled it. Missed the bin. Didn't pick it up.

She looked at herself again.

Longer this time.

"You're still in there," she said.

The reflection held her gaze.

Didn't argue.

Didn't reassure.

It just stayed.

Which was worse.

She left the bathroom.

The clerk finally looked up as she passed.

"Have a good night," he said.

Lena didn't answer.

Outside, the air felt heavier against her skin.

She walked home through the quiet streets.

And the clothes didn't feel like something she was wearing anymore.

They felt fitted.

Like they had already decided how she should move.

The streets were emptier now.

Closer to nine.

The younger kids were gone—pulled inside, lights out behind them. The older ones gathered near the church lot, clustered around a speaker and a cooler of sodas.

Music thumped low and distant.

More vibration than sound.

Lena didn't join them.

She cut through the alley behind the post office.

Gravel under her boots.

A single floodlight casting her shadow long and thin ahead of her.

She heard the voice before she saw him.

“Walkin’ alone tonight, cher.”

She stopped.

A figure sat on the back steps of the Feed & Seed, just outside the light.

As her eyes adjusted, he came into focus.

Older. Sixty, maybe. Gray beard. Denim jacket worn thin at the elbows.

A cigarette burned between his fingers, ember breathing in and out.

Mr. Thibodeaux.

He looked at her like she'd shown up on time.

“I'm heading home,” she said.

He took a drag. Let it out slow.

“You ain't walking like you're from here.”

She frowned. “I've lived here my whole life.”

“That ain't what I asked.”

The night filled the space between them.

Crickets.

Wind through dry grass.

That low, distant music.

He looked at her then.

Not the clothes.

Not the shape of her.

Her.

And he nodded.

“Halloween ain’t for hiding, cher.”

She didn’t answer.

“It’s for tellin’ the truth before the rest of the year catches up.”

The cigarette flared.

Faded.

He didn’t explain.

He didn’t need to.

The questions pressed up—what truth, how do you know, why me—but they didn’t come out.

Didn’t feel allowed.

Or necessary.

He’d already said enough.

They stood there a moment longer.

He stopped looking at her. Turned his attention back to the dark, like he was listening for something she couldn’t hear.

“Good night, cher.”

He didn’t turn when he said it.

Lena moved on.

Her footsteps were the only sound for a while.

She reached her street.

Porch lights still on.

Windows lit warm from the inside.

Her house waited at the end.  
She stopped at the steps.  
Looked down at her hands.  
Steady.  
Halloween ain't for hiding.  
Be careful what you come as.  
The mirror.  
The girl who hadn't flinched.  
Lena stood there a second longer.  
Then she understood.  
She hadn't been wearing a costume.  
She'd been choosing.  
And something in the town—  
noticed.  
She didn't go inside.  
She sat on the front steps, back against the railing, and watched the street.  
The last trick-or-treaters were gone.  
Porch lights clicked off one by one—  
the Boudreauxs', the Millers', the house at the end with the flickering bulb.  
The street dimmed in stages.  
Like someone turning a dial.  
Then it settled.  
No wind.  
No music.  
Just the low hum of nothing.  
She checked her phone.  
11:57.

She waited.

For what, she wasn't sure.

A sound.

A shift.

Something that said the night had meant more than it showed.

11:58.

She looked again.

11:59.

The screen went dark.

Her reflection held there—sharp eyes, steady mouth.

12:00.

The numbers changed.

November 1.

Nothing followed.

No wind.

No flicker.

No correction.

The street stayed still.

Her breathing stayed even.

She waited another minute.

Then she stood.

Unlocked the door.

Stepped inside.

The house was dark.

Her parents asleep.

A single light left on in the kitchen.

She locked the door behind her.

Everything was exactly where it should be.  
Nothing had shifted.  
Nothing had reset.  
She stood there a moment longer.  
And understood.  
It hadn't been the night that changed.  
It had been her.  
And there wasn't anything in Cypress Parish  
that was going to change her back.  
She stood in her bedroom with the door closed.  
The house was silent.  
Not empty.  
Watching.  
She left the overhead light off.  
Just the small lamp on her dresser—the cracked shade turning everything amber.  
She faced the mirror.  
The girl in the blazer looked back.  
It was time to take it off.  
She undid the buttons.  
One by one.  
Slid the blazer from her shoulders.  
Let it fall to the bed.  
The shirt.  
The pants.  
The boots.  
Barefoot on the cold floor, she stood in her underwear and looked.  
The makeup was still there.

She grabbed a wipe. Dragged it across one eye.

Black smeared. Lifted.

Her expression didn't.

The other eye.

Clean.

Same face.

She tried to let her shoulders drop.

They didn't.

Tried to loosen her jaw.

It held.

Tried to make her eyes smaller. Softer.

Nothing.

The mirror gave her back the same look.

Calm.

Set.

Not something worn.

Something kept.

She sat on the edge of the bed.

The blazer lay beside her.

Dark.

Waiting.

She didn't put it back on.

Didn't move it away, either.

Her phone lit in her hand.

A message sat open—

hey did u see what happened at school today lol

She typed no.

Deleted it.

Typed what.

Deleted that too.

The words didn't fit.

She set the phone down.

Tried to reach for something familiar.

Scrolling.

Noise.

That quiet, shrinking feeling she knew so well.

Nothing came.

Same room.

Same bed.

Same skin.

But the space inside it had changed.

She lay down.

Pulled the covers up.

Looked at the ceiling.

Breathing slow.

Even.

She closed her eyes.

And didn't fold in on herself.

She stayed open.

The dark didn't press.

It waited.

So did she.

Sleep came without edges.

Dreamless.

She woke to gray light pushing through the curtains.

November 1.

Same ceiling. Same dresser. Same crack in the corner where the house had settled and never bothered to fix itself.

The blazer still lay on the bed.

She sat up.

Checked her hands.

Still hers.

Her reflection in the dresser mirror—still her.

She touched her face.

Nothing left from last night.

Just skin.

She dressed without thinking.

Jeans. Gray sweater.

Clothes that didn't ask anything of her.

In the kitchen, her mother stood at the stove, scrambling eggs. Her father sat at the table with coffee and the paper, folded to the same section it always was.

The radio murmured low.

"Morning," Lena said.

Her mother turned.

Looked at her.

Paused.

Just long enough.

"Morning, baby," she said. "There's bacon in the oven."

No questions.

No mention of the night.

No curiosity.

Just acceptance.

Lena sat.

Her father glanced up.

“You sleep okay?”

“Yeah.”

He nodded.

Went back to reading.

She ate.

Eggs. Bacon. Coffee.

All of it tasted exactly the way it should.

That was the problem.

She walked to the bus.

Same time.

Same stop.

Same kids.

When she stepped up, Mr. Landry looked at her.

Really looked.

“Mornin’, Lena.”

She hesitated. “Morning.”

She took her seat.

Across the aisle, Elise met her eyes.

Didn’t look away.

“Hey,” Elise said.

“Hey.”

“You doing okay?”

Not casual.

Not filler.

“Yeah,” Lena said. “I’m fine.”

Elise nodded.

Turned forward.

At school, it spread.

Mr. Hebert called on her.

Twice.

She answered.

He said, "Good answer."

Like he'd expected it.

In the hall, Cassie from yearbook stopped her.

"I like your outfit."

Lena looked down.

Jeans.

Gray sweater.

"Thanks."

Cassie smiled like it meant something.

Walked on.

By lunch, the pattern had settled in.

People didn't avoid her.

Didn't overlook her.

They accounted for her.

She sat at her usual table.

Corner.

Out of the way.

Drew from English set his tray across from her.

"Mind if I sit?"

She looked at him.

He held it.

Not awkward.

Not bold.

Just there.

“No,” she said. “Go ahead.”

He sat.

And that was that.

No one questioned it.

No one hesitated.

Like this had always been how it worked.

Lena rested her hands on the table.

Steady.

She thought about the night.

The warning.

The rule.

The mirror.

And understood.

It hadn't been a costume.

It had been permission.

School let out at 3:15.

Lena didn't take the bus.

She walked.

Not home.

The parish library sat at the edge of downtown—low brick, seventies build, never updated.

She usually avoided it.

Today, she went in.

Mrs. Chen looked up.

Paused.

Nodded.

Like she'd been expecting her.

Lena took a table in the back. Corner. Between the stacks and the window.

She pulled out her notebook.

Pen in hand.

Nothing came.

She waited.

Then—

I don't know what I am now.

She crossed it out.

I know what I was.

Quiet.

Safe.

Nothing.

She stopped there.

Looked at it.

I don't know if I want to be safe anymore.

The words held.

Didn't soften.

The door opened behind her.

Old hinges. Slow.

She didn't turn.

Footsteps.

Measured.

Coming closer.

A shadow crossed the page.

Lena looked up.

The woman from the porch swing.

Gray coat. Paper cup in both hands.

Not here for books.

She sat across from Lena without waiting.

“Mind if I sit, cher.”

Same word.

Lena didn’t answer.

The woman set the cup down.

Folded her hands.

Watched her.

“You wore it.”

“Yes.”

“And it fit.”

Lena said nothing.

The woman nodded.

“Most people take it off.”

Silence.

“You didn’t.”

“No.”

“You didn’t borrow anything, did you?”

Lena looked down at the page.

I don’t know if I want to be safe anymore.

“What happens now?” Lena asked.

The woman didn’t answer.

She only looked at the notebook.

Lena read the words again.

Then picked up the pen.

I don't.

The woman stood.

"Don't fold it unless you mean it, cher."

She closed the notebook.

The library hummed.

Clock steady.

Light gray through the window.

She sat there a while.

Thinking about the blazer in her closet.

Knowing.

\*\*\*

She opened the closet.

The blazer was where she left it.

She reached for it.

THANK YOU FOR READING  
SECOND SKIN: A Cypress Parish Short Story

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