

## It Will Not Define Us

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The job we do does not define us. You can take off your hands at the end of the day so that when you touch your lover you don't have to get your work on them. I am not the work I do.

During the day, I sit at my desk as hundreds of papers drift across. She is supposed to sign them, it's Her signature I attach to every dotted line. She has important work to do, and when the whole world needs your permission to run, you get papers to sign. She stopped reading them years ago. "They will all get signed one way or another" She had said to me once. And so they were. Signed by me, in Her cursive.

During the night, I sit in fresh skin as I pet the cat. She purrs softly.

During the day, I sit and read the papers. I will not sign anything I haven't read. I've gotten fast at it so that the papers do not pile up. Her signature has become my own. I read about the people begging Her to get rid of the park benches, the homeless are taking them as beds, and I sign. I read about the people demanding there be a place for the elderly, they remind us of the path we take to die and we cannot bear the sight of them, and I sign.

During the night, I sit beside my tub as I scrub my skin. No harsh chemicals because the skin won't last that way, just lots of scrubbing. Once it is clean, I hang the skin up to dry. Some of the water drips onto the bedroom floor. When I slip it on in the

morning, the outside will feel smooth and soft, but the inside  
always stays damp.

During the day, I sit and watch as the things She signed, I signed, are enacted. I watch as slums get bulldozed to put in a new mall. I remember that paper. I watch as the men with signs against Her get buried in the ground. I remember that paper. I watch, and I read the new papers. And as I read, I picture what the reports will look like in a week when they show up on the big screen.

During the night, I sit beside the ironing board with a bottle of moisturizer. I rub lotion into my new skin. Monica likes this new one so I will try to make it last longer. Monica didn't like the idea of new skin in the beginning. I tried to explain to her what I did during the day, the words I read, the papers I signed. I tried to explain to her that I loved her so much I couldn't bear to tarnish her with my filth, but she didn't understand. She demanded I try to keep my current skin. To not put on a new one when I got home, but it was never clean enough to touch her. I refused to let the hands that had signed death orders, that had kept people under the feet of others, touch Monica. I could see how the distance I had put between us was hurting her, so I tried to clean myself. I spent hours in the shower every night. But I scrubbed too hard, used too much soap, kept the water too hot. Monica saw my skin that was red and raw, my skin that was coming off in pieces, my skin that was being ground down to muscle, and then she understood.

During the day, I sit at my desk alone. Sometimes She comes out and greets me. In the early days I tried to find skins that matched my first one. I was so nervous She would notice. I searched desperately for skin that looked like my old skin. But inevitably there was a time when I couldn't find skin that matched. This

new skin was darker, and it didn't quite fit, bunching up around my wrists and elbows. I held my breath as She walked past my desk, trying not to fidget with the loose skin on my knuckles. She simply watched the report on the big screen - one-thousand people who looked like a man who had built a bomb rounded up and walked to a new home in the desert - and then She retreated back to her office. After that, I stopped worrying about finding skin that matched.

During the night, I sit on the ground in the alley behind a corner store. My skin had started to flake and shrivel up. So I sit here crying out in pain as I grip my leg. Someone hears me. I see his face at the end of the alley and so I cry out again. He comes down and asks me "What happened, are you okay?" He sounds younger than my last skin. Good, that means this new skin will be healthier, last longer. I reach out for him and wrap my arms around his back. Then I rip. I can do this with such efficiency now, people don't even have time to scream. I pull his limp body out of my new skin. I take off this old husk, flaking and peeling as I move, and slip into my new warm skin. It fits well. It feels clean.

During the day, I sit in my day-old skin and get used to the way it feels wrapped around me. And then the papers start to come. So I sit and read and sign and watch and feel as this new skin slowly becomes filled with the dirt of my work. But the filth of my work cannot touch me. This skin will fill with evil and I will replace it again and again. And when I reach out to touch the woman I love I will not have to worry that the sin will touch her too. We will both remain clean from this work.

It will not define us.