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## Home of the Flesh

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## I. Home of the Flesh

Once upon a time there was a girl with crocodile skin. She would go to school under the hot sun wearing long sleeves and full-length pants to hide herself. At night, she would scratch herself raw—between the elbows, by the wrists, under the knees, around her collarbone and neck, itch, itch, *itch*—and come morning, there would be blood on the sheets and puckered scars on her skin. She would gladly trade the prison of her body, brown walls scored with the sharp marks of her nails, for her classmates' blank white flesh. She told her doctor this. He shook his head, covering her hot, itchy skin with his own pale, cool hand, soothing the eternal burn. "But your skin is so beautiful! I wish I had skin as warm and golden as yours." His words never reached her ears.

After a month of screaming in the shower when the water hit the raw gouges on her body, her parents took her to a hospital in Denver. For two weeks she sat, mummified in wet clothing, cocooned in moisture. When they finally unwrapped her, her skin was nice and smooth, and she finally felt like a real girl. She ran around the hospital floor, giving every nurse a hug. They sent her off with treatments and prescriptions and a cautionary warning—love your skin, and it will love you back. After going back home, she dutifully followed their prescriptions, but she still couldn't figure out how to love her skin.