



# Swan Skin

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Retold Fairy Tales

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For Odette, the best part about going out was getting ready. Eyeliner, foundation, glitter, hair curlers, and giant hoop earrings lined up like soldiers on her desk awaiting their mission. Odette spread her outfit out on her bed, looking at the pieces below under the warm honey glow from her string lights and candles. The record player in the corner caught for a brief second and the smooth voice of Billie Holiday jolted before continuing to croon about lost loves. The plan for the evening was simple: try out the new club on 8th street, drink a few drinks (but not too many), have a good time with her friends before the stress of the holidays finally caught up to them. Even Odette's outfit seemed perfect, a black top and skirt with heels and a giant white feathered jacket. The jacket was, of course, the statement piece for the evening and Odette smiled to herself as she ran her hand over the soft pure white feathers. After changing, she looked at the outfit in the mirror and admired how the jacket enshrined her body. It was her coat of armor, her protection and decoration. She was fearless and she was free.

The multicolored lights of the city shone through the sleet and the taxi window as Odette and her friends traveled to the club. The backseat was the usual array of long limbs, lipstick, and the beautiful sound of girl laughter. Odette fidgeted with the crystal swan necklace resting on her chest. The necklace had been a gift from her mother when she was a child, as Odette was named after the beautiful princess turned into a swan in Tchaikovsky's ballet Swan Lake. Odette's childhood room had been a shrine to her white bird namesake; swans were painted on every wall and the bookshelf overflowed with swan stories. Her favorite was The Swan Maiden, in which a woman is able to wear the skin of a swan and live as a bird until her swan skin is stolen by a hunter. The woman later finds the skin and flies away, leaving the man who imprisoned her forever. The idea

that a woman could hide herself, turn into a beautiful bird and fly away wherever she wanted was always appealing to Odette. She squeezed on the glass swan lost in thought and the wing punctured her thumb, jerking her back into reality just as the cab pulled up to the fluorescent club.

It was hot. The more drinks Odette had the hotter it became. People changed into swirling lights, speeding by her on the dance floor. The air was thick with smoke and the presence of dancers but Odette tilted her head back and let the multicolored lights wash over her. Bodies everywhere, but not the ones she knew. What time was it? Whose hands are those? Odette tried to talk or think or breathe but the arms pulling her away were too powerful and the hands gripping her were too tight. A man she had never seen grabbed her white feathers and rendered her motionless. The lights flew over Odette's eyes one final time before she was pulled into the darkness.

The wall against her cheek was scratchy and cold.

She couldn't breathe.

She couldn't do a single thing.

And after he was done with her, Odette saw his shadow pause after zipping up his pants. The shame was temporary; he turned and melted back into the lights. Odette slid down the wall to the floor gasping for air. The soft feathers of her jacket were crushed and damp. The grimy floor beneath her was covered in white feathers that surrounded her as she shook uncontrollably. A fall from grace, a far cry from the confident liberated woman that stood in her bedroom earlier and donned her feathered armor. Odette's swan skin had been torn, ripped, and stolen by a man who didn't even know her name but now owned a part of her that had once made her free.

For Odette, the best part about going out used to be getting ready.

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