

Strip (Her)

by Amanda Sledz

There's not enough cigarette cloud to conceal her, malnourished and pale beneath blue and pink lights that summon 80s-era skate rinks. She saunters towards the center of the stage, asking her bored expression to convey detachment, while a DJ that fits the skating rink even better than the lights announces her fantasy name, and every body in the room travels elsewhere.

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He is really proud of himself for dating a stripper. He tells everyone that he has a girlfriend and she is a stripper, in that order, and doesn't mention anything else. He works in a tattoo shop and does things with computers and waits for her at the end of her shift so she doesn't get murdered by someone else who thinks too much about strippers.

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She has fresh face tattoos, stars and hearts framing her eyes like a mask. This means she won't be working anywhere else in Indiana, except around poles or in a hipster restaurant or in a tattoo shop with her boyfriend and other men like him who still remember when she was a stripper. He gave her the face tattoos so that she'd wear him everywhere. She grabs the pole and spins, and her face is flip book animation, one line changing every turn.

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At the stage half of the men seated are forever angry, scowling and hoping she's hating herself a planet deeper with every orbit. A man with a white tshirt laundered into yellow like his fingers, like his teeth, fishes the dirtiest bill from a wallet he's had since his sixteenth birthday, the day his father insisted he needed to know something leather other than a belt against his back. He waits until she's looking and then tosses it on stage, a dead-eyed child, fishing for a future in a fountain.

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Back at home his wife makes a point to no longer be attractive -- his type of attractive, anyway. Her wardrobe has become a rotation of sweatsuits boasting color exclamations across the ass that he doesn't want to read. He wishes she wore more make-up, while she wishes he could do his own laundry, could pick up the children, could stay at work an entire shift, could ask her a question that didn't make her feel like a kitchen appliance. He wishes she wore more make-up, so she throws all her make-up away.

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One day the stripper will have dyed her hair too many times and the color won't shine like it once did. She'll start telling people she's a dancer (not a stripper) while doing the same thing for the same men, with the same man but with maybe more tattoos, eyes ever looking elsewhere.

