

## SKAG

by Naomi Vondell

At forty-two, Heather Rockwell was certainly the most striking woman in the departure lounge. In a Proenza Schouler blouse, Armani jeans, Blahniks, and more-or-less natural blond waves, no one could mistake Heather for anything but first class.

As she sipped her skim latte, which she always bought from Starbucks because the logo complemented her complexion, Heather mentally calculated the cost of this trip. It was no more than most of the others. Liposuction. Brow lift. Implant adjustment. She tallied the amounts.

This year, she was trying conjunctivoplasty. It was a new procedure: surgical replacement of the whites of her eyes. Any spider veins or brown spots would be removed, and the whites would be brightened for a younger, fresher look.

Sometimes, she could still hear their voices. In the hallway. On the playground. The cool kids. “Fatty!” “Lezzie!” “Skag!” “Flat as a board that’s never been nailed!” What the hell was a “skag,” anyway?

It didn’t matter. The word meant they didn’t like her. That it was okay to hurt her.

Heather had learned to read at the age of two, and she’d been a straight-A student all through school. But no one listened to her. She was a “skag”.

The modeling course was five weeks of revelation as to why Heather had never been listened to. It was all about image. Heather learned makeup, posture, clothes, Product. Product with a capital P. The word was spoken reverently, like the unpronounceable Name.

Heather started her diet. Half a bran muffin for breakfast. Sliced tomato for lunch. Dinner if she thought she deserved it, which wasn't often. Heather lost one hundred and seventy-five pounds in six months.

She graduated with honours, got her MBA, and got a job. And she met her prince. The prince who was now cheating on her with a young fresh-faced millennial.

Heather checked her email. There was one from her boss. Versace graphs due tomorrow. Heather had a vague awareness that the older she got, the more grunt work was tossed her way. As if she were a garbage heap. Maybe that was what "skag" meant. She would Google it.

There was an email from Annette, her daughter. Another A, this one in calculus. Annette was smart. So had Heather been. Annette didn't realize yet that because she was a girl, smart didn't matter. Not unless you were smart in a sexy way.

Heather tossed her iPhone into her Chanel bag, picked up her Prada carry-on, and glided toward the departure gate.

End