

The—Lovely—Red—Skirt

Red isn't my favorite color—Jezebels wear red, the church mothers said—forced to wear Pentecostal approved skirts swiping against my ankles—with thoughts of having them mangled with every weighted stride—my skin sewn up into dusky, gray cotton fabric—I choose to comply—to a lie that my body—has to be—adorned in modesty—to make the creator of this same body--give me access to everlasting life.

To please—my flesh cleansed of rebellion—I admire this stolen skirt from the back of my closet—it's short—scarlet red—velvet smooth—feisty and taboo—like the discovery of this hidden treasure—amongst a heavy duty trash bag of clothes known as acceptable apparel—given as gifts to the huge black family of seven with an unemployed father—a Diversity Visa Lottery Immigrant—failing—nonetheless, I take it for the purpose of hope—shove it into my basket two hours before my mom—under his instruction—snuff and filter it out—from the “oldest to youngest” selection process—of scavenging through piles of stained—new—garments.

One day I'll be able to wear it.

In fact, I do—sneak it into my textbook-stuffed backpack—fold it nicely so it won't wrinkle—rush to the bus and sit in the front seat—like I usually do—head resting on the cold, dewy window pane—in pain hearing the laughter of the stylish, popular girls being passed loved letters like church tracks on a scorching Sunday afternoon—my Song of Solomon's—to myself—smeared along with the Vaseline sucked from the side of my right cheek—and when we arrive—I run to the bathroom after getting off the bus—I go into the smallest stall—I needed to

go into the big—accessible one—she’s morbidly obese my doctor whispered into my mother’s ear—those words stung, but still—I squeeze off the decoy—my thighs spilling over like the unraveling seams—screaming with every slight rip—stretch.

And I carefully take out the lovely red skirt—place it on my body--climbing up my hips with ease—a perfect fit—shocks my body with confidence—finally comfortable in my own skin—while despising it—forgot about how I felt—the red skirt singed my waist—insinuated my overdeveloped curves—okay with being locked outside the gates of heaven—if only I could live out this last lustful day—for I desire myself in this moment—but not for long.

I strut to class with a tight backpack—my chin and head tilted up approaching my cubby—the teacher gasps in horror—sprints to the entrance of the door—clutches my wrists before I could get any further—yanks me—pulls me—I sit outside the principal’s office—listening to her expert opinion on what my adolescent body should be wrapped in—through the midnight blue cinder blocks—anything but that she said—this isn’t even like her—call her father, I insist.

I get dress coded—my father absent—per usual—out looking for work with his phone off—they call my mom instead—the pressure of shame towers over me as I wait for her—for hours—reading *The Babysitters Club*—I look up and stare—a petite, white girl with a lovely praline green skirt on—shorter than mine—but, she’s called cute—administrators admiring its emerald beauty—my head hangs low—I get into the car—thighs too thick for an eleven year old my mom complains—but it’s not my fault—blame God for not answering the many prayers I

prayed—on the same knees covered in baby fat—like the rest of my temple—blame WIC and EBT for my gluttony—when food was finally in the cabinets—it was more than enough—even though we never had enough—besides those occasional—seasonal—gifts we received—the hand-me-downs—the—lovely—red—skirt.