

Veronica Abrams

Fashion Victim

Kaylee Anderson didn't like Genevieve Jones, but she sure as hell didn't kill her. Gena a solid "B" student with a "C" list social media popularity rating and senior at Kennville High, with mousy brown hair, and a boyish rectangle body frame, Gena had nothing on Kaylee. Kaylee was the coveted school hottie, the ultimate trendsetter. Kaylee was the one who brought all the high-end runway fashion to their little middle of nowhere town and high school. The 'Dead Doll' look, unitards, camel toes, the return of the Mom Jeans, even just tights- but no pants, the see through sweater without a bra. But all that fashion was starting to seem so tame so passé when this season rolled in 'skin tagging'. Although bearing tremendous resemblance to sebaceous and epidermal cysts, these modifications were done with intention, with perfect precision, like a fine tattoo inking or shot right in the muscle. And Kaylee would have never guessed that Gena's lumpy little tumors would become a threat to *her* well being, that they would pose a vital danger.

Like many of her classmates, Kaylee had convinced her mom to let her get a 'lil body tagging done over the summer. They were having girls day out. Spa time. Getting their hair highlighted, their brows waxed and tweezered, the whole deal, when Kaylee begged her mom into signing the parental waiver to get a little body disconfiguring done to celebrate the start of her senior year. Trying to sway her, she showed her the last post by fashion blogger, Vicki Haley, where she had ranted, 'Skin tags??? Seriously, I know what you're thinking, unwanted little benign tumors, not exactly the sexiest or most enticing, but don't be fooled fashionistas, surprisingly, these little buggers, are incredibly eye catching on all body types and can be surgically inserted on the body anywhere, making them highly addicting.' Kaylee offered her mom more proof, swiping through her phone, for pics of celebrities sporting them on their shoulder like an expensive

brooch, the perfect little fashion accessory to accompany you anywhere. More current than Teacup Chihuahuas and poodles in your purse or carry-on luggage. Body tagging was lit right now, hip. Unlike ear stretching, gauging, and dermal piercings, body tagging wasn't just popular with the hipsters, metal heads, and punks, it was fashion for everyone.

Although adverse to the idea, Kaylee's mom finally acquiesced to letting her daughter scar and mangle her body, just as long as it wasn't very big and remained hidden from her dad.

"Just a small tag" she told her, placing a motherly and indulgent hand on her shoulder as Kaylee drooled over the tagging studio counter at the big glossy picture book of options like a kid in the ice cream store. Deciding on one only about $\frac{3}{4}$ an inch in diameter on the small of her back, a skin embossing flecked in gold complete with a rhinestone inlay outlining. It looked like a sexy little dressed up lump of tree fungus, gracing her flesh for only private consumption. Admiring her new addition, Kaylee was excited to flaunt it and couldn't wait to start her senior year at her beloved Kennville. With this new little boost of confidence, this year- the halls, the cafeteria- she would surely own all of it.

While Kaylee's was certainly the most expensive, others had beat her in the numbers game. What came as the biggest shock was Genevieve Jones, this timid little, unassuming copycat clone, the kind you would expect to have one or two out of fear that she would stick out sans surgical incision, had gotten so many of them over the summer. *This little twirp?!*, thought Kaylee who had at least five alone that were visibly protruding around her pastel pink v-neck sweater.

"Nice tags," Kaylee said, eyeing her smugly, as she applied her vampire red lipstick in the bathroom mirror on the first day back at school, trying to hide her envy and rage for Gena under a cool smirk of a smile.

"Thanks," said Gena, mid-hand washing, pretending hard that she wasn't the least bit intimidated by her, that she didn't idolize her or care what she thought, turning the cold water off first she burnt herself, and then tried to conceal the redness of her hands by hiding them in the depths of her mousy brown hair, running her fingers through the back to smooth it out.

"How'd you manage to get your parents to go for all that?" Kaylee said, interrogating her, now blocking the bathroom door exit, arms crossed over her chest in last season's see-through fishnet sweater. Gena took in a deep breath, she had prayed the encounter with Kaylee had already ended back there at the

double mirror. But Kaylee stood gawking at her, getting a closer look, which was clearly an attempt to put Gena back in her place. To not let her gain any social capital, to hoist her back into nobodyville. But Gena, was one of the few girls who had turned eighteen over the summer and didn't even need her parents to sign the waiver. Unlike Kaylee, Gena had body disfiguring options. And lots of them.

“You should get a massive one...” said Kaylee, pulling out her Smartphone like a pack of cigarettes, trying to con Gena into thinking she'll be the cool kid, and should ignore the surgeon general's warning. “How bout like this one?” she said, biting a lip, showing Gena a sexy little high def pixel of a skin tag so large it would invade her entire bug-eyed little face, obstruct her peripheral vision, “It's probably a genius way to get an older guy to go for ya. That way they'll know for sure you're legal,” she said laughing, now being forced to move over to the left side and let Gena go, as Ms. Phelps her history teacher came walking through.

Maybe it was because Gena had secretly worshiped Kaylee since 7th grade soccer tryouts, when the pimply face naive little Gena of course didn't make the cut and Kaylee celebrated with a victory dance- her butt out right in front of Gena's face in the perfect pair of athletic shorts just to really rub it in further. Or maybe it was because Gena cyber-stalked Tony Richardson, the blue eyed cutie and star wrestler of Kennville High all the time. Tony Richardson, the James Dean look alike, also known as Kaylee's on and off again boyfriend. And the guy Gena followed every day on-line and she even knew his shoe size (9) and what his favorite band was (“Demolition”). So, of course Gena valued Kaylee's opinion, who wouldn't. But nobody could have ever guessed just how far she would have ran with it. Just how to heart Kaylee's words stuck to her.

The next Monday there was Gena, creeping through the halls of Kennville High and the door of their 6th period bio lab, clad with skin tags looking like a full on leper. Every nook and cranny, from her ankles to her brow was ripe with them. Gena didn't just look hip or cool or fresh with her new Fall look, she resembled the contents of the biohazard receptacle from a geriatric dermatology clinic. Like the rotten flesh in a hospice unit. Two inch melanomas cascaded down her arm as if a perfectly painted henna tattoo. More valuable than a pure gold ancient Egyptian upper arm cufflet.

The first experiment of the semester, was to grab a lab partner and dissect a frog. Kaylee was tongue tied when Tony Richardson asked Gena and not her this time. Completely livid nearly foaming at the mouth, she couldn't believe her eyes. At first she thought it might just be because he mischaracterized Gena,

saw her skin abuse as the doing of someone easy and reckless, an actual bad girl. But Kaylee then realized Tony was just really curious about what exactly were these new protruding lesions. He seemed infatuated by her strange textbook-like body growths, like he wanted to be examining her under the magnifying glass, dissecting her fatty tissues. "That's sick, Gena, totally ill."

"Gena" she corrected him, sheepishly giggling, grabbing the microscope away from his gleaming blue eyes that were like an unspoken invitation to the best tailgating parties where all the cool kids drink and drive. The one's she had never been present at, yet saw the drunken after pics they posted online. Gena gulped, trying to ignore him and his leering curious smile. She pretended to look at their little frog cadaver cut open, under the microscope on the table, and Kaylee watched from the back of the room, ready to take an "F" for the assignment, her jealousy growing within her like a wildfire burning down the aisle of desks in Mr. Merinda's bio lab, lighting up the desks and chairs with just her eyes.

That night Kaylee of course cried herself to sleep, feeling like a bargain basement loser, a runner up prom queen, re-playing the events of the tragic second week at school disaster - Tony picking Gena to be his lab partner. The way he looked at her like some bumpy moldy spud goddess. Was Gena now "It"? was she the new "It" girl? Kaylee reassured herself that just couldn't be possible. All this because Gena, had developed these tiny little meaty lumps over the summer. *They weren't even her's*, Kaylee thought sobbing with her head deep in the pillow, *they were surgically implanted*. Kaylee considered every option to dethrone Gena. To regain Tony's pubescent little greasy head of affection. Getting a fake ID, even the option of falsies- the kind they sold at the mall, adhesive skin tags you could stick anywhere only they weren't very heavy duty, but they could lose their stickiness with sweating and then she'd really look like a total loser for sure.

By the time her 6th period bio lab bell rang that next day Kaylee's heart was full on racing. She was prepared to rip a chunk of tagged flesh off that girl, pull her hair out, she'd do what she had to. But Gena wasn't there. *Absent?* Thought Kaylee, *What a little baby*. She probably knew Kaylee was after her. Wednesday came around and she was still gone. Thursday, Friday no Gena.

By Friday on her way to P.E. Kaylee heard some kids talking in the halls saying that Gena was really sick, was in the ICU. Later her friend, Becca texted her that she had heard one of Gena's tags had become infected, probably from an unclean needle or instrument at the salon, and her blood tests came back Hep C positive. In Algebra others were sure it was melanoma. Skin Cancer.

Kaylee felt ashamed as she sickly rejoiced in the idea of Gena fallen ill. The way you would if an apocalyptic disaster struck, but still it got you out of a test at school. She imaged Gena lying in her hospital bed probably looking almost identical to a rotten pokey African horned cucumber. With all the little bumpy skin nodules poking out all over her, piercing through her shirt like a textured ribbed sweater. *Gena was a goner*, she thought slamming her locker, hiding her smile, eyeing herself in the mirror, the competition was over.

But her smile quickly dissipated, when another thought rushed in, what if Gena would be infamous. She'd be the next little internet story trending all over social media, with a flashing headline "Fallen Fashion Victim," or something real clever, even before her casket dropped six-feet under. What if she went viral on the internet all because of her infected tumors. How could Gena be the famous internet story and not her? Yet alone, if Tony did decide he wanted to be with her now, would it only be because he couldn't have Gena? Dead or alive, Kaylee wouldn't let Gena have this.

When Kaylee got home from school she flung off her backpack, across the living room floor, it went flying and the strap even managed to hit her Cocker Spaniel, 'Lucky', in the eye. Without even removing her shoes, Kaylee immediately began a manic emergency Google and Pinterest search for some kind of answer from the universe. Some way she could outdo Gena. But every fashion idea she could find or think of felt rehashed, cliché, none of it wholly original. All trends floated through her laptop internet browser one click per millisecond - just fragmented candy colored images, glimmers of some sort of recycled fashion bygone error, but nothing came to her.

Kaylee was hungry and had been on an internet search binge for what turned into hours and had managed to forget to eat dinner and because of this her stomach was angry and growling. It was almost like her parents were just ghosts in the room, back an hour or two ago, and she almost didn't even remember them asking her to come to the table for dinner. That's when the idea struck her how she'd take it to the next level. How she'd out due Gena. She'd let Tony, the entire senior class, maybe even all of the internet- get up-close and personal with her. She'd expose her intimate and softer side for all. Because lets get real she thought she knew now guys clearly didn't even care what clothes a girl wore, what mattered was what they looked like without them on. That's what Tony wanted, skin, and lots of it. She'd give him a whole lot more than just that though. She'd show him her insides. As the daughter of a gastroenterologist she had access to

all the latest medical equipment to do it. Costing around \$500 a pop, she'd get her hands on one of his endoscopy camera pills, this could even become the next big thing, like the new club drug, bigger than molly and LSD. It would be sick, it would be ill.

Her dad didn't even hesitate to the idea of her having the procedure, as Kaylee like any normal teenage girl frequently complained about cramps and stomach pain. In fact he seemed relieved about it as she approached him cleaning up in the kitchen, wiping off the marble countertop after dinner. She had such a look of urgency on her face when declared she wanted to have the procedure that he had feared the worst, his little Kaykay was dropping out of school or was pregnant with Tony's babe.

By downing the pill with just one hard swallow coupled with wearing the tiny little electrodes under an electromagnetic vest, his little girl could go along with her usual day. Modern technology had all the little kinks worked out and an endoscopy was no longer an invasive procedure. Daddy suited her up and explained it would take a full eight hours for the pill to pass through her, and off to school she went. His sweet little Kaykay, he doubted anything was wrong with her gastroenterologically, but he always thought it better to steer on the side of caution here.

But that wasn't even the bulk of it. Once she pulled up at school and dragged her backpack out of the car, she strapped an ipad to her chest, into the neat little front vest pocket, and secured it with some hot pink duct tape, the ipad functioning as the interface, the portal to broadcast the images, the procedure the doctor should have been viewing from a cushy doctors office swivel chair somewhere. This interface which allowed her to reveal the full Monty, as the pill journeyed through her entire body, passing through her throat, to her small intestine, her lower bowels right there in plain view. Kaylee flung her hair out of her face looking down on the screen at her own exposed throat and trachea now, she knew she was really onto something, this was gonna be huge. The pill was making its way down. She got carried away imagining the possibilities. When Tony saw her sweet flesh from the inside, from her nether regions, to the workings of her internal organs all her gooey gushy insides, he wouldn't be able to resist her, he would want her inside and out. And broadcasting it on the internet, wearing it all around town, she'd be liberating girls everywhere. Feminism 5.0. No more gut shaming. Gut walks everywhere. Girls all shapes and sizes, wearing less than nothing. Exposed under the bone. Pushing the envelope one step further. They'd all think this was what it meant to

reclaim your true girl or woman power. Showing that it was what was on the inside that mattered. That's what everybody would believe this was all about.