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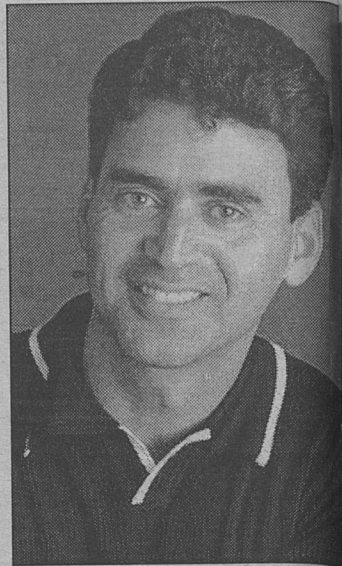
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When Your Relationship Ends the Skin Hunger Begins

BY MICHAEL ALVEAR



Whispering pines hush in anticipation.
 Despair melts into morning dew.
 Hearts flutter like a butterfly's first leap.
 When a man touches you, life wakes up. Whether his hand is on the small of your back or the nape of your neck, there is no slouching in the presence of a man's tenderness.

Words are simply love's dialect. Touch is its native language. The most powerful word, the most eloquent phrase pales to a passing kiss, a parting hug, a glancing touch. Marinate in a lover's touch long enough and it tenderizes you. You feel like you belong. To him, to here, to this.

It's only when a relationship ends that you understand the power of touch. Your body rebels at its absence. It wants the flutter, the dew, the pines.

You don't realize how much touching goes on in a relationship until it ends. You don't think about how often your legs are entwined in bed or how long your hands are clasped on the ride home. Goodnight kisses, teasing tugs, assuring hugs – you took them for granted and now there's nothing to supplant them.

Your body is used to touching and being touched, kissing and being kissed. And now it's going through withdrawals. The long, aching, endless skin hunger begins.

The hunger drives you out, into the night hoping the darkness will shed some light. You drink too much; you drug too much, all because your skin starves so much.

You sit in temporary couches, lay in untenable beds, all so you can feel the butterflies land, the pines whisper and the morning dew melt.

And they do.

For a minute, an hour, a night.

When a relationship ends, your body suffers the most. You can distract your mind, you can divert your heart, but you can't do anything with the skin hunger except feel its pangs.

The yearning to lose yourself in a man's touch turns into a crutch. Being touched becomes more important than the man who's touching you.

The craving for contact blurs your vision; you confuse surface with depth. You can't really see the man in front of you, only his potential to get you through the night.

Your body ends up looking at your soul the way your dogs look at their empty dinner bowls—with imploring eyes.

"Didn't I just feed you last night?" your soul asks in exasperation. It's a question you wouldn't ask of your pets yet you ask it of yourself. As if you can't live off a man's touch once and never get hungry for it again.

It's only when a relationship ends that you understand the power of touch. Your body rebels at its absence. It wants the flutter, the dew, the pines.

Losing the consistency of a man's touch makes you harder, tougher. You feel yourself congealing. You withdraw, toughen up, close things down.

But the hunger doesn't really go away. It just lies in wait. And soon you'll be out for, act on and plunge into anything that can make it go away.

You bounce between having no boundaries to having too many. First you're in heaven, then you're in hell. Then you're in heaven, then back in hell. The polar attendant at the Pearly Gates can't make up his mind.

And you wonder, why is everything too little or too much when you're single? Why do the choices seem so stark? Why is it gluttony or starvation, boredom or overload?

Why is nothing the only option to everything?

Finally, you do that awful rowing towards balance, that furious paddling between nowhere and everywhere, and somehow you steer yourself to calmer waters.

If life is merciful your body meets your mind the way the river meets the ocean, creating a transition between land and sea, thought and feeling.

The ocean's salt stings the river's wounds and creates a new ecology, much like experience bruises emotions and creates a new consciousness.

From the still of this estuary you see the possibility of reaching heaven without going through hell.

You see that the pines, the dew and the butterflies are possible but they have to be nurtured not hunted; brought forth not chased down.

It's only from this estuary, formed by the peace your soul brokered between your warring factions, that you see what you could not see before: Heaven as creation and not as a quest.

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