Meat Jacket Essay, Research Paper

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MEAT JACKET

?I fear that our technology has far exceeded our humanity? -Albert Einstein

RETINAL DELIGHT NIGHTCLUB, 9:32 PM

She was an alluring woman, to say the least. Her auburn hair was cut in a razor-thin line across her cheeks, jutting out a full three inches from her lips. It was cut short enough to allow the small strand of pearls around her neck to be in full view, but long enough to keep her from looking butch. Although Harrison doubted that short hair alone would knock her down the beauty scale except maybe from stunning to striking. Her swan-like neck stretched downward into the black bubble-vest she was wearing, her skin white as cream. Under the vest, a gray skin tight cotton long sleeve shirt stretched over her long, thin arms which showed the slightest hint of muscle tone. The sleeve ended at a loop, in which the woman had slipped her middle finger. Harrison noted in his observation that the ending of the sleeve looked rather like the tip of a fountain pen. Her pants were silk looking and fell ever so delicately over her calves and thighs. The black koulats were at least $500, and Harrison knew a woman like her rarely had to pay for her trinkets. She sat at an angle at the table, so she could set her drink down, but the rest of her body was out, facing the crowd. Her acquaintance for the evening wasn?t decided just yet. Harrison followed her legs down to her feet. They were small, Lilliputian almost in size. This was not to say that she looked foolish because of them. Quite the contrary. They were wrapped in leather heels, making them look long and dainty. Harrison shifted in his seat. The woman was looking at him now. She raised an eyebrow at him, he averted his eyes. When it came to watching he was a pro. When it came to contact, he was poor, at best.

He looked downward into his drink. The club?s noise was blaring, letting him speak quietly to himself. His beer was a green tint under the light, made dull by his sunglasses. His thin, bony fingers tapped the beat of the song that the band was playing on the thin wooden table. His greasy hair hung in small thin spears around his face. The harsh lights overhead gave his hair a black sheen. He pushed his beer away. He was leaving. Harrison shoved it across his table, tossing fifty cents down next to it for the tip. He lingered, looking out over the dance floor, the moving bodies, the bass that made his retinas contract. Fitting name, the club?s. He spun on his Gucci shoes, facing the door. The woman was there, three feet from him, looking directly through him. Her lipstick was made darker by his prescription sunglasses. He gave a wry smile, not sure what to do next. He shifted his weight inside his Armani suit.

?You look uncomfortable.? Her lips parted just slightly when she spoke, revealing a small portion of her amazingly white teeth.

He chucked slightly, still looking at his shoes. ?Yeah. A little. I?m not much for these public gatherings. I?m more of a reader, myself.?

?I can tell. Most readers stay home and read. You joined society, so there must be some chance of making you a social butterfly.? Her velvet voice reminded Harrison of those squeaky clean AT&T operators he was always seeing on television commercials.

?Well, it?s a special occasion. I?m celebrating.? Harrison kicked himself. He sounded desperate.

An eyebrow raised. ?Oh? What would that be??

?It?s my birthday. I?m twenty-seven.? God, he sounded pathetic.

?Happy birthday…..?

?It?s Harrison. Like the actor.? Stupid, stupid.

?That?s cute. I?m Caroline. I can?t stand these places. Too loud.?

?Sure. You look like you don?t get out much.?

?No, really, I can?t take the noise. Wanna get outta here, get a drink??

?Thanks, I?ve already had three. I?m just gonna go home.?

?Come on, I don?t bite. We look really dumb just standing here. You can have a Ginger Ale.? How could he say no? This was like a wonderful dream.

?I guess. I know this place on…?

?Fifth Street. I?ve seen you there. That?s why I approached you. You looked familiar.? Dear God, this couldn?t be turning out better.

?Let?s go.? Harrison said, clicking off fifty more cents tip.

SEVENTH STREET, 9:54 PM

The sky was yellowish, and Harrison was unsure whether it was because of the neon globes that lined the street or because a storm was on the horizon. The wind moved like whispering ghosts through his stringy hair. It was cool and brisk, swishing his brown curls from side to side. Caroline was explaining again about how petty the world had gotten, and Harrison nodded when he felt it was appropriate. He let her ramble on about this and that, all the while wondering about the circumstances he was currently in. Yesterday, he was a lonely loser who preferred to stay at home than going to brash clubs. Now, he was walking to his neighborhood pub with the most beautiful woman he had ever come in contact with. This had to be a joke. Her facial muscles pulsated as she spoke, giving Harrison shivers. Beautiful specimen. Maybe later he could investigate further. Now it was time to start bringing in the net. They walked on, her shoes making hollow clicks on the smooth concrete.

TATTLER?S PUB, 10:10 PM

The cold wind followed them to their seats, as it clung to their jackets and mixed into their hair. Caroline ordered a Daiquiri; Harrison a Gin.

?God, I never get tired of that look on the buffalo?s face? Caroline said, gesturing to the giant head above the door. The regulars called him Humphrey; he was always a welcome sight.

?I love that thing. Always looks so surprised, like, ?wha? Who got shot???. Harrison mused, chuckling.

Caroline pulled a lighter from her breast pocket, along with a slender Virginia Slim. She cupped her hand around the lighter, revealing her exquisite hands. The fingers were long, like a musicians, and the nails were slender; not so short that she looked manly, not so long that they were gaudy. Her knuckles were almost nonexistent, but they pressed against the skin just enough to provide the hint of strength.

Caroline looked up at him with her penetrating eyes. ?Why, besides the fact that it?s your birthday, venture out into the world, especially to the Retinal Delight??

?Apathy for the mundane.? He spoke into the water that the waitress had set on the table while they ordered their drinks.

?Oh? What do you mean??

?Well, I look at it like this: I?m at home most nights, and sometimes I get antsy for the outside world. Kinda like when you sit in the same position for a while, it?s always more comfortable to switch to a new one??

?I see. That?s fascinating.?

?My turn to ask questions, Caroline.? He looked upwards, his hair tickling his cheeks. His brow was low: he was looking for answers before he moved in.

?Now, answer me this: Why does a woman like you, with your……what?s the word?? Harrison asked.

?I don?t know what you?re going to ask. Just continue.? She let a wry smile slip.

?…Okay, for lack of a better way to say this: why did you pick me out of all those guys there? They?re so much more handsome, they have more money…..? Harrison kicked himself at how awkward he sounded.

?You looked lonely. You looked like the kind of guy who didn?t get invited to parties because he was perpetually thinking. The kind of guy who was constantly thinking circles around everyone he came in contact with. The kind of guy who is the most sensitive person anyone could know, but no one takes the time to find that out.? The drinks arrived. Caroline sipped hers as Harrison thought through this.

?Thank you. I?ve been waiting to here this for my entire life.? Harrison pushed his drink around on its napkin.

?Well, you?ve proved me right.? She looked up from her straw into Harrison?s eyes.

RUSSIAN HILL APARTMENTS, 11:48 PM

The outside was painted cream color, with pine trim around the doors and windows. Harrison pushed the door open, the inside heat of the lobby was stifling. The landlord was getting lazy about cleaning up the heat ducts. He held the door for Caroline, keeping a forgotten nicety alive as he did. She glided in, and headed for the elevator. That was odd. Most women would wait to find out where their company lived before heading for the first door they saw.

?Caroline. I live on the seventh floor. Hold the elevator.? Harrison sputtered, pulling his jacket from under the door, where it had gotten caught.

?I?ve got it.? She seemed in a hurry. There was plenty of time for Harrison to finish. It wasn?t even midnight. Morning was far away.

Harrison scuttered to the elevator. It was quiet there, like a garden. The hum of the fluorescent light above was white noise that bothered Harrison?s circuits a little, but, he was an advanced machine, he could adapt. The doors closed. He could do it here. He pressed the big red button marked ?STOP?. The car lurched to a stop.

?Harrison? What are you doing?? Caroline asked with a smile. She expected something kinky. Harrison could deliver.

With that, he was upon her, his lips against hers, locked in an embrace that was the high point of Harrison?s life. For the first time, he was in love completely, and, the love was returned by Caroline. Strangely, her hair stayed in place.

Her hands moved down the small of his back, under his belt. They stayed there. Good. She couldn?t fight as hard that way. Harrison, careful not to alert her, slipped the blade from inside his sleeve. It was long and curved, razor sharp, and ready. He pressed it against the back of her neck, under her hair. Couldn?t afford to hurt the hair. Had to keep the wounds minimal.

?Ooh. What?s that? It feels cold.? She said around his lips.

?You?ll see.? He ripped it to the side, opening a gash in her neck four inches across. He had severed a vital vein to her brain, and she would die within a matter of minutes. The problem was, she could still fight in those last few minutes.

She screamed, and her arms pulled from Harrison?s belt. She hit the ?STOP? button once again, starting the car upwards. Harrison did his best to hold her in place, but those small muscles proved to be more powerful than they looked. She slammed him against the wood-paneled side of the elevator, giving him a jolt. Harrison slipped from his coat, His loose T-shirt revealing the cuts on his arms. Small yellow wires sneaked out of them quietly, pushing the flesh down off his limbs. His leg skin was pushed out the cuffs of his pants, slipping over his shoes. The cuts were circular, so the wires could just break the scabs and the skin would fall off. His fingers loosened, looking more like latex gloves than human skin. His forearm inched down, revealing a long, gleaming underarm of metal and wires.

?You?re a Goddam Hopper!!? She said, fumbling through her purse.

?Not exactly. I?m a self -aware Hopper. I realized that military life wasn?t for me, so I decided to body-hop my way to freedom.? The wires licked against the empty eyes, pulling the flesh over his scalp. What was left before Caroline was a vaguely human form, whose face looked more skeletal than anything else. The wires were pulling at his clothes, showing more cuts where the Hopper had slipped the skin on.

?What the hell is a ?Self-Aware Hopper??? Caroline ripped through her purse, her hands examining each item; never taking her eyes off her lovely beau.

?If you?re looking for your Derringer, I took it while we were walking. Now to answer your question…..?

Harrison switched on an internal voice message. Dan Rather?s voice rumbled from Harrison?s speakers. A news broadcast from long ago.

?Developed by the military for covert operations, Hoppers were used primarily in the Middle East to infiltrate possible threats to America?s safety. They were perfect spies. They could ?body-hop? into other humans when they saw fit. They weren?t allowed free thought, in a sense, they were 20th Century marionettes. There was a glitch in a batch of MMX chips sent to the Pentagon. The imperfection was overlooked due to the possibility that there was a war building in Turkey. The batch, called ?Maulers? were sent along with the rest of the Hoppers to Turkey. Maulers had the ability of self-awareness and used it to manipulate their prey. In Turkey, they slaughtered over half of the populating, body hopping from one civilian to the next. Over 300 left Turkey on planes and returned to the US, body hopping their way to leadership. To date, they have killed over 7000. The Maulers have—? The recording was cut off as the skin from Harrison?s back covered the speaker. Caroline stood at the other end of the elevator, making no effort to stop the bleeding. Her eyes lulled back and forth as she tried to stay conscious. She was smart; no tourniquet could stop the flow down her back.

Her eyes were black now; the pupils dilating and twitching: Harrison sensed that she was dying. The elevator stopped at the seventh floor. Before the doors could open, Harrison slashed upwards, slicing her heart in two. His hand paused as he ripped through her ribs, and he had to jerk to free the blade. She coughed a few drops of blood, then dropped to the carpeted floor. Harrison picked her up, carrying her under his left arm, dropping the knife in his pocket. He dragged her to his apartment door.

APARTMENT 703, 12:01 AM

The body seemed heavier than Harrison was used to. Usually, he could lug it about like it was a pillow, but this one seemed to have more girth. He laid her out on his bed, her hands above her head. He retrieved the knife, blade first. The yellow wires pulled his skin off his chest, revealing the instrument panel and more tubing. His glowing eyes darted about her body, surveying the cuts. He could make at least one more on the back and still keep the skin intact. He turned her over. The blade pulled back of the vest off, saving Harrison at least five minutes. The wires probed about in the laceration, pulling the skin ever so slightly. It slipped quietly off her back, over the shoulders. The arms came off without a hitch, and the scalp came off with little less than a squelch of blood. All the others, Harrison had had to ?shuck? with the blade. This was like taking off a glove. Harrison laid the skin on the chair, the pants slipping to the floor. Harrison ran his fingers along Caroline?s spine, going up to the skull. Her muscles were exquisite; well toned and taut, and Harrison made a note to take those with him. The bones on her skull were slippery and separated, unlike the others. He moved back down her spine, on to her shoulders. They too were slippery and strange. Harrison didn?t like this one much. He wanted to body hop then leave town. Harrison pulled the skin from off the back of the chair, then walked to 705, the Dressing Room.

APARTMENT 705, 12:11 AM

The Dressing Room was barren, specked only with the small white pieces of plaster that had ripped out when Harrison had smashed through the wall. There was a small jar of Vaseline to aid Harrison in slipping into the skin. Metal sometimes got caught on the membrane, and this helped to not only pull it on with greater ease, but to keep it looking alive. Next to it, there was a porcelain bathtub, filled with a bath oil and water. Body hopping was a lot more work than it was cracked up to be by the media. Harrison began the process.

He dipped the skin in the bath, cooling it and washing off the blood. The bath oil swarmed around it, filling the legs and head. When Harrison had been removing the ?underskin? as he had nicknamed it, he?d had to remove the scalp. In previous experiences, the hair had either fallen out, been torn out, or had died when he had been wearing it, turning slimy. The bath oil made the skin stretcher, easier to fit into when he had to. His wires and cords were tense, and, along with the hydraulic joints, were unable to squeeze into the skin without tearing the elbows and knees. While the skin soaked, Harrison began smoothing the Vaseline on his arms and legs, careful not to miss the undersides of his taut muscles. This would take at least another hour. The skin was badly damaged, and he couldn?t afford to risk breaking it. Couldn?t afford another slip-up. Too many of those these days.

APARTMENT 703, 12:16 AM

Caroline slid off the bed, careful not to let Harrison?s hyper- sensitive ears hear her thud. She rolled on her bloody shoulder towards Harrison?s pants. The blade had ripped a hole in the pocket, and she had to reach it. Harrison wouldn?t body hop anymore after tonight. Caroline?s wires searched wildly for the blade as she closed her eyes to run a diagnostic. Harrison had been rather gruff with that edge, and she wasn?t so sure one of her pistons hadn?t been severed. Maulers were especially careful about their well-being. She let her arm become lax, slipping off her side. Her titanium elbow hit the small metal square where the bed was screwed to the floor. A soft metallic clank shot out. Caroline?s eyes pulled clear of the diagnostic check. That noise would alert Harrison. She rolled under the bed, grabbing the blade.

APARTMENT 705, 12:19 AM

Harrison stood in front of the full length mirror, checking to see whether or not the Vaseline had covered all of his plates. He turned around, keeping his head in the same place as he did. His pectoral muscles were dull with grease, but the black stenciled ?MMX APPROVED? letters showed through. He worked his fingers under them and yanked them both up. Wires and batteries crisscrossed his chest, humming with the power inside him. He smeared the Vaseline under them, then closed them again. He ambled over to the skin, still soaking. He dipped his arm in under the membrane, being ever so gentile with it. He slipped his arm into the skin, doing his best to keep it in one piece. He fitted inside the fingers.

Suddenly, a noise. A subtle one, but a noise the same. Harrison pulled himself out, running to the wall. He listened quietly, doing his best to hear whatever had made the sound. Humans just don?t get up and walk away when they?ve been skinned. They just don?t. Harrison inched closer to the opening. This would be a bad situation if humans just walked away after being shucked. Harrison scanned his memory to remember where he had left the blade. A downward thrust to the temple would finish her, this he was sure of. He had left the blade in the pocket of his pants. He kicked himself for not taking the muscles first. Stupid mistakes get you killed, Harrison.

APARTMENT 703, 12:27 AM

Caroline checked the vials of fluid that were given to her by Mr. Huang. They were to be used to pump into her wires, heightening her senses, helping her to deal with the unpredictability of eradicating the Hopper. She removed a vial and placed it into her arm, next to her main wire. She let the wire suck it in, and felt as the fire ripped through her veins. Her video camera eyes retracted as the sense of consciousness a machine is capable of increased tenfold, jarring her. Her fingers twitched, and she rolled out from under the bed; fearless. Her elbow slammed into the metal bedpost hard enough to bend it, making a loud clank that she was sure would bring Harrison coming. Three vials left. She might just keep some of this for herself.

APARTMENT 705, 12:29 AM

Harrison knew Caroline was alive. He knew that she was a Hopper, for that matter, in the sense that a machine can reason well enough to assume what it has been taught was the truth. He was stronger than she, otherwise he wouldn?t have been able to fend her off in the elevator. He spun on his ball-heel into the hole separating the two rooms. He was ready for a fight. He was ready to attack. He was not, however, ready for a knife flung into his forehead.

APARTMENT 703, 12:30 AM

Caroline let fly. The blade arced perfectly in the still air, connecting beautifully with Harrison?s eye. He uttered a squawk and tottered on his feet, then fell backwards abruptly, his shoulders and head connecting squarely with the porcelain bathtub. When he hit, the basin shattered, his head becoming entangled with the skin. Caroline watched as the blade severed the top and bottom from each other when Harrison struggled the best he could. The cold water poured over his metal, making it hard and making the wires twitch and turn.

Caroline turned, located the phone. Began dialing the numbers that she was instructed to after she had completed her assignment. Her small microphone ears pressed against the receiver, hearing the small beeps of the tones.

Mr. Huang answered. His labored breathing made him mispronounce his ?s?es.

?Huang.?

?It?s done.?

?Good. Your government thanks you.?

?How many more??

?Too many to count. They?re reproducing.?

?I?ll talk to you tomorrow. Same place??

?Yes. Right there. I?ll resupply you.?

?Good-bye.?

?Good-bye.?

Caroline hung up the phone. She had to find another suitable human to hop into tonight. Couldn?t board a plane to Washington looking like Terminator. She stood, gathering her bloodied clothes. She walked through room 705 on her way out. She reached the door. Unlocking it, she opened it briskly, checking the hall for humans. None. As she closed the door, she heard a small shattering noise coming from close by. She looked around, seeing nothing but the glass from three cylinders that she had left on the floor and the blade protruding from her abdomen.

She let out a shriek as her wires attacked her throat. Her eyes spun rapidly in her head in opposite directions. Her fingers bent and twisted, the metal snapping. Her back arched, the spine cracking. The drug was working. Apparently, in large doses, it was quite detrimental. Caroline found this out the hard way as the wires grabbed a hold of her jaw and ripped it off. She crumpled to her knees. Hoppers, as a whole, enjoyed watching their pray die. Just before her VidCam eyes shut down, she noticed Harrison?s audience, his chest heaving.

APARTMENT 705, 12:34 AM

Harrison checked the skin one last time to make sure that it was unusable. There had been enough noise up here for one night, and he didn?t want to kill unless he had to. Some of his prey were quite noisy.

Caroline?s head was torn from her eye to her mouth, the nose misshapen by the weight of his head. Her back was torn into her arms, which had small rips in them. Unusable. Harrison put his pants on. He was going to meet Mr. Huang, and he needed a body.

FOLD?S AUTO REPAIR, WASHINGTON, DC, 4:40 PM

Huang was slumped against a rusty Chevette, his oxygen machine resting comfortably against his shin. His dark Vietnamese skin was dulled by the fluorescent tubes of lighting above. When he saw Caroline, his brow raised.

?Right here!? He signaled for her to come over. ?Caroline?, was, this week, an overweight cleaning woman from the Russian Hill apartments who Harrison had happened upon on his way out of his apartment. She waived at Huang.

He sized her up. ?Caroline??

?Huang??

?How?d it go??

?Better than expected.?

?Good. Let?s go back to the Pentagon. They?ve got some more improvements for your CPU. ?

?Super. Mr. Huang??

?Yes, Caroline??

?Has anyone ever told you what exquisite skin you have?? Harrison said, slipping the blade from his sleeve.

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