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# **Second Skin**

By

**KRISTIN IDASZAK**

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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*Second Skin* received its world premiere at WildClaw Theatre in Chicago on Sept. 14, 2018 (Josh Zagoren, Artistic Director; Clark Bender, Managing Director).

CAST:

Quinn.....Stephanie Shum  
Sigrid..... Paula Ramirez  
Aislinn..... Hilary Williams  
Quinn Understudy..... Chelsea Dàvid  
Sigrid Understudy..... Alys Dickerson  
Aislin Understudy..... Sarah Lo

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... Jess Hutchinson  
Stage Manager ..... Aaryanna Renee  
Dramaturg ..... Hannah Herrera Greenspan  
Scenic Design..... Lizzie Bracken  
Casting Director..... Moira Begale  
Costume Design..... Anna Wooden  
Sound Design..... Sarah Espinoza  
Makeup Design..... Krista D'Agostino  
Lighting Design ..... Kaili Story  
Assistant Stage Manager..... Cedar Larson  
Production Manager..... Lila Gilbert

*Second Skin* was developed through the Wagner New Play Festival at the University of California, San Diego.

Special thanks to Naomi Iizuka, Gabe Greene, Deborah Stein, Delicia Turner Sonnenberg, David Jacobi, Adele Edling Shank, Ted Shank, Arthur and Molli Wagner, Samara Harris, Joe and Clare Idaszak, and Shane Kelly.

# Second Skin

## CHARACTERS

QUINN: 27, an insomniac.

SIGRID: 27-52, a woman with secrets.

AISLINN: 14 or 49, a selkie.

(Pronounced: ASH-lynn.)

## SETTING

A theatre, tonight.

Also, a beach. Or rather, your memory of going to the beach.

NOTE: In this play, beats usually indicate a shift in time or storytelling style or both.

... is for when language fails.

/ designates overlapping text.

*for the Gregerson women  
and for Adele Edling Shank*

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)  
it's always ourselves we find in the sea  
—E. E. Cummings

The water sustains me without even trying  
The water can't drown me, I'm done with my dying  
—Johnny Flynn and Laura Marling

# Second Skin

## Part One: The Prodigal Daughter

*(Darkness.*

*Music:*

*A ghost song.*

*A cri de coeur.*

*A sea shanty.*

*Something from another time.*

*The darkness lightens.*

*QUINN stands on an empty stage.*

*She hasn't gotten a good night's sleep in weeks.*

*There's nothing about her that's soft or feminine.*

*She wears men's clothes.*

*She's all hard edges and coiled energy.*

*QUINN listens to the music.*

*It reaches its tendrils into the recesses of her memory.*

*But she can't put her finger on where she's heard it before.)*

QUINN. I used to be afraid to fall asleep.

So my mom would tell me bedtime stories.

*(Beat.*

*A bedtime story.)*

Once there was a tavern owner

who lived in a village near the edge of the world.

Fishermen would stop and rest at his tavern.



They'd tell stories about the fantastical things they saw  
beyond the edge of the world.

One day a woman walked through his door.  
She had hair like the wind and eyes like the moon.  
The man fell in love with her on the spot.  
She stayed with him through the winter.  
When spring came, she wanted to leave.  
But they were expecting a child.  
So she stayed.  
She gave birth to a beautiful girl.

The man gave his baby daughter a silver charm.  
As she grew older, she wore it every day.  
For a time, they were a happy family.  
But the woman was a selkie.

*(Beat.)*

Selkies look like seals, but they're not.  
Selkies are the souls of the drowned.

A selkie lives underwater.  
But she can visit the land she left behind.  
She takes on her human form  
by slipping off her sealskin and leaving it on the shore.  
A selkie's skin is the soft grey color of fog.  
It feels like the sky before a storm.

My mother told me that if you steal her skin  
she has to stay with you.  
She has to love you.  
But she will never belong to your world.  
She doesn't belong to any world.  
She'll spend her nights in your arms

and her days looking for her lost skin,  
her second skin,  
so she can return to the sea.

*(Beat.)*

This is what happened to the man at the edge of the world.  
He had hidden his selkie's skin.  
He was afraid she'd leave him, and he'd never find her again.

One day, their daughter discovered the skin.  
She didn't know what it was.  
She showed it to her mother.  
That night the man returned home to a darkened house.  
The selkie had returned to the sea, taking their daughter  
with her.  
The girl was the daughter of a selkie.  
The sea wanted her too.

The man was heartbroken.  
He couldn't eat, couldn't sleep.  
He got a job working as a deckhand on a fishing boat.  
For years, he scoured the sea looking for his lost loves.

He never found them.  
At the end of his life, he'd sit in the tavern  
drinking whiskey long into the night and reminiscing about  
his selkie.

*(Beat.)*

Or maybe that wasn't how the story ended.  
Maybe a woman wearing a silver charm sidled up to him  
at the bar,  
bought him a drink, and sat down to tell him stories of the sea.  
To tell him she never forgot him.

*(The sound of a selkie.  
Perhaps the ghostly music returns.  
We can make out, indistinctly, the shape of the selkie.  
Or maybe we just imagined it.  
Beat.)*

Super dark, right?  
That's the kind of shit my mom told me to help me fall  
asleep.  
Stories about death and losing the only thing you love.  
No wonder I turned out to be such a hot mess.

I still don't sleep much.  
But my mom hasn't told me stories for a long time.  
She was  
well  
we hit a little rough patch.  
Like fifteen years ago.

She's a difficult woman.  
It's not that she's—

I don't know.  
I just don't know anymore.  
It shouldn't be that hard.  
But every time I talk to her  
every time I talk *about* her  
my blood pressure just

*(She makes a little "skyrockets" gesture.)*

through the roof.

*(Beat.)*

This is what I know is true:  
My mother's name is Sigrid.  
She's always checking up on me.  
It's like she can't stop herself.  
Her hugs are too tight.  
They suffocate me.

OK, so like, when I was a kid, we'd be running errands.  
Like you do with your mom.  
The bank, the grocery store.  
Sometimes we'd be standing in the cereal aisle or whatever,  
and the color would drain from her face.  
She'd drag me back to the car and speed home.  
We'd stay inside with the doors locked and the lights off  
until my dad came home and found us sitting in the dark again.

It was—  
I mean, that's weird, right?  
We've never talked about it.  
She won't talk about it.

She doesn't talk about her parents, either.  
Her dad died when I was too young to remember.  
But the day her mother died  
is the only time I've ever seen her cry.  
I was sitting at the kitchen counter doing my math homework.  
She sank to the ground. Her body was wracked with sobs.  
After a minute, she got up  
and helped me with my times tables like nothing had happened.

When I was thirteen or fourteen,  
my friend and I raided her parents' liquor cabinet.  
We got so drunk.  
When my mom picked me up, I acted natural.

She didn't say anything about it.  
I thought I was in the clear.  
At school the next day my head hurt so bad I saw stars.  
When I came home she was sitting with the lights off.  
Waiting for me.  
Trembling with rage.  
We fought. She took all our glasses in the cupboard  
and smashed them into the floor, one by one.  
The neighbors called.  
I told her that I hated her and ran into my room.  
That night, I lay on top of my covers curled into a tight,  
angry ball.  
She came and sat on the edge of my bed.  
She stroked my cheek and whispered, "I'm sorry."  
My mom's hands are rough and red.  
They smell like lemon.

After that we fought all the time.  
Night after night, our shouting shook the house.  
Every morning there was a tentative peace.

One morning I was in her room. I don't remember why.  
I picked up the glass on her nightstand.  
It smelled like whiskey.  
I'd never seen her drink.  
After that, I checked every morning.  
Every morning was the same.

Now, as an adult, I bring it up.  
She laughs it off.

*(As her mother.)* That? That was medicinal.

*(To us.)* I try again.

*(To her mother.)* It just seemed like it might've been a lot,  
Mom.

*(To us.)* She says,  
A nightcap was the least I deserved after everything I went  
through.

*(What did she go through?  
What is she talking about?)*

*(To us.)* This is the thing about my mom:  
when she tells you something, you know it's the truth.  
But you never feel like she's telling you the whole story.

*(Beat.  
A shift. Out of memory, into the present.)*

Every year I fly home for Christmas.  
This year, mom slurs her speech.  
She can't button her coat.  
She blames it on the cold.

*(To her mom.)* Mom, it's sixty degrees.

*(To us.)* She seems out of it.  
Maybe she's started drinking.  
Not her nightly tumbler of whiskey.  
I worry that this is something else.

And it is.  
A few weeks later she calls me with the news.  
She has ALS.

*(Beat.)*

ALS stands for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis.  
It's a progressive neurodegenerative disease.  
That means the motor neurons—  
the cells that make muscles move—  
they just weaken and die.  
Nobody knows why it happens.  
Nobody knows how to stop it.

It starts in her arms and legs.  
Then she'll lose her ability to move altogether.  
She'll get trapped inside her body.  
Her heart will still beat.  
Her mind will still think.  
But her lungs won't breathe.

Once you've been diagnosed you get two, maybe five years.  
I won't be able to do a goddamn thing about it.

My mom is going to die this way.  
No matter what I do, she's going to—  
It's so fucking arbitrary.  
I think about all the other ways it could've happened.

Cancer.  
Heart attack.  
Overdose.  
Friendly fire.  
Shark attack.  
Getting struck by lightning.  
Being thrown from the back of a bull.  
Getting trampled as a crowd stampedes out of a burning  
theatre.  
Natural causes.

There are so many ways to die.  
Every death is different.  
But every cause of death is the same:  
lack of oxygen to the brain.

*(Beat.)*

I realize I'm still on the phone with my mom.

*(To her mom.)* Are you OK?  
Do you want me to come home?

*(Beat.)*

*(To us.)* She's quiet for a long time.  
I check my phone to see if we're still connected.

When she finally speaks, her voice is strange and thick.  
I can't quite hear what she says.

*(To her mom.)* What?

*(To us.)* She doesn't answer.  
Instead, she tells me I'm just like her.  
That's not true. We're just totally different.

I have to come home and care for her.  
Mom doesn't want me to.  
Or she says she doesn't.  
But there's no one else who can.  
I'm an only child and so is she.  
I don't have any brothers or sisters to help out.  
Neither does she.  
So I book a one-way flight.



When I get here, she's happy to see me.

I think.

For the most part, she's still her usual self.

The disease hasn't progressed very far yet.

It starts with tripping over the carpet, over nothing at all.

The doctor gives her a walker.

She hates using it.

Which—

*(She makes a gesture or noise of frustration.)*

but, I totally get it. I'd feel the same way.

For the first few weeks I'm here, it's peaceful. Pleasant, almost.

Except for

*(She gestures: you know.*

*Beat.)*

Mom's favorite cookbook has always been the phone book.

I've inherited her culinary skills.

So we do takeout every night.

Mexican Mondays, Thai Tuesdays. You get the idea.

Until out of the blue she takes up cooking.

I've been on the phone with her insurance company for  
over an hour

and I'm *pleading* with this stupid woman named *Doris*  
when I hear a crash in the kitchen.

It scares the shit out of me.

I sprint to the kitchen.

Mom's standing there, surrounded by every pot and pan we  
own.

She's dropped them all.

There's blood everywhere.