

Skin deep III - Endgame

JULY 2025



SKIN DEEP



Meanwhile, as the fake Karen was embraced by her new family and settled into her artificially crafted life, Z1 found herself lonely and sad. The organization prevented her from dating the real Karen since now she was wearing the bodysuit of an Indian woman. Yet she couldn't be with the fake Karen either since Z1 was not familiar with the idea of bodysuits and the organization preferred leaving things like that. The sudden breakup was painful. It was her first lesbian relationship - or was it? - hard to tell. Anyway, it was hard to process. And she had to start from scratch, with no connections, only a luxury apartment, endless financial resources from the organization and lots of blurry memories.

She walked through the city with a quiet desperation. She remembered some streets, but no one recognized her. Why? Since the day she was taken and later released, it's as if she'd become invisible. She frequented parks, public squares, anywhere with crowds, silently hoping for someone to stop her. No one did.

She tried getting to know more Black people but she had a constant feeling of not belonging there. Despite her looks, her ebonics, her sway, she couldn't shake the sense that she's only mimicking what others did naturally. She carried a strange guilt for this disconnect, for the possibility that she was only passing.



She went into therapy to process all of this. “I dunno,” Z1 said, eyes lowered. “I don’t feel Black like that. I *look* it, yeah... but it don’t feel real. Feel like I’m just puttin’ on. Like I’m playin’ a part.”

The therapist leaned forward. “Has it ever occurred to you that you might be carrying some internalized racism?”

Z1 blinked. “Wait—what you sayin’?”

“I mean... when you were younger, did you ever wish you were white?”

The words floated in the silence for a long moment. “Maybe. I don’t remember, but... yeah, maybe. I was the only Black gyal in my school.”

The therapist nodded again. “That’s actually quite common. A lot of Black kids who grow up around mostly white people end up feeling like what some call a ‘coconut’: brown on the outside, white on the inside.” Z1 looked up, eyes narrowing. “Damn... that hit.”

“You’re just someone with a difficult past. And that kidnapping you went through—of course it made everything worse. Maybe stop trying to *be* anything for a while,” the therapist said. “Act it out. Try things on. Play with the identity until something clicks.”

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The theater wasn't the same as her old one as Katherine, but it was equally glamorous. Small stage, narrow rows of chairs. Some of the faces in the room seemed vaguely familiar, though no one recognized her.

Her looks and voice, obviously, limited her options. Casting directors kept steering her toward specific roles. Eventually, they built a play around her: a kind of Wakandan fantasy, full of tribal futurism, where she played a strong, sensual warrior. Her lines were conveniently written in Ebonics, her costume dramatic: gold, black, structured around her curves. She delivered her performance with quiet intensity, not overplaying it, but owning the space. It wasn't Shakespeare, and having such a stereotypically Black role made her feel uncomfortable, but it worked.

The show ran for two weekends and drew a decent crowd. Someone mentioned her presence, how her body seemed carved for the spotlight. She wasn't going to be a serious actress, everyone knew that. But a few producers suggested something else: cabaret. Maybe even burlesque.

Z1 didn't know how to take it. She had very little interest in performing in an over sexualized role in front of single men. It wasn't definitely the future she imagined, but after everything, the idea of performing without explanation, of being seen and not questioned, held its own kind of appeal, so she accepted.



Against all odds, Z1's cabaret debut was a success. It startled her more than anyone. The shy, uncertain woman she was now stood under soft, colored lights, wrapped in sequins and slow music, drawing eyes without saying a word.

She didn't know how to dance, nor to strip. It wasn't in her nature. Not really. She told herself it was therapy, soul-searching, survival, anything but fulfillment. But each performance chipped away at the shell. The stage gave her something to distract herself from her situation, if only for the length of a number.

Her acting experience eventually helped. She simply stood, walked around on stage, sang on playback. She didn't need to be herself. She could be a persona, a silhouette, a symbol. Her hourglass figure and a faint resemblance to Nicki Minaj did the rest to attract crowds. Well, her curves probably helped too.

When her agent proposed the stage name *Nicky Mirage*, she laughed out loud. "You're kidding," she said.

"Mirage," he repeated, grinning. "You're not what you seem. But damn if you don't look like a dream."

Nicky blushed.

The name stuck.



Karen had been feeling hollow for weeks. Loneliness had crept in like fog: quiet, cold, hard to shake. Lonely, waiting for Ruth to make some progress, for Alexandra to regain her memories, she didn't have much to do. One night, she wandered into a dimly lit cabaret bar tucked off a side street. The sign out front shimmered in cursive neon: *Tonight – Nicky Mirage*. The name hit her. She thought about Z1. She had not heard anything about her lately.

Inside, the air was thick with music and perfume. The stage lights danced on sequins and bare skin. And there she was. Z1—now *Nicky*—commanding the room in feathers and fringe. Karen felt her breath catch. Bingo.

She waited for a break, then made her move.

She approached Z1 during a break and invited her to sit with her.

"Hey, beauty," she said softly, slipping into the booth beside her. "How you doin'?"

Nicky turned, raising an eyebrow. "Damn. Bold entrance. How'd you know I'm into girls? I look like I waving a rainbow flag or somethin'?"

Karen grinned. "Nah. I can read people." She leaned in slightly, her lips parting.



Nicky stopped her with a raised hand and a half-laugh. "Eh-eh, hold up. Don't get ahead of yuhself. I ain't what you think. I might be all glitter and hips on stage, but off it I'm shy as hell. I ain't no bitch." she trailed off, her voice quieter, but Karen wasn't really listening.

She was staring. The plunging neckline, the curve of her chest, the soft shine of her skin under the cabaret bar lights. Karen blinked, trying to pull her thoughts together. *How the hell did we get here?* Two straight white women, now two queer women of color, both hotter than they'd ever been. Also, two ex-lovers.

"I'm sorry," Karen said, cutting in gently. "I didn't mean to disrespect you. I just... I think you're lonely. I feel like you've been through a lot, a breakup maybe, and now you're trying to figure out who you even are. And this is what you need."

Nicky narrowed her eyes, caught off guard. "How you know dat?"

"I..." started Karen, but Nicky left for her next song, shaken by the encounter.

Karen sat quiet for the rest of the evening and even after the show, she couldn't stop thinking about her ex lover.

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Maybe, she thought, she could win her over again as this new version of herself. A fresh start, no confessions, no baggage.

She contacted the organization and they didn't object. Technically, it wasn't against protocol as long as she did not realize her true identity as N8, her former lover.

A week later, Nicky Mirage took the stage.

The music kicked in—a can-can number, playful and wild, echoing the glamour of the Belle Époque. Nicky was radiant in her red and black corset dress, fishnets framing her thighs. Karen sat at a small table close to the stage, drink untouched, eyes locked.

She looks more confident, Karen thought. *What a woman. What a queen.* They'd taken everything from her—her memories, her name, her race, her love—and still she adapted.

After the act, Nicky strolled to the bar, glowing with applause, and ordered something sweet and strong. She spotted Karen.

"Well well," Nicky said, cocking an eyebrow. "You got enough o' these legs tonight or what?"

"Not nearly enough," Karen replied, heat rising in her voice.



Nicky smirked, then slowly raised one leg, displaying the curve of her thigh, garter taut and shining under the spotlight.

The crowd whooped and clapped, surprised at the bold gesture by the usually static attitude Nicky had. But the gesture was aimed at one woman alone.

Karen's body buzzed with adrenaline. "Fuck me" she said under her breath, barely keeping it together, "let's go somewhere."

Nicky tilted her head, teasing, and then smiled seductively.

"There's a dark room in da back," she whispered, low and sweet. "Come follow meh"

And Karen did. Without thinking.

Z1 led Karen into a private VIP room, its decor elegant and rich. A large bed stood at the center, dressed in crisp linens and heavy blankets.

"You were right," Z1 said, tossing herself back onto the bed.



"About what?" Karen asked, trying to keep her voice steady"

"Everything," Z1 replied. "Mi feelin' real lonely. Just got left by a bitch I thought I loved... an' your approach was exactly what I needed."

Embarrassed by the knowledge that that *bitch* had been her, Karen did not know what to say.

"But lemme tell yuh somethin' straight. I might act quiet but I don't want you to get this wrong. I wear di pants in dis. Don't play me, yuh try hurt me, yuh goin' regret it. You mine now, aight?" - her blaccent got stronger as she warmed up.

"Yes" "Good gyal. Now come eat"

They clicked right away, like nothing had changed. The chemistry was still there, easy and real. Karen felt that same pull she'd felt before, and Z1—now going by Nicky—was just as locked in.

Karen started visiting her every week.



The following week, Nicky welcomed Karen the door rocking a Bavarian beer maid outfit.

Karen grinned. "Damn, looking good as always. What's with the costume?"

Nicky shrugged, a little shy. "Yeah, I know it's kinda random... but I like playin' those white girl roles, if that makes sense. Like... I ain't really comfortable in that whole 'sexy Black woman' image. I dunno. Hard to explain. My therapist says I'm like a coconut—brown on the outside, white inside. You ever feel that way?"

Karen blinked. A therapist? If her memory started creeping back, there could be problems... "Yeah, I get it," she replied casually. "I mean, I have Indian blood, but I've always felt pretty American."

"Right? But for me... it deeper than that. I get kidnap, yuh know? Not too long ago. Real mess up ting. An' da shock... it mash up my head. I lose most o' my early memories. All I really remember is growin' up in di Caribbean, den movin' here when mi was a teen. Dat's it." - her Blaccent resurfacing again.

Karen hugged her, genuinely sorry for what had happened to her. "Don't fight your vernacular," Karen told her. "Just be you." "Yeah... you right," Nicky nodded.



She smiled faintly. "Now it's just me... an' di name dem gave me on stage. Nicky Mirage." Karen's throat went dry. She smiled back, gently. "Well, it suits you."

Nicky tilted her head, playful again. "You sure? Or you just like mah tits?" Karen laughed, tension bleeding out. "Both."

The next time Karen arrived, Nicky was dressed in a full 1920s flapper look—beaded fringe dress, long pearls, gloves to her elbows, and a black feather curling from her headband.

"Looking ravishing," Karen whispered, leaning in to kiss her softly on her plump lips.

Nicky smirked, but her eyes didn't quite match the smile. "Yeah, but... this gon' be the last time I get to choose what I wear." Karen frowned. "What do you mean?"

"They say the audience wants somethin' spicier," Karen reached for her hand, squeezing it gently.

"Whatever it is, you'll own it. Like always."

Nicky gave her a small, grateful smile. "Yeah. I just hope I still feel like *me*."

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The next time Karen showed up at Nicky's place, the door was already open. Inside, she found Nicky standing in front of a full-length mirror, adjusting a shockingly vibrant Brazilian carnival outfit—rainbow sequins, glittering fringe, feathered shoulders, and a towering headdress.

"This is ridiculous," Nicky snapped, hands on her hips. "I ain't even Brazilian!"

Karen leaned casually against the doorway, her gaze very obviously lingering. "Still looks good on you though."

Nicky rolled her eyes. "My therapist actually told me to try leanin' into more Black roles—like, playfully takin' back my identity, y'know? I guess she got a point."

"She might be right, Nicky. - Karen said, in a serious tone - After all, you're Black and you should come to terms with that"

"I guess you're right."

"Life is too short to be taken seriously. You're a hot Black woman, just have fun with that!"

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Nicky nodded, reflecting on her words.

"Here, lemme help you with the feathers—you need more!"

"Hhm, okay," Nicky replied with a shrug, half amused.

Karen adjusted them, taking her time. When she stepped back, Nicky looked stunning.

Nicky rolled her eyes. "Hmm, I dunno."

"Come on! Say *bom dia*!"

"*Bom dia*," Nicky echoed, a little deadpan.

"Hah! See? You even sound like a native," Karen grinned—and kissed her. The feathers fluttered slightly between them. Life wasn't so bad lately.

The thought gnawed at Karen: *Was she really willing to throw all of this away if Ruth's plan succeeded?* Maybe she could rescue Nicky, restore her memories, but then what? Would Nicky hate her? Realizing her lover was also her ex-lover, the woman who'd turned her into this drone? Would it unravel her completely, her identity, her sexuality? Too many questions. She would just take this day by day for now.



That week, Nicky prepared like never before. This wasn't going to be one of those nights where she just strutted and mimed along to music. They wanted more from her now. She knew she had to step it up.

She spent hours studying Nicki Minaj—the sway of her hips, the cool, lethal confidence, the way she could take command of a room without saying a word. Tonight, Nicky would channel all of that. She poured her frustration and anger into movement, letting every beat of the music carve it out of her.

Nicky approached the stage with a new confidence. She had watched some videos of Nikki Minaj lately to absorb more of her body language and it was paying off now.

She danced, tearing off more and more feathers to reveal her dynamite curves, teasing the crowd with every flick of her wrist. She ended with only a couple of feathers, which she threw to the crowd. They lost their minds.

Nicky left the stage stumbling down the stairs, heart still thudding in her chest, limbs buzzing, the noise of the crowd echoed behind her like waves crashing at a distance. She blinked, dazed. Karen was waiting, grinning like a fool.



"You killed it," Karen said, eyes gleaming.

Nicky didn't say a word—just pulled her into a tight hug, clinging to her like a lifeline. She was still catching her breath, but laughter spilled from her anyway, shaky and giddy.

"I did, didn't I?"

Karen nodded. "You were a fucking star out there."

Something clicked into place. Nicky stood there, feathers stuck to her skin, makeup smudged, sweat rolling down her spine—and she'd never felt more like herself.

"This is it," she whispered, almost to herself. "This is what I was meant to do."

Karen pulled back, still holding her shoulders. "You think so?"

Nicky's smile widened, eyes bright.

Karen kissed her. She didn't know how long this blissful time would last but she was enjoying it minute by minute. She had a cute, if somewhat dull girlfriend in Isabela and a hot lover like Nicky. Funny enough, they used to be sisters, white and straight as a pole...



Meanwhile, Isabela—Karen’s partner and Nicky’s sister—felt lonely and neglected. Karen often left in the evening and wouldn’t return until the next day. It was obvious she was having an affair. Isabela still felt strongly attracted to Karen, even though Karen had grown cold and distant.

She had recently let go of the goth look Karen had once encouraged, opting for a more classic, casual style reminiscent of Ariana Grande, something that suited her face more. But Karen didn’t even seem to notice.

One evening, sitting at home alone, Isabela decided to check Karen’s tablet, hoping to find proof of the affair. She scrolled through what seemed to be a detailed agenda, but liked more like a catalog of people, each with customizable bodies and mindsets. And there she was, under the name Emma.

“Emma? That’s not my name.” Her profile showed a baseline version, a chubby redhead, and her current appearance marked as “Bodysuit model: Ariana.”

What does that even mean? Was she...?

She remembered reading about stories about illegal skin suits, women who had lost their memories after putting one on, only to wake up months later with someone else’s face.



Was she not actually Isabela Rodriguez, but a chubby redhead stuck inside a bodysuit? That would explain the uncanny resemblance to Ariana Grande. That sudden awakening in a hospital room a few months back. The strange absence of documents, of school records, of family photos, even though her memories felt real.

Her heart was beating fast.

Well, there was something she could test. As scary as it was.

Her fingers trembled as she tapped through the settings. She found the editable fields under *Profile Customization*. Ethnicity: *Mexican*. She changed it to *Puerto Rican*.

In an instant, her skin deepened to a smooth mocha brown. Her petite nose broadened, the bridge flatter now. Her hair curled up, soft and coiled. Her lips swelled fuller, plump and striking. She touched her face with wide eyes, her breath catching. "What da fuck?" she screamed, her voice echoing in the dim room. "No no no!"

It was all true. She wasn't real.

She stared at her reflection. Her chest rose and fell with shallow, rapid breaths.



She was trapped in an artificial body suit. But why her? She wasn't rich, famous, or important. Just... an ordinary girl. Or was she? She realized with a chill that she couldn't trust a single memory of her life before waking up in that hospital room. Who had done this to her? That bitch, Karen was certainly responsible for that. Hopefully

She looked back at the screen, jaw tight. Her thumb hovered over a grayed-out button: *Restore Original Settings - Unavailable*. Her breath caught. There was no way back.

"So I'm a white chick, huh?" She quickly edited her profile again, *white*, she typed. Then: *blonde, bobbed hair, blue eyes*.

And just like that, her skin lightened, her hair shifted, shortened, strands twisting and recoloring themselves into a natural blonde bob. Her eyes stung for a moment before turning a pale, icy blue. Her nose became small again, her facial features still resembling those of Ariana Grande.

What she didn't know was that the tablet had quietly sent a signal to Karen's phone. Karen suspected what had happened and, cursing herself for not having locked the tablet away, drove home as fast as possible.



The front door slammed open minutes later. Karen stepped in, her expression amused. Isabela, still staring at herself, didn't hear the footsteps behind her.

"So," Karen said, voice sharp. "You found out about the bodysuit, huh, little bitch?"

"AAH!" Isabela screamed, tossing the tablet onto the sofa.

Karen walked closer, slowly, her boots clicking on the wooden floor. "Ooh, let me take a look at you. A white girl now? Going back to your roots?" She snorted. "Tell me, how does it feel, knowing I turned you into an Ariana Grande knockoff?"

"You did this to me?" Isabela stammered, backing away. "I really... I really thought this was real."

Karen smirked. "Yes, I did it. You know, I even gave you a choice: Rihanna, Beyoncé, Ariana. You turned your nose up at Rihanna and Beyoncé. Didn't want to go Black, huh? Not like your sister?"

Isabela blinked. "My... sister?" She had no memories of growing up with a sister.