

# SKIN

*Echo Clifton*

Her.

A label of unachievable perfection. She is an empress of beauty and grace.

Enchantress of worlds and idol of innocence.

Gentle songs leave her rosy pink lips, and everyone comes to listen.

Girls of all kinds want to be like her, matching the delicacy she holds within her hands. She is pure and compassionate. Tender, and elegant, and luxurious, and magnificent. She is desire.

But her soft-spoken stories leave ringing in my ears and pounding in my chest. Words twisting around my mind like rose thorn bushes with labyrinthine purpose. She creates images of safety and affection, but these are lies. Deceitful whispers designed to kill. A false pretence of love.

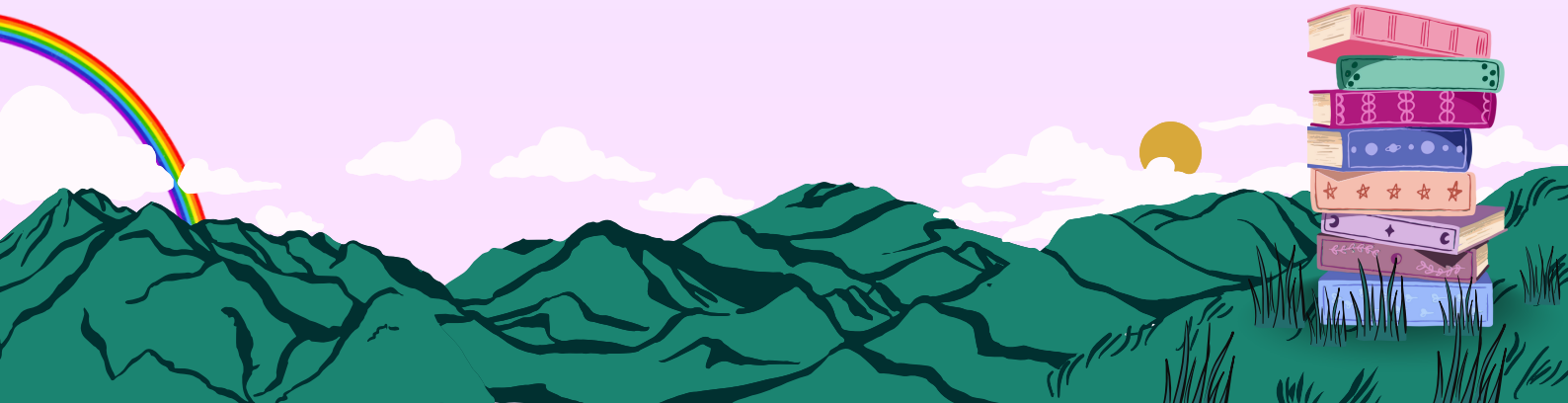
I despise the idea of being her.

Him.

A label of strength and ferocity. He is a king of barbarity and courage.

Ruling vast lands, and creating destruction in his wake.

Commands fall from his course lips and everyone turns to hear.



Men of all kingdoms want to be like him, imitating the determination he wears on his chest. He is brave and steadfast. Strong, and relentless, and brilliant, and fearless. He is passion.

Yet, his brazen cries bring tears to my eyes and leave metallic tastes behind my teeth. His demands scratch at my throat like creatures trying to spill from my mouth. His words are poison. Empty promises of protection and prosperity. More lies, built to draw those who fall victim to youth into the gates of war. The roughness with which he speaks is little more than bombshells.

I resent the thought of ever being him.

So I ask, what will become of those who are not delicate enough to be 'her', and not strong enough to be 'him'. When the unwavering grasp of the wrong name claws at clasped lips and curled fists. What happens when the crown of individuality bestowed upon your body isn't for you? When the song that thrums through your veins is different to the song you are forced to sing. Too soft to be 'He', too rough to be 'She.' Never enough to be me.

When did the push-and-pull of soft curves and downcast eyes become 'woman'.

When did the sharp slice of angular jaws and steadfast grins become 'man'.

When did we become anything more than just skin?

