



And Throw Away the Skins

Scott Archer Jones

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This poignant novel is stylish and poetic as it travels through the troubled seasons of a woman's life.

Scott Archer Jones's emotional and dramatic novel *And Throw Away the Skins* follows the unpredictable and often painful twists of a woman's life.

Bec survived cancer, but she's not sure she'll survive her relocation to New Mexico, failing marriage, and the barrage of people who want to be her friends. As she is pulled into relationships and responsibilities in her new town, she also finds herself supporting a veteran retreat center on her property.

Bec's search for acceptance leads her into the arms of an unstable veteran whose bodily injuries remind her of her own. With her husband at war in Afghanistan and her lover at war with his mind, Bec starts to wonder if she's living the life that she wants to.

Bec—an independent woman who appreciates her solitude—has a habit of talking to herself, a humorous and relatable trait that also reveals information about her emotional state and decision-making processes. Her sad and often abusive relationship with her father is unveiled in flashbacks that mirror her cancer experience and explain aspects of her personality.

Transitioning between modern-day New Mexico and Bec's childhood, the story imparts imagery and details in a sensory way. The house that Bec moves into becomes a psychological touchstone, connecting her past and her present, while bits of her family history and mountain living expertise make scenes feel all the more real.

Bec's struggles as a breast cancer survivor are introspectively detailed. She tries to accept her postmastectomy body and battles her deep fear of the disease coming back. Issues are explored through her relationship with her husband, William, who spends much of the novel overseas. Their arguments over Bec's breast reconstruction surgery set the tone for their failing marriage, eliciting empathy for Bec even as she makes increasingly risky decisions regarding her marriage and life.

Supporting characters include a motley crew of small-town inhabitants, some of whom are more developed than others. A group of fun and oversharing women are initially important in Bec's story, but they fade into the background as the book progresses. The owner of a local cafe's humorous and direct observations add levity to the novel's serious content.

The veterans at Bec's retreat also become important, helping to reinforce themes of loss and physical deformity. When Bec begins an affair with one of them, their questionable relationship provides excitement, anxiety, and suspense. Accents, slang, and other personal tendencies help in distinguishing characters from one another. In contrast to their natural dialogue, the narrative itself is stylish and poetic.

The last few chapters are overloaded with dramatic scenarios that wreak havoc on the established direction of the

book. Characters meet hasty fates, Bec's open emotional reflections become less clear, and the novel's ending leaves many unresolved questions.

And Throw Away the Skins is a poignant novel that isn't afraid to throw curveballs at its characters.

DELIA STANLEY (April 30, 2019)

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