Ode to My Tattooed Skin

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Author Bio
Emily Cranfill is a History major with a Writing minor, who would like to dedicate this piece to everyone who said her tattoos would keep her from being successful.

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You're a clean sheet of paper, 
my round robin. 
Like the back-alley friend 
we were all warned against, 
you enable the rebellion 
that once shamed my mother.

It's not mutiny to us, is it? 
You've always embraced 
the lessons I want to remember, 
displaying them proudly 
the way my seventh-grade best friend 
would tape our projects to her fridge;

you and I celebrate together 
all I've learned since the first time, 
lying on the carpeted floor 
in my best friend's mother's house, 
shirt pulled up and needle poised, 
dripping black calligraphy ink

that would soon be thrust deep 
beneath several layers of skin. 
You're the whisper that reminds me 
of the darkness of that night, 
and I sometimes think defiance 
was the first word from my lips.

At first, you preached the reminder – 
the importance of really living and being alive. 
The sudden breathlessness I felt, 
the surface tension breaking at needle's point, 
meant I never can forget the ankh, 
the little “life” beneath my right breast.
It was three years before I realized,  
the only way to remember the hope  
I was learning to find in losing control  
was to find someone to scar you again;  
the only way to heal my heart’s wounds  
was the anchor across the ribs that protected it.

For Christmas, just a few months later,  
Daddy gave the gift of a permanent word,  
which fit perfectly on the inside of my right wrist.  
You and I waited longest for the visible “Legacy”  
that I hope mirrors the one I’ve been building  
since he first spoke the word to my child-heart.

Few hands have touched you and meant something  
the way that Jonathan’s small palms have.  
Across my left shoulder blade, you speak  
the words he and I have said for years,  
the words I had to choose to really mean:  
“I love you, to infinity and beyond, forever and ever.”

With the mix of ink and blood, you have a voice  
to speak the words that need to be repeated.  
“The story can resume…” you now say,  
a reminder that my past is just that,  
made to tell the good and the bad,  
its only power that which I choose to give.

My quiet confidante, secret keeper,  
over the course of four years and two states,  
you’ve held them close to my heart,  
and always at your surface,  
a reminder of the journey I’m making  
from hopeless rebel to joy-seeker.

A selfless martyr,  
you repeatedly endure the abuse,  
the necessary pain that marks us both.  
The way you heal, so eager to accept these words –  
they were a part of you all along,  
weren’t they?