

The Taxidermist's Lover

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Creepy and sensual, *The Taxidermist's Lover* is a gothic romance about a young woman who's obsessed with her much older husband's taxidermy practice.

Scarlett, with her lifelong fascination with dead animals, finds her match with an ultra-talented taxidermist, Henry. Henry preserves all the usuals: hunting trophies, beloved pets, and novelties for display. Scarlett pushes the envelope, acting as a muse for his creations. She wants to see badgers with wings, crows crossed with rabbits, and other artistic perversions: "I imagined the body of a red fox, its flame-orange fur contrasted with the angelic white of a stork's wingspan; a flying, majestic vixen." The lovers' transgressions invite nightmarish payback, though; they're haunted by disfigured creatures, as well as Henry's professional and sexual jealousy.

Written from Scarlett to Henry, the book unfolds over the course of a year. Its limited perspective evokes classic, epistolary gothic novels; the text acts as a diary of the horror that Scarlett unwittingly awakens. While the story itself is short on surprises, the tension between Scarlett and Henry is riveting, especially when their private conflicts play out in the undead creations they cook up together.

Scarlett's twin, Rhett, is a complex foil. They speak in the quirky, shared language of their private world. Flashbacks cover Scarlett's childhood and family life, resulting in insights about her. She refuses to let go of the past; instead, she keeps reworking it, hoping to find a form that will finally be acceptable to her. Her lack of self-awareness is the real monster.

In the book's most thrilling passages, Scarlett rides the cusp of realizing the deep inequities in her relationship, the way Henry controls her, and the destructive power of her imagination, making *The Taxidermist's Lover* a luxurious, macabre romance.

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