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The Quality of Skin

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The Quality of Skin

I knew then
as I watched her on her way out
that I'd be obsessed with skin.
Thin, jaundiced skin clinging to bone like
over-seasoned chicken left to cook too long.
Toe bones that resembled the cords straining in her neck,
not enough skin to cover all that height,
the height of a model gone unused.
I remember nothing else of her
besides the quality of her skin.

Years later
and everyone is at the mercy of their skin.
Immaculate planes slick with oil
and aggravated, busy surfaces marked by the same sheen.
You are this if you have that
and that if you have this.
I find myself grouped in with the worst
but far from that unfortunate few.
I remember nothing else of them
besides the quality of their skin.

Years later and what spared me then
gets me now.
The aggravated, busy surface that tells my age
and a trying reaction rustled up too soon.
Too much questioning from the immaculate
and not enough empathy from those with skin busier than mine.
Checking myself in mirrors and faces like Joyce's Connie
and patiently waiting for the day when my cells decide it's time to shed.
I remember nothing else of myself
besides the quality of my skin.

Now I envy the immaculate
but surround myself with those who aren't quite there.
Complimenting what thrives on foreheads, cheeks, and chins
and wanting more of it when all they want is less.
Always better or never really bad at all in their eyes
but never any better in mine.
Still Joyce's Connie but a Connie who makes eye contact
and degrades herself fewer times in a day.
A personality trait listed beneath a yearbook photo,
I am nothing but the quality of my skin.

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