

Skin

For Dr. Kiene

As the doctor is removing a pinch of my cheek
he remembers a favorite cereal from childhood.
My eyes are closed. I want to see nothing here—
not the needle, not even the gentle nurse.
His voice flows over me, the milk and honey of nostalgia:
“They were shaped like tiny flying saucers . . .”
I think, *you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone*
lyric of the beach days when salt and sun whitened my hair,
turned my skin so brown, so brown but I wanted it darker still—
deeper than Coppertone. I feel a little dull pressure
denting my cheek, near the laugh line.
“. . . the same company that now makes Captain Crunch . . .”
the milk of human kindness flowing from memory.
When he stitches me up, I feel the tug—
a fish pulled from the Atlantic’s blue envelope,
a small note on the bleached boards of the pier,
swaying pylons frothed with sea foam,
sand fiddlers scurrying for cover at every receding wave.
I have a bucket full of them until it’s time for castle making,
then they’re as free as the fish thrown back.
I open my eyes when he finishes. Ten stitches,
the number of perfection on a less-perfect-than-ever face.
I see the doctor’s eyes are dark cocoa and maybe I stare too long.
Now that the lull of listening is over
I want to nibble his fingertips, taste to see
whether they’re salty or slightly sweetened,
wind-whipped wild sea oats or Quisp and Quake,
the tang of shored-up yesterdays buried in the flesh.

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