

## Loose Skin

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2/21/98

The itching's awful  
when I meet you  
at your parents door,  
but I tap my skin into place  
and button down my sleeves and collar tight.

At the dinner table,  
your little brother  
spots my left ear slipping  
and says it must be love.  
My skin turns red  
and I have to hold my hair  
just to keep from falling apart.  
Without even noticing,  
you tell your brother  
to shut up and eat.

With a spoonful of oatmeal,  
suddenly my hand falls off  
into a plate of milk, like a glove.  
Your mind's on conversation,  
but your mother smiles  
as I slide my hand back on  
and wipe it clean.

With a wink she says,  
I think it's time we left you two alone.

We go to watch TV,  
but I'm shedding patches of skin  
with every step.

When we're alone,  
you turn around and gasp,  
and there I am, exposed,  
my heart beating against my rib cage,  
my lungs straining for air.

I try to apologize,  
but in this naked state,  
it must seem insincere.  
You suggest I just  
pick up my skin and leave.

Walking out the front door  
with my armful of embarrassment,  
I try to make apologies again,  
and I think, hey, why don't we go see a  
movie?  
But bitterly you answer,  
Tom,  
why can't we just be friends?