

The Great Ephemeral Skin

His scars, slowly healing, reveal his own insides to him. The scabs remove after each wash and a new surface reveals itself each time slightly more healed, slightly different each time. Yellow, then red, pink on the margins. What an unfortunate place to have injuries, he thinks, as he looks into his open hands. He looks around, re-arranges this and that, always thinking about the next possible juxtaposition, maybe this time: *God?* He does away with his books, things he kept and never did things with, his attachments, and looks to strangers to fill the void, but all they LOVE is the EXPLICIT SIDE OF HIM. This man, that man. Faceless, armless, crippled in one way then another. A man named Freedom, lips like pillows. Another named Him. On the dance floor, the others all gravitate towards the familiar, clasping onto eyes the same color and the same shape. Two bodies, like brothers, one inside the prism, the other here and now. Narcissus, Tantalus. The uniform is prescribed, predisposed, and copied. K. dances for them, mostly an object they ignore. When he goes into the night, he wraps his keychain around the shaft of his cock, and just before the time comes he removes it in the darkness of the stranger's apartment, with a discretion that reminds him he has a tiny home somewhere. The world is brutal, not just the institutions, the people, the buildings, nature too is cruel. His mistakes glare at him like angels, their anger suddenly made visible, rushing in front of him but backwards, grey, slowly undressed by Time itself. Cupid points to the shame of soured youth, and like ash, its beauty dissolves. His face falls off into his hands. The shroud onto the floor. Every man looks like the devil in the end. The furrowed eyebrows create a sharp, defined "v," the devil dick tapping at the innermost sensitive part, his body like a mad cat, or a snake, or some other slithery thing. When he pedals his bike home, buzzing, his tears fall onto the road, and he sings- for what?- for everything. Los Angst. Los Angeles. Smell.AIDS. D.U.I. D.O.A. The same ones ask him where he is going. He clasps his hands and rests his head upon them. He would do anything to be able to sleep through this life. But he met a man who did that once, his body was permanently swollen, almost as if he had drowned, but was still living. This world was never for O. The buildings reach into the starry skies like claws, and the magistrate awaits. Even so, the tape and rubber and string that holds this body together is growing tattered, like a cadaver turned inside out, the doctors surround it with tools and books. The solace is that in this city, which expands underneath his feet, someone else is probably going through the exact same thing he is. Someday I will kill myself. Someday I will kill myself, he repeats. Before they get me, I will kill myself. The sirens cease to sing. Somewhere else another hustler is looking into his hands. His eyes, two half-moons, look for a sign, into the eyes of the jury: sarcasm, lovelessness, the fantasy of autonomy. *Who gives a fuck about you? Bye now. Wish I'd never met you. How much does this cost again?* But the way the others see him is unavailable to him. Even in his peripheral vision, the mirror does not quite speak. Every stranger is a potential lover and they witness the desire boiling in him, which makes his body recoil like a snail. Intimacy, like respect, must be earned. The uniqueness of his fingerprint makes him sick.

In the first Atripla dream, K. appears, looks into his face and passes his hand through his hair. *Don't cut it O, whatever you do, don't cut it.* The next night, in another dream, a famous B-movie actress falls out of a convertible, which is on parade, and he nurses her concussion with constant talk of love. *It's gonna be okay honey, don't you worry.* The ambulance is never called, and she slowly turns into a baby in his arms *Just stay with me now* and while he sleeps, he cradles her awake in his dreams.

-Orlando Tirado, Los Angeles, 2012