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Zoster

Jack Coulehan

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Zoster

They say in Hell, *The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction*. A year later, my left eye and forehead start to smolder as soon as I wake up, which makes me rub them like crazy, especially the tip of my eyebrow's peculiar burning that gets worse when I press the hair against its grain, but I can't resist doing it, not just once, but enough times to wince in a spate of flagellation. Invisible by mirror, my forehead flares until I douse its embers in the shower. A skinwalker stands behind my right arm and, when I least expect it, makes me rub my palm into my scalp, as if polishing a car. Two weeks of painful rash followed a year's estrangement from a wedge of face, the compulsion to touch, the conviction that freedom eggs us on, but doesn't deliver, the understanding that there are dead ends I can't back up from, and something like guilt, I guess, for not making more of myself before wearing out.

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Editor's Note: "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction" is from William Blake's *Proverbs of Hell*.

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