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## Written on the Skin

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# Written on the Skin

by Robert Cooperman

Mr. Markowitz, the owner  
of the neighborhood market  
always rolled up his sleeves,  
forcing us to read the blue  
numbers on his left forearm.

When my mother sent me  
the three blocks to the store  
for something she'd forgotten,  
his smile a wolf, when I'd stare.

"He uses those numbers,"  
my mother fumed,  
"so you'll be too embarrassed  
to argue that he overcharges  
by a nickel or dime."

This was back when markets  
delivered: his regular man, flu-bound  
one afternoon; so after he'd rung up  
the Kotex my mother blushed for,  
Mr. Markowitz bicycled a big order  
down Avenue H, and as he passed me,  
pointed toward the corner,  
to Tommy Lockhart—  
our neighborhood kapo—  
first big, hard, and merciless.

"Help!" I wanted to shout,  
but knew Mr. Markowitz wouldn't:  
how he'd managed to survive.