

S C R

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R A M

I C K

A streak of blood in one's stool, a crumb of cake on one's lapel, the look on a loved one's face when you've said something irreversible. One tries to avoid surface joy and shallow misery. The first breath, the last breath, and every breath in-between, must be true, even during adultery, or murder, or child abuse. Even during mediocrity. We're criminals, of a sort, one and all, equal in the breaths of our sins. In the morning, after our nightmares, we shower long enough to wash away the trysts, or the violence, or the harm. But wrath and sorrow won't stay drained. If I put damage marks on her throat, it's because I had the strength to do so but not the strength not to. This—a fact as primitive and human as lust and opposable thumbs—won't change in the span of our youngest generation. Here we are, all of us and all of ours, everyone on Earth. Some of us isolate ourselves in

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desert stark, in storyless sweep of grit and glare, swallow and wait, waterless oceans of ancient living and future sundeath. We reject the shade of the family tree. Some of us integrate ourselves in forests old, in story old of star and cross, stone and shroud, death and resurrection and sinny wonderment. We reject the thrills of the knowledge tree. We spread our words to the far corners of the flooded fields. We still suffer heartache and heartburn and heartrend. Some of us invest ourselves in civil clamor, in storyful cornets of wit and loss, ascent and fall, boulevards of ambition and penthouse picnics of loneliness. We reject the ease of blankets under roadside trees. Some of us sweat in the brimstone fields. Some of us tarry in suburban lint. Some of us bleed in national trenches. Some of us wallow in thuggery and swill. Some of us never get to open our eyes but all of us who

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do get to close them. Perhaps one has the courage to jump, but not to land, to crash, but not to take off. Death isn't eccentric. Death isn't genius. Mary raises her arms in celebration. Judas is the boy around the corner. Stick a star atop the diseased tree on the hill. As soon as one attends to a wallflower, one overshines, and instead of adjusting the lamptitude, one opts for darkness. Or for the dim cruelty of disregard on alert. What if we bled in individualized colors, whether we were guilty or innocent, molten or aquifered. What if we ascend a spiral tower. There, under the sparkling firmament, we may survey the human swirl. None shall sleep and none shall wake and none shall faith themselves into certainty. We are sunflowers in the dark, not erect to lesser stars, our half of the earth having turned its back upon its sun. We would be golden unto our cheerful thoughts wide to the sky—but

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we don't believe in the worst night. Some of us shiver in the tall exposure of our twisted towers above our subjunctive sleep and some of us snuggle against our paramours in the royal we. Love is eccentric. What if we ingested in wholes and not in parts, with no debris permissible, with nothing ever left over in a world of excess. Love is genius. A streak of white in one's hair, a sliver of glass in one's foot, the shaming stare of a stranger while she points a loaded finger at your head. Just try to die from a dignified plan. Just try to live within a dignified structure. Vertigo rift is a reactionary way to fail to cope, a fateful insistence, and thou shalt not acquiesce. Thou shalt not overspeak of self in a world of selves. Thou shalt not ghost bath with chance—the world protects nobody unless it protects you. Whenever I cross your viaduct into the deeper trees, whenever I raise my constant

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collar against your irregular chill,
whenever I forsake myself in reverie,
I'm grateful to Darwin and his
distinctions. The dark space in one's
footed tub is the future of one's core
misbehaving. If you were to place your
hand on the small of her back, would
she yield to the astral blood of one's
ancestors, or would she thwart your
ubiquity, cutting your explanation off
and tossing it to the gulls or ravens to
fight over as nothing but another day's
lift. In the kettle are yesterday's salt and
ice and tomorrow's suggestions, grifted
for passive effect. One's stubble won't
last a lifetime. Thou shalt not grow to
fill the gap. Thou shalt not hurt her
upper shelf, but I've dusted her lamps
by candlelight and I've disturbed her
violet bedspread. Thou shalt not fathom
the entire battlefield, nor even the
smallest skirmish, and one's lived long
enough for one's antlers to be tinged

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green with the palest moss. A streak of
luck in one's twilight, a fabled mote in
one's nonexistent third eye, the flagrant
but unseen wink of a secret and fragile
admirer. We're tried by juries of our
peers. We're sentenced by our limitations.
Should we ever be pardoned, we'll be
pardoned by the injuries of evil, and
should we ever be executed, we'll be
executed within the jurisprudence of
love. What stirs the asymmetrical mind
seldom stirs the symmetrical flesh. The
acoustic doesn't overwhelm the electric,
just as the poet can't compete with the
diva, or the craftsman with the despot,
just as my tinkering won't register in
your box or patent offices, just as the
strains of your heart aren't discernible
to my nosebleed personas. One hasn't
the time to possess both a purpose and
a posse, not in the far time or the near
beyond, not when one wants to wander
winter forests in search of one warm

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body. You have my heart, but souls aren't exchangeable. Thou shalt not seek deliverance in mingling. Thou shalt not part ways with innocence. Thou shalt see thy breadth and know thy depth and be neither inwardly proud nor outwardly humbled in our world of too much false everything and not enough true nothing. Language can't hold the light. You might think me out of touch, but I know something of shore light and something of plateau light, what's diffused and what's uninhibited, what might still accompany a quest and what might yet hasten a suicide. We do terrible things and we'll keep right on doing them. All of our options have their day in the sun. Some of us wake to sunshine on the day of our undoing. We drip one slow drop at a time from our human glacier. We shape the landscape and we raise the seas. We're damaged and steeped in hurtability. We're mumps

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and courtship and aneurysm and we are uneraseable. We origin ourselves out of carbons and tide pools and apes. Some of us still seek shelter under trees in lightning storms. We still let the mean and stupid propagate. We still need bodies. We still kill some of our killers. We still kill some of our unborn. Thou shalt not trade the next step for the last step, not in youth and not in dotage. Thou shalt ride your favorite mount to the edge of your tolerance for yourself, your mouth hushed by a better cave than Plato's, your impetus grown toward her fen reckoning. Nonetheless, unlike one's own Cumberland, the gap is impassible, unfillable, infallible, be thou seed walker or stud. You might not remember the naked choice, but one never forgets the force of blood flow gone to nether strength. I spent too much of my youth with hidden hardness—the stones of a poet and the

frame of a false adonis. Some of us still quarry our childhoods. We go swimming in our former waters. Some of us still autobiography ourselves as if seeking justice. Our wise men failed to show when our little nite lites shone. Evening air settles us easily into sitting-room melancholia, or we whirling dervish down the wide boulevards away from fame. Some of us are cartographers of one another's flaws. Our cemeteries are yesterday's suns. Our deaths fit like party hats. Some of us believe we are sinners at conception and some of us believe we aren't anything until birth and some us believe we're perfect in the fullness of time. Good works clatter on the junk dealer's cart. Some of us trust in tradition and some of us lust after innovation and some of us know tradition is the history of innovation. There are those of us who think we can think our selves out of our self. Some of us are the

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stuff of dreams and some of us are the stuff of legend and some of us are smoke and mirrors. None of us are all of us, but any one of us is some of us. One shouldn't trust another, though one's trustworthy, though one's too aloof to be trusted for more than a lifetime—I'll be a wayfarer once more, unless one's already had one's chance—and I'm one, one who isn't you. Thou shalt not tread upon the tender falsehoods lest they not develop into your nemesis. Thou shalt not let winter outstay its welcome, though you wanted fall to never end, though summer gave you all the tools to build a happy life, though spring was almost too carefree for the good of your later seasons. What I sometimes fail to take into account is my penchant for crevices even as I crave vistas—one can't be alone out on the promontory while also plowing the fields or mining a golden spot. One must be involved or one must

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be elite. One must get things done by the hearth and not dream of disappearing into the snow-creamed woods. You sat on my chest thinking you'd conquered me, thinking I'd risen from my slumber at the flick of your wrist, and while some truth lingers on your tongue, I wasn't asleep, I was abask in reverie, and nobody's conquerable. What brimstone falls into our lives we might deserve—embers in the loins and cinders in the mind—fires sweeping through our luxuriant hills, herky-jerky twitchings and tremblings in virtual night, those mutual comings and goings across our parallel plane. His probing wreaked havoc—her gift, so cardinal. What can appear unfair from one angle can be one-of-a-kind windfall from another, some sudden reason to see oneself as well-chosen and incredibly alive, not cursed or unlucky or bewitched. Her obsession brought release—his response,

well-launched. Thou shalt not act lukewarm and thou shalt not manifest selfishly and thou shalt not spill your nows without asking. Torment isn't in the waiting, it's in having nothing for which to wait. If I could essay with sustained concentration on one culture-ordained topic—make it anti-suicide—I'd be dead. One lives for the escape. One could die for the chase. He thumbs the collective cause before the plunge, seeking the control of a saint. She stares at his oscillations. They'll merge to live another day. The carnal malefactor still lurks in pickpocket-resistant memories on private mornings of sighs and whistling. We don't want our truths so much as we want imperative scope. We wish to stride across some vaguely familiar godscape in blustery weather. Trees thrive on the waters of our disappointments. We try to read their bark and then we try to read their

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stumps and then we read stacks of dead books in the hush of our unsatisfiable heads. Our questions seek air and light. Every answer is a death. Thou shalt not think of self as a better or worse version of earlier or later selves. Thou shalt not deem self incapable of any grotesque horror, but instead be grateful you've not yet been tempted beyond your will to resist that glossy catalogue. A streak of meanness in one's character, a stain of overt failure in one's pedigree, the confirmed eyes of Peter staring into the gate's mirror. Thou shalt not illustrate your arousals with the renderings of dispassionate reality. As children, as breathers, as time-stroked consumers of subterranean and concrete and plastic arts, we're never safe from ourselves. We want our loved ones to be healthy and happy. We cradle ourselves in our bedtime stories. We stroke brow. We pat hand. Here comes the horizon.