

S E P

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I C K

Time's past, and I'm gone. Whether one's cremated or biered or buried, one's atoms disperse, our appropriate drifting off from the straight-and-narrow into the ancient and fabled, into the native and wild, into some field's indifference, when what's mentionable and manageable becomes no longer mentioned and quite beyond management (unless one believes Nature's the ultimate manager). You've too often fantasized about a sky burial (beaks, mandibles, fangs)—you could be placed on a bier with your face to the heavens so that birds could have your eyes and other tender bits. Insects would find a way to get their share, and even if the bier were built tall, climbing mammals might join the feast. Open-air charnel grounds for the claustrophobic suburban agnostic. But neither inhumation nor immurement interest one—both merely postpone the inevitable. Exarnation in a tower of silence is too ritualistic, too

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orderly, simultaneously too segregated and too crowded. Burial at sea and dissolution are potentially ecological options, if one's into fish and fluids, if drowning as a corpse (as a concept) isn't bothersome to one (in the former case), if one doesn't mind being washed down a drain (in the latter case). The universe, whether time is linear or not, whether time even exists, is a sepulcher, archaic from the outset, even if there's no beginning, even if you're disappeared, even if you never existed, as unexistable as existence. You reduce to a pile of dust. You're one of billions. You're a forever idea. One, too. Waterkill in the firelands. Don't take goodness lightly—whenever it shows its fresh face—as death, for all its powers, can't undo kindness. After all, what did you think would be your legacy? We don't know why we're here, or what we're supposed to do across our lifetimes, but we're confident it's not to

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hurt others and not to destroy ourselves—though some (many) of us have those talents, willful or not. Spiritlift in the earthstir. You're gone, but you belong to a memory or two, scratched into cluttered slates. You were told not to glance back at beauty and you were told not to anticipate the dawn and you made your life as simultaneously ordinary and as oblique as you could. At the blissful end of the awful hallway: the uncarpeted mothery. Up above you far within: the aspirations of a bricklayer cassanova. Epitaphs are for others—the meager cleverness of culture, bounded by transferable concepts. Marble nudes and saliva-sheened marbles. Wings break, hearts flutter, and bodies writhe in ocean light. You'll persist with your mulish patience as carnival colors give way to the tasks of drab pragmatism, as parted lips relent to sustenance, as sparkling eyes cataract into the social clouds of oughts

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and shouldn'ts—you'll find your way back to the tasteful room of gathered selves, of like others sort of liking one another, standing one another during our too-bearable unburdening process of disappearance. They've done this before, love, if you wouldn't mind remembering. Beguile them, God, now that you have their gazes—show them your irrefutable moves. You other. You self. You're out of the way, where you always strove to be. Impress your ossified fate around your eyes, your harp cheekbones, your sure jaw, your cranial home—after all your inward years, you've no place to go but out. Revisit a swallow of clean water. Quiet the mirrored critic. Place a cross under the chosen one. We're free to think whatever. You lived a life of plenty and gave a little back, and fairy tales aren't the headwaters of our ethics. Nor is scientific proof. Drought your guilt into story if you must. What made

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you think you could ever transcend sidewalk emptiness or the American patio? What gave you the cockamamie nerve to fight city Goliaths with suburban straws? & when were you last barefoot in the right park? She held him (at their goodbye) as one might hold a struggling moth. He held her (at their restoration) as one must clutch a found lostling. Just as long as your imperatives aren't spies. Just as soon as my switch is flipped. After you'd given a cemetery for her thoughts, may hers be a thousand waves of relinquishment, may yours be one big tidal wave of abandon. Out of your dreams and into hers. The shadow from that thread stirred by the breeze on that barbed wire is as gorgeous as any kiss, any idea, any release, any architecture, any coronation, any kind act, any woke moment—this says more about the word *gorgeous* (or about your quirks) than anything about the world.

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Despite your certainty that it's true. It's repeatably and perspectively true. You and your ilk can't be budged from this position, even though none of you are likely to ever stop a bloody war or soon journey to Mars. One's disappearing act into ephemera has fooled nobody. One's specialty was visual ricochet. Skinbrush in the airstream. Years and years ago you imagined yourself a refractor, a reverse lens into thoughtful interiors, into wild minutia, a double propulsion out of our world into your snowglobes. Whatever gets said underwater. Whatever occludes the favored breast. Whatever you scheme into being as an escape from being. She doesn't know she's in the frame and he doesn't know he's a mere minor character. Another routine day breaks, the sky's the sky, and one's hopes aren't limited to life. You've been around the block and every house is just as steep. We're free to imagine parallel mysteries, situations

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and locales supremely flawed, but in the specific ways we need them to be flawed (supremely), in the ingenious ways they must be known and unknowable, unlike our common lives and yet resemblant of those lives (since death is a given). Our minds simply can't be stopped (until they're stopped). She's a bare feast of mental prowess. He's a tangled hedge of physical peace. No one can be blamed for wanting a little more in our world of too much and never enough. Outside the Tinth, on the bland ground, one's ashes would settle, content. Or likewise beside Cabrillo's lighthouse, or in Death Valley or Central Park, or at Waterrock Knob, or amid the Giant Sequoias—a scattering of options. One's heart would wander one's land. Even if only along the cobblestones of old Providence, in a lost time, when you mistakenly felt chosen. You'll not again allow that boyish stride to expand and infect your chest—a spark

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of arrogance amid a condition of refusal, an aspirational contraction in a world of hurt. Whatever, places with names. Whatever, odd places of rest. Whatever, one's life ends. She stood out as fever and he failed at gravity. Part ways in the last days. Here comes the fresh law, same as the stale law. One doesn't see the point today (because today one knows the point doesn't exist). Most days the point's a believable (desirable) mirage. Or one just didn't see the point *that* day (because that was the day one realized there *is* no point). You must pull a point out of a hat and believe in that point—it'll exist, obviously, since it'll be the point you drew out of that hat. And don't let anyone tell you—just because they lack your particular perceptions—that you don't have a point. Make truthful copies of your point and bury them in safe places—though there's probably no need to name those places, as long as

you can remember where most of them are. Those attractive (and less attractive) traps and alarms of yours needn't be set. Points aren't stealable—though they can be mislaid or overexposed. Whatever, one's life ends. We have time for beer and cream and surprises hidden in cakes. We have time for monuments and scabs. We have time for rhetorical answers. He tells her she's so baby and she blues his persuasion. The subject and object are equally dismayed. Why inter what's been purified by fire? Why worry about this evanescent flesh? Why attempt to imprison in coffin or urn, in crypt or mausoleum, in tomb or catacomb, what's been set free? Remains don't remain remains for long, not in solar time, not in galaxy time, not in mathematical time. We move on to other things, if not nothing. One toys with one's past to fashion a story resembling a laundry line, to display one's cleaned secrets, to

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juxtapose the too ordinary with the very private, the utilitarian with the sensual. Show us your cages, show one your shape. Revel in the light, the billow, the lift—our time instantaneous, our space infinite. Clovertide in the limesink. Don't circle round the exit as if your fear's in either the leaving or the staying and not in the transition itself, your need to be and not to depart or arrive, not to sleep or wake—or it may be that you're overfond of thresholds. If your misser is busted, you might not grieve for what you never possessed, and the costs of opportunity burden the romantic—she who wants failure to be dreamy and he who wants fate to be widely determined, if not wildly divine. Something from before birth. Something out of the warm future. You've sidestepped embalment, mummification, and cryogenics, et al., knowing they're for ones not you, for luminaries infatuated with the fashions

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of sticking around, for visionaries who think they might as well taxidermy the soul, even if there's no such thing, even if gazing upon immortality might be like staring down the sun. Something in the neighborhood of the impossible. Something like nothing made manifest. You'll not again let that lure tempt you onto the hook. You'll not again dance for the sake of the wallpaper. She, your elementary wallflower, and also he, her maddening mindspike, and also you, his mentor electric, toll road to the barn burning south of the cemetery, south of the clearbrick cathedral and its grapevine altar, south of the heavenly swale. One's cuffs aren't clean. One's mouth isn't dry. Why hide the celebratory decay? Why try to balance an elegant chaos? Why delay our most effortless slumber, when we can be ourselves without influence or condolence, without sangfroid or glee, your heart no longer in your pocket, one's

mind no longer in the wings, our time rounded up to null. This is the downhill glide, crest to coast, one's reconnaissance of our spiritual continent, your time to gleam in another's eye, to pass muster as inherent, to fly as owl above antelope, the peninsula out to sea and once upon a life under a willow tree now gone, the dignity of that lineman in love, the surety of touch, the safety of words, land given to us by our ancestors, planets out to roam, red roofs of the grand old hotel in diffused light, one hand in another hand, those hills of long ago, these rifts of now, one's restless search, your favorite dress, his three-day stubble, her salty dimple, water rings on the table, creases in unfreshened sheets, a twirl of hair across a beloved brow, sad swallows on days of nonchalance, wry smiles on nights of no reckoning, the smells of exchange, the sounds of intrigue, all of this one adores, all of this mattered beyond one's faults.

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