

DEAD LETTER

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Humankind, bewildered in the maze of life and blind.
Lucretius

Instead, weakness, fluidity, concealment, and solitude assume their place in a kind of dream world, where the sleeping witness finally feels safe enough to lie down in mystery.
Fanny Howe

Protest is when I say I don't like this. Resistance is when I put an end to what I don't like. Protest is when I say I refuse to go along with this anymore. Resistance is when I make sure everybody else stops going along too.
Ulrike Meinhof

THE DEAD LETTER BRANCH OR SHEEP

The gray zone of my disappearance, drugged by a still unknown drug, at dusk the hour that mourns the loss of day, cast down, but I go.

I had been given notice, as all subordinate clerks, myself named one, were given notice.

After scores of years of reading through undeliverable correspondence, no one more suited to this than I, vested with that authority to open and read the dead letters, I am to be removed. Not a rumor, not whispered speculation, is my yet sudden removal, due to an incoming administration, all posts, save some ex-clergy, are being removed. I would have preferred to have declined their offer, but they have already asked that my keys be returned.

I am the most trustworthy dead letter man handling dead letters, yet I am to be removed, most likely today.

I was hired for my ability to decipher handwriting. To sound out the correct intention, to sleuth a destination. Stiejt Kanedeka means State of Connecticut. I could smell it.

Burning. For the rest we fed to the flames.

I burned the dead letters, burnt letters fed to the flames in cart loads.

I am out cast, an effect of that almost involuntary refusal of loss. In my inbreath I burned with what comes from elsewhere, yearning the scent of me being absent in relenting, the trace, too, lost.

Faithfully I have sorted through them, lived through them, the unreceived, prone and silent, I burned cart loads, monthly, yearly.

Within I had found rings, infolded in paper—the finger it was meant for molders in a grave. I had found bank notes, sent as swift charity to whom it would not relieve, who nor eats nor hungers anymore. I had read pardon for those who died despairing, hope for those who died unhoping, good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamity.

I have read just enough, not more than necessary. A business so fitted to me. I have sorted the mail of the bereft, errands of life who speed yet faster to death.

My surrogate hand unsealing, tender and mild and serene, continually, at this refusal to be, at that inevitable night of bodies, twilight of my impersonal.

The dead letters I fed to the flames, yearly, faithfully.

Now suddenly I am to be removed from circulation. This my home, eternal dusk, invaded only by shadows, I am cast out. Where, as formless, who, as unrecognizable, when, am I capable of such exit, how, bound by this silent disaster, a figure without form.

This event will
have happened.

By nature and misfortune, susceptible to a pallid hopelessness. I am outcast, suspended
between an everlasting no and an everlasting yes.

I am the dawn, faceless possibility, impersonal, slipping beyond my form into the dazzling
light of a world that says no to depth. At this moment, this dusk that is dawn, I am named as
such, named as one.

I repeat.

I am to leave my post in the Dead Letter Office in Washington. I am to leave as if possible
to publish myself, even as an anonymous dead letter man, as an instinct, unformed and
atmospheric, as if I come or go from without, as if this could be thought, formed, burned,
written.

I am as weather shadow cloud and as weather shadow cloud I depart.

THE COPYISTS

Hardship revealed the path. I entered blindly, will-lessly, treading recursively, hardly
steadfast, with hesitating steps. Dead Branch to Wall Street, a shallow, middle way, while lost
in perplexity and intricated with an unclear object, and in my complicated parts involuted, all
bewildering all objects. Hunger was there, and so was weariness and remainder, that refuse,

my not unfamiliar companions who marked my passive journey outside. My unthinkable volition accrued from where I began and where then I end.

I arrived upon answering an advertisement, motionless one morning at the open door of an attorney's chamber, at this threshold, in summer.

Pallidly I stood awaiting notice, neat, respectable, incurably forlorn, there as he found me, my summoned object as if unthought, unthinkable at first he liked me, my almost singularity, pitifully sedate, as compared with the others, flighty and fiery.

And I was hungry for copy, a silverfish gorging on glue and pulp, I craved to scribe, having deciphered, consumed, interpreted, burned what had already been written, useless and unintended for my receipt, at last, and irrevocably, I was to author, if not my own, a copy of others, if necessary. My hand steady, my ink sea ever before me, rhythmic waves of script along my ruled lines, scribing copies, doubles, triples, quadruples, the law of my letters of what law would recall, bequeathing, dictating, deeds and documents afloat and strewn with my letterings.

I wrote on industriously, cheerlessly, and within a silence the letters echoed back. No pause for digestion, a self-consumer of the law in letters in lines. Mechanically I moved my pen across the page, burning inevitable letters.

What was this law whose hand I lettered?

What law recalls the letters for whom to receive the law? Neatly and pallidly penned, my hand reaching and withdrawing, wavering over the vast pages to which I was the author, too.

At least at first.

Ravenous to express myself in a language alien to all other languages to speak the weather of strangeness under the weight of that, for my melancholy refuses naming, a dirge that feeds on lament—that endless debt.

There I was shelved, suspended in abeyance, passively docile, between the figures: first, Turkey; second, Nippers; and third, Ginger Nut. Names the likes of which are not usually found in the Directory, mutually conferred and expressive of their person or character.

Turkey was short, and English, not far from 60 in age, pousy. In the morning he was a fine florid hue, after noon ablazing, and blazing on without waning, until 6 when he left and no more was seen of Turkey. Turkey whose face gained its meridian with the sun, and seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline, with undiminished glory and continually. After the noon meridian, Turkey authored blots, a copyist altogether too energetic—a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness.

Turkey's body so uncontrolled in its motions and reckless scattering his sand-boxes, splitting his just mended pens, flaming with augmented illuminations, being ever so rash in tongue.

In short he was

incautious

noisy

spilling

a racket

impatient

boxing his papers about

undecorous in manner

rash and insolent

yet before noon, the quickest, steadiest creature, a style not to be matched easily, civilest, blandest, ever reverential.

Pulsating in the law office of the endangered, of bodies, of unbalanced motion, either too fast or too slow, of activities who negate their outcomes, result in unthoughts, or unwanted evidence, lawless. A pulsing circularity, revolving, into whose cross currents, I floated. I appeared as they found me among these who erased all they wrote wantonly, heedless and fiery, rash and oratic, impatient, methodically arranging the office of derangements, morning through afternoon, smudges, peevish blots, thwarting objects, unreadable and eaten raw. Save for Ginger Nut, who neither vexing nor thwarting, both the shell and its seed.

Was it madness was mad because it cannot write or because the writing itself horrifies the one writing?

Nippers, the second, a sallow, whiskered pirate, young, the victim of two evil powers: ambition and indigestion. His impatient and nervous testiness proved grinning irritation, hissing rather than speaking, and especially discontent with the height of his worktable.

Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get his table to suit him. He put chips under it, blocks of various sorts, pasteboard, and at last went so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment by final pieces of folded blotting paper. But no invention would answer.

For if he wanted anything it was to be rid of the copyist's table altogether. Nippers and Nippers's body so blocked in circulation, sores and pains, lacking all design, delirious in his body, for his writing pains his writing body, for writing assumes its own body, only by consuming the body of the body, an erasing textual cannibal.

What love could find our bearing there, be borne? What love could think or write the relation of this, that inside to this outside, this outside to that inside, the openfield of a body whose interior sails off into an other inside. These spaces, the offices, the tombs, the dead letter branch, all opening to that dense beyond. Among the ferns, the moss, the rotting maples. In this I too see shadows, think shadows or the cloud that is the possible of weather of all shadows. What love could reach this night of bodies? When shadows are all. For it is shadow through which I speak, through which I love, among these confounding bodies, blocked erasing burning.

My office mates haunt these chambers, clad among, with their rebellion against writing. And yet, is this not why the attorney pays us? For both Nippers and Turkey, who make the words say what they can't, ingest their own bodies, destroy their tools, tables, pens, with their un-

digestible grief and unaccounted bodies. For this ginger is the heart of this very brain, and this heart eats as it is this brain. Ravenous. Relenting.

Addicted to what haunts. That motionless sustenance, remedy to singularity.

Word by word I went, copying titles, recondite documents, deeds, until, word by word silently, mechanically, palely, I could copy no more, nor as weather, nor as shadow, nor as cloud.

I stopped. I would not. I not.

OUR HABITATS

Upon my arrival, the upstairs chamber, a melancholy place, looking at one end upon the white wall of the interior of an inner lung, a shaft of light, haunting the buildings from top glancing through to bottom. Perhaps a tame view, deficient in landscape or life, but good contrast for the scene from the other end of the chamber which had windows looking out on an unobstructed view of a high, even lofty brick wall, blackened by age and everlasting shadows. No magnification required to bring out its hidden, lurking beauties, just within ten feet of the chamber's window. Even the near-sighted spectator could benefit from its details, dead black brick, deep within the impoverished interior.

Owing to the tallness of the surrounding buildings, their close proximity and the chamber itself being on the second story, the interval between the chamber's windows and this wall not a little resembled a huge square cistern, from which in a pastoral scene, a shepherd might water his flock.

This then a solace to some.

I was stationed in the corner closest to the attorney by the ground glass folding doors, on his side, within his easy call, in case he had a trifle for me to do. My desk was placed close to his and close to a small side window, a window which had once afforded a lateral view of certain grimy backyards and bricks, but which, on account of subsequent construction, and owing to this, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light, penetrating as weather

shadow cloud, duskily illuminating through the shaft from far above between two soaring buildings, much like from a very small oculus in a dome.

Negative and positive exposures of a passive ground, dull and staring, in which our melancholy found a home.

A passive receptivity, a dim calmness, where not a wrinkle of agitation rippled me. My sunken obscurity constitutes the almost trivial distance between thought and its object, between wall and window, a face that speaks neither depth nor form at all.

He procured a high green folding screen, which would entirely isolate me from his sight, while not from his voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were co-joined.

In sunlight and candlelight I was found at his behest, in my hermitage, uncarpeted.

Find me within,

a perennial sentry in my corner.

THE ATTORNEY OF WALL STREET, A STORY OF LOVE

He is an elderly man,
he is an unambitious man,
he is an attorney,
he is an unambitious attorney,
he is an unambitious man, and in this he is like me.

He is the kind of unambitious attorney who never addresses a jury, nothing to draw applause, but rather prefers to be in the snug tranquility of his snug retreat doing a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds. So snug. Both in prudence and method.

What irritation he might feel, he postpones; he sympathizes with us, is charitable, even, towards all our imperfections, Nippers, Turkey, Ginger-Nut, and me. He sees no mischief in any of it, what he might think of as my eccentricities, he surmises to be involuntary. Formless and motionless from without.

I am useful to him.

To befriend me means his own delicious self-approval, a self-love he couldn't deny. I grant him that. To humor me, he might think, costs him nothing, yet might gain him a sweet morsel for his conscience.

I am his advantage he can't refuse.

He acknowledges that I copy for him but am exempt from examining my own work and the work of others and am never to be sent on the most trivial of errands and that it is generally understood that I would prefer not to, in other words, I refuse point-blank.

I not. To this, he is reconciled.

The love of my attorney is as between everlasting shadow and everlasting blankness. I am only his problem in that I am no problem at all, for his province is entirely safe in my hands. Honestly, I had returned every stray change dropped upon the floor, since at times he is apt to be reckless in our affair. Heedless of shadows yet charitable towards the unformed, that dusk of bodies.

Our no inverted only exposes us yet further to it, revealing from ourselves, for my resistance would save neither of us.

Is his love, wrong love, his law, wrong law, wrong weather shadow cloud? A minimal self, stuttering into silence. My repetition, prefer not to, not to, prefer not. Singular, a private form, nothing fixed, neither refusing nor accepting, neither predicting nor promising, a response without response. Nearly summoned.

At twilight he regards me as a last column of some ruined temple, as a wreck in his Atlantic,
our love's ship sunk, and as such, he returns me.

For the attorney yearns that I would between an everlasting no and an everlasting yes always
be. His fragment suspends in mid-sentence.

For I can neither reject nor refuse the ruined matter around me. I stay there, return there,
ever going there. By your yearning, love, I am made, my withdrawal both ecstatic and
relenting. You yearn for this, too.

UNMAN SPEECH

“I would prefer not to,” in a singularly mild, firm voice, I replied from my privacy without moving.

“Prefer not, what do you mean? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it.”

“I would prefer not to.”

“Quick I am waiting.”

“What is wanted?”

“The copies, the copies. We are going to examine them. There—.”

“I would prefer not to.”

“Why do you refuse?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“Will you not speak? Answer!”

“I prefer not to.”

“You are decided, then, not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense?”

Yes, my decision was irreversible. And inevitable.

“Turkey, what do you think of this? Am I not right?”

“With submission sir, I think that you are.”

“Nippers, what do you think of this?”

“I think I should kick him out of the office.”

“Ginger Nut, what do you think of it?”

“I think, sir, he is a little lunny.”

“You hear what they say, come forth and do your duty.”

I gave no reply.

“When those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you.”

“I would prefer not to.”

“How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?”

I gave no answer.

This is not to refuse the inevitable.

The shifted winds and all was hushed.

“Ginger Nut is away; just step round to the Post Office, won’t you?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“You will not?”

“I prefer not.”

“?”

I made no answer.

“?”

I made no answer.

“?”

I moved to the entrance of my hermitage, and I respectfully and slowly and mildly contracted into my corner. I am that motionless, that otherwhiles, that ever elsewhere.

“Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me.”

“I prefer not to.”

“Very good.”

I made no answer.

“?”

I made no answer.

“Come here; I am not going to ask you to do any thing you would prefer not to do—I simply wish to speak to you.”

I slid into his view, ghostly.

“Will you tell me where you were born?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“Will you tell me any thing about yourself?”

“I would prefer not to.”

“But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you.”

I fixed my gaze on the bust of Cicero, a few inches above his head.

“What is your answer?”

“At present I prefer to give no answer.”

I retired behind my screen. The green screen he placed between us to conjoin our inevitable obscurity.

“Never mind then about revealing your history; but let me entreat you, as a friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office. Say now you will help examine papers tomorrow or the next day; in short say that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable: —say so.”

“At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable.”

Nippers with his severe indigestion approached.

“Prefer not, eh? I’d prefer him, if I were you, sir. I’d prefer him; I’d give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, that he prefers not to do now?”

“Mr. Nippers, I’d prefer that you would withdraw for the present.”

Nippers sourly departed; Turkey blandly approached.

“With submission, sir, yesterday I was thinking about him here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers.”

“So you have got the word too.”

“With submission, what word, sir, what word, sir?”

Mobbed in my privacy I mouthed, “I would prefer to be left alone here.”

“That’s the word, Turkey, that’s it.”

“Oh, prefer? Oh yes—queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer—.”

“Turkey, you will please withdraw.”

“Oh certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should.”

I stood at my window in dead-wall reverie, having given up doing any more writing. No more copies. The doing of doing nothing.

“Why, how now? What next? Do no more writing?”

“No more.”

“And what is the reason?”

“Do you not see the reason for yourself.” My dull and glazed eyes showed onto him. From here I see before seeing.

“What! Suppose your eyes should get entirely well—better than before—would you not copy then?”

“I have given up copying.”

I remained fixed there, a wreck in his Atlantic. To this he offered to assist me, he asked me to leave unconditionally within six days, his little command, wanted me yet more removed.

“And when you finally quit me, I shall see that you go not away entirely unprovided. Six days from this hour, remember.”

“I would prefer not.”

“You must.”

I remained. I was silent. I remained silently. Hushed.

“I owe you twelve dollars on account; here are thirty-two; the odd twenty are yours.—Will you take it?”

I made no motion, unmended.

“I will leave them here then. After you remove your things from these offices, you will of course lock the door—since every one is now gone for the day but you—and if you please, slip your key underneath the mat, so that I may have it in the morning. I shall not see you again; so good-bye to you. If hereafter in your new place of abode I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter. Good-bye, and fare you well.”

We slipped into an internal dusk. Unreason now our steadfast atmosphere, for I am your full stop.

SONS OF ADAM

In his perfect quietness, nearly, with nothing vulgar, neither bullying nor bravado, no hectoring or striding about, no jerking out urgent commands at me, no vehement order that I bundle myself off with my beggarly belongings, nothing like that at me. Without loudly requiring it, my attorney did bid me quietly to depart. But while I saw he may assume that I would leave, he could not assume whether I would prefer so to do. For I am more a man of preferences than assumptions.

When he returned the next morning, earlier than usual. Assuming that I had vanished, like some weather passed through or some ghost evanesced, he tried the door knob, locked, but as he fumbled under the doormat for the key, that key he had assumed I would have left, his knee knocked against the door panel. Clunk. To this my reply.

“Not yet; I am occupied.”

His early arrival caught me mid-dream. Each of us stood on other sides of the door, as if twinned, motionless, which of us more that man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virginia by summer lightning, dreamily leaning out his open window, killed there, still, silent, refusing, until someone touched him, and being touched he fell. That singularity. Us two on either side of our office door. One within the other without.

“Not gone!” he murmured at me.

I made no reply.

I reckoned the attorney obeyed a mystical ascendancy which I had over him, an ascendancy, for all his chafing, grinding, assuming, he could not escape from or refuse. He left me in our dominion to finish my early morning as I preferred. What was to be done? How protest? The attorney walked around the block in his unheard of perplexity. He could not thrust me out in body, he could not drive me out with words, he could not call the law, as the idea was unpleasant to such a lawyer as mine. And yet could he permit me to stay and enjoy my triumph over him as he assumed it to be? If nothing was to be done, could he assume anything further? He could, as he had earlier assumed, assume now that I was already departed, retrospectively, and in the legitimate, to his legal mind, carrying out of his assumption, return to the office in a great hurry and walk straight into me as if I were weather, shadow, cloud—departed—his evanesced ghost. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a homethrust into his homerule. He assumed that I could not withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions. Or could I? I saw him doubting himself and doubting his doctrine. He returned, resolved better to argue it out with me, again.

“I am seriously displeased. I am pained. I had thought better of you. I had imagined you of such a gentlemanly organization that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice—in short, an assumption. But it appears I have been deceived. Why, you haven’t even touched the money yet.”

I answered nothing. Returning nothing.

“Will you or will you not quit me?”

“I would prefer not to quit you,” I replied, gently emphasizing the not.

He feared both of us now. His nervous resentment, my steadfast refusal, our aversive constitutions. We were alone, outside of public and domestic realms, in our dependent province. We were alone in an uncarpeted office, doubtless of a dusty and haggard appearance, unhallowed by humanizing associations. He swallowed his exasperation and I retired to my hermitage. He in his corner pitied and indulged me, imagining my hard times, imagining me to mean nothing. I in mine. Could he assume that I would emerge from my corner and leave on my own, that I would find a time agreeable to me, that I would march in the direction of the door?

It was half past twelve, the tides were shifting between Turkey and Nippers, the first glowing and overturning, the second abating into courtesy. Ginger Nut munched on his noon apple. And what quiet departure my attorney imagined for me, I couldn't reckon. I remained standing in my window in my most profound deadwall reverie.

Yes, I would stay behind my screen. He would persecute me no more. I was his solace, harmless and noiseless, an old chair. Motionless. He never felt so private as when he knew I was here. We were content. We indulged each other. Our contents. I was furnished with a room in an office for such a period as I would see fit to remain by my attorney who had come to see me as his mystery, preordained and fated, his silence and providence, our patience.

For my passive suspension, impersonal abandonment, my very blankness, my weather
shadow cloud, suited us. Involuntarily our refused allegiance bound us together.

SUSPENDED

We, who have turned our houses into ships, who float and haunt an added open to inwardness to what is oceanlike, like a closed beyond mirroring our traces, now are at ease among shadows. Among shadows I am at ease. I attach to objects, think object, and there it blurs what's telling what's thought. And it is mine, endlessly, and this is what exhausts me.

If I could unthought, be the unthinking thought me, nonthinking being me. If I could write me, you or he be my passive. Or if I could breach into the world as your or his failure. For you receive me, bereft of your own experience, floating, hauntingly. Yet I decline to be written, prefer not to be your copy, for inevitably your negligent husbandry abandons me like grass, sea grass, to grow chaotic everywhere, and there I leave the inwardness that is dark.

We who come from mistrust and air, forever losing, lost and losing, because I remain that more unthinkable.

You see me only as your error, or better, an error, but see more now as an atmosphere of error as weather shadow cloud. You resist to think my thinking, refuse my difference, and in this we fail together, our error. It's neither mine nor yours to expend fully, forgive, please, my absolute. I miss you terribly. That is, your must could only be my last word, your force of necessity assumes your grand, immanent, and insistent, what you've called, my weather.

Love, gather together in the self-inhabited, suspended, exclusively to itself.

My door is locked to you, and there are no more windows, to say incapable of receiving.

Not yet.

That was me, being occupied, locked from the inside, that is, occupying myself, hardly, poorly. Then, please, read me both ways, as ambiguity, both ways, as unaccounted, for that endangers you and your recording promising whatever pleasure for you, your writing returns you to your own oblivion, not closer to me than ever. Nothing remains? I halt the need, nothing halts nothing but my flowing, stationary but floating, haunting. My error is our alibi. We remain faithful. Enlisted in each other. What do you need, want for me? What I for you? How, love, do we hate being both?

The speed of my pulse, measureless, an aspiration of blood circulating. Blood sharing. Addicted to our pulsations, aspiring for blood for measure and erasure. We do not write but addict, we will through repetition, involuntary need, for we desire desires addicted to their own attachments.

Not storming but a blankness onwards with no colors as if soluble, you would like for me to figure, as if a blankness that is classed as that which escapes classification. You like me, not willed, unrushed and involuntary, bewildered, when you're that will that cannot be hence a nothing to be read, nothing to be written, no color to be painted. We fall outside, an insoluble nothing, for we have fallen, are felled in our orchard. Love, could it be that what we prefer is nothing itself? Itself doing nothing?

You like me. In a pathless place for want of a road, muted and plain.

For you and I are suspended suspense and then finally what leads to love you said a suspended will suspends thinking, you followed, as if to suggest, I am your returned, everlasting ruin, absolute error, in a world that can't clothe me, yet fits not at all. Why are you trying to bury me living? Try, try. Our temple's assembled of ruins.

But when do I need them, do I not need emptied into empty? I figure to myself, bewildering thought returns self-thought, from circumference to center. You write stones and I retrieve myself, if never. I might have fallen save for summoning a path with no signs, a disaster of traces and pasts erased behind me. I am something you don't know. Get it? Not you, not yours.

But please do not think me insensitive, though indifferent to body, food, mind and even to you. I am not that I feel no pain, for it appears that my thought wishes this thought. Stone thought. Dream you.

MOVING DAY

Here I remain, the unaccountable, standing immobile in the middle of an uncarpeted room.

At times another attorney might come to us, having business with my attorney, and, struck by my peculiar aspect, would make a sinister observation, act out a contention. At other times, an attorney seeking an interview with my attorney calling at our office would find me alone and would seek precise information touching on my attorney's whereabouts. He would leave taking with him his idle talk of which I would have taken no heed, and also taking with him an himself no wiser than the he he was when he came. He for a time might contemplate me in my position, in the middle of the room, motionless, blank stare. Or if my room were full of attorneys, a reference underway, witnesses and workers, and business driving fast, and a deeply occupied legal man seeing me wholly unemployed would make a request of me unoccupied to fetch a document at his office, I would as you know decline with tranquility and remain yet idle. That attorney, staring, would turn to my attorney.

What could he say? He was aware that a whisper of wonder was running around, in reference to me, his strange creature he kept in his office. I could see it worried him very much, being not any small item of rumor. But how could he rid himself of me, what he now called his intolerable incubus, me though sensitive, his sylvan spirit lingering in his orchard or woody faun by a pond.

He asked me again to quit him but after three days, from his view, of my consideration, I said I preferred to abide with him. And what he thought his conscience could not endure, speaking to himself he fancied letting me live and die in his rooms and masoning my remains into his walls upon my death. He considered to himself, more out loud than he noticed: Who is the incubus, the ghost, the vagrant that will not vagrant himself? He made no reply, had none to himself to make, so he logicked himself into quitting me since I would not quit him.

He conjured up new premises for himself, mere blocks from me, but making me thereupon a trespasser in our rooms no longer ours. A common trespasser he figured me into. Common to him no longer.

One day he said, "I find these chambers too far from the City Hall"—liar—"the air is unwholesome."—liar, again—"In a word, I propose to remove my offices next week, and shall no longer require your services,"—liar, he needs me more than he needs air—"I tell you this now, in order that you may seek another place."

I made no reply and no more was said.

The wind dying down now to a hush.

On the appointed day he left me in the naked rooms, a motionless occupant, not frozen, but not folded up along with the huge folios. Offices no longer habited, emptied of unbalanced bodies and tables, the heedless and fiery, Nippers, Turkey and Ginger-Nut. My lawless fellows, thwarting objects and their unreadable smudges, all gone and departed.

“Good-bye: I am going—good-bye, and God some way bless you; and take that.”

Whatever it was it dropped to the floor. I sensed he tore himself away from me the one he for so long longed to be rid of. Adieu, my love. I will visit you no more. Adieu.

TENANTING OR PURIFICATION

I cleanse myself, of myself, of others, of nights of bodies, mine and others, yours. Love would think I am fastidious when finding under the sofa what love mistakes as personal. It is a ritual to cleanse oneself of life—not a matter of private hygiene—for a care neither to seduction nor self-identity.

Passive onto it, I am an immobile earth. I compress my time, near timelessness into this point in space. You color me with half-staved thoughts, half-formed, almost thoughts. We stand skinny there. Were you once my remedy for thinking, medicine against myself? I give no answer at present.

My attorney stayed away, coming not near, as if some squeamishness withheld him, poor little fucker.

He misses me, our landscape, our window, that never changes, changes less. It doesn't give more or less, our eternal ruined view of a viewless and not deserted but rather if never dead empty. Only copies, I made for you these emblems of what is not any more, what offers no view.

Whisper to me from behind buried skulls and endless etymologies, whisper to me, given up, give up, deliver me to. Whisper to me an empty world or a world housing few whispering loss and losing, framed and walled up in it, incased in petals. Whisper with me and preserve

me with your abstinence, with me ebb, wave with me, petrify in obstinate silence, vestige
with me a trace in an orchard or our window.

I haunt our building, sleep in the stairwell, fitfully, sitting on the banister of the stairs by day,
sleeping not sleeping, waiting while not waiting in the entry.

In vain you have left me, in vain you persist, in vain you imagine I am nothing to you or to
anyone, but I am yours, and we are your terrible account. I your uncountable nothing, to you
I am confidentially yours. Ever yours.

Find me on the banister at the landing, in confidence, there. I am as you find me.

Find me as I am.

Ever yours,

B.

“What are you doing here?”

“Sitting on the banister,” I mildly reply.

“Are you aware that you are the cause of great tribulation to me, by persisting in occupying
the entry after being dismissed?”

No answer. I give no answer.

It is as you sensed the same either way, here or there, yet in vain no alternative. Your house or mine. Doesn't it, love, all come down to the same, no difference but all? I drown myself in it and invite you. We ask for not even what otherwise persists. Ask.

Why read, why copy, why thought, why others? Haven't you been trying to read my face—I caught you mid-act last night. Try, try. My suit, my voice, my profile, your open fields of what might be told, expanding but nothing works, or a work that has no form, found. Find me no form.

I am leanly composed. Dimly calm. A word without wrinkles. Brought to a standstill, a mutter of difference, or broken moaning, if you could listen. I had not forgotten how, living in the difference of that life that grieves. Not as you imagined it? Incapable, little fucker, either of love or of grief?

OPIUM

Does desiring erase remembering? Insatiable forgetting, drugged by abandon, a vastness of what is not mine or me. All feeling. As if I could surprise myself, or better, surprise you out of yourself. A gift. Let hair become leaf, let leg become root, let sigh become windspell, birdhum, let my head become weather, my heart shadow, then cloud again. All felt. Yet temporary all as all weather shadow cloud.

Listen, an inner rhythm lives, an inner aching gathers to me, bundles around the formless. You need this, need me to be intimate, tonic to your grief, captured, returning, and back to myself. Any snug contrivance falls flat, limps along lame and drugged. How the leaving always comes back. Listen, there's a duet in the next room.

He tried, honestly tried, to find a way to it.

“No, I would prefer not to make any change.”

A clerkship, more copying, a trip in the countryside, bill collecting, bartending, his propositions.

“Too much confinement about that. No, I would not like to do that; but I am not particular.”

“Too much confinement?” he parroted.

“I would prefer to be doing something else.”

European travel companion, entertaining a young man with conversation, others.

“Not at all.”

He next tried to frighten me, my immobility, into compliance, poor fucker, he did.

He was precipitately leaving me when he turned toward me, a turn I had known, now desperate as much as despairing.

As if called back, he says in a tone quite kind, “Will you go home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come, let us start now, right away.”

An overture to which I could only state, or re-state: “No, at present I would prefer not to make any changes at all.”

He answers nothing.

Sometimes I do things without knowing why, counterfeiting a semblance of knowing but not. If looking for an exit, slow or fast, I invite you to step overboard, slide out onto my draft, love, please, unroot my feet.

Pause at the door unattended. Step over the threshold unbidden, arrive in his presence unformed. Delivered outsidership, stationary, for I like to be stationary. Pause. I prefer to cleave to you, your inwardness to my apparition, your incubus, your manghost. Poor, pale passive mortal, I am yours. My unwonted wordiness once inspirits you. And yet you abandon me. Not the slightest obstacle in my pale unmoving ways. I did it for you. Silently. Though I might repulse you, transformed your melancholy, your pity, into fear.

Listen. A pauseless person there I am always.

FUGITIVES

“Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you.”

You say to me as if the passive and active, whether voiced or dancing, were the visible, as if simple, that simple. But, love, it's perilous, living, and we need more and various vias. As if your options are yours and mine are mine. Is there a that that might contain us, tolerate the difference? The errancy is ours, our hesitant, from one voice to another.

But you run from me. Grab the first omnibus, fearing you would be hunted. By what? Who? Our former landlord, incensed? The rent paying tenants, irate? Whoever else might persecute you. But I, would I? Haunt you? Yet you run from me in your rockaway. Living fugitive, running not running, on off, inside outside, problems, each with our passive and active, our thickness.

Why not try? This almost nothing isn't nothing, love. You know it, it's ours, name it, love, you liked it. A decay, lingering on, nonloss. No limit to decline, to drift, to love it.

You return to find me having been removed to the Tombs as a vagrant. And, lo, a note. A letter yes delivered. A oneness for once of law and body without mine but of mine, an impossible leap across my very gap, an exposure of my wound, exigent yet vivid, that can never be stepped over, forever away from now, love, we can't be bridged. For there's no

means no machine to get there, cross over. See, we who are perforated in fantasy encounter in that note, between paper and pen, body and body, that letter, I escape that inscription, stopped writing, stop being written, stop writing, love, please. Return me to forest, stone, shadowing cloud, stammered out, by way of living.

When they come for me, I offer not the slightest obstacle. How to obstacle? Why? Has our grief also gone fugitive? Given up on watching over the line, that crust to form, to start of me and to end of you. Rather and but in my page, unmoving way, silently to acquiesce as weather shadow cloud. They move me southwards, arm in arm with the constables, our silent procession, some curious bystanders join our party, silently we process, filing our way through all the noise, and the heat, and the joy, yes, the joy of the roaring thoroughfares, at noon. We file silently in procession, making our way through the heat and noise and joy, we silent, the streets staring, roaring. To the Tombs, at noon, arm in arm. My fellows. My brothers. A progress to love, to you.

CURTAINS

Being under no disgraceful charge, harmless and calm, as ever, they permit me freely to wander, vagrantly in prison for being vagrant. I face the high wall in a quiet yard, while peering out at me the eyes of those who have seen, murders and murderers, thieves, the lawless and all the rest, needed, real or not, for the works to work so well. Arrested for my arresting self, arrest of an arrest, arrest arrests arrest.

My body exiled who is missing, long missed, moves me, from myself, quietly, almost, what would have been there, near missing too. But not without you, had I not wanted to wander? Yet now the one who is found, no longer lacking. I wander in my confinement, vagrantly returning elsewhere, formed otherwise, the effect of me rather than your denial of what I am not or miss. I confess I am homesick.

Then my lawyer visits.

He yells across the prison yard.

“p”

I say, “I know you and I want nothing to say to you.”

But he persists, “It was not I that brought you here.”—liar—“And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here.”—more lies—“And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think.”—liar again—“Look, there is the sky, and there is the grass.”

“I know where I am.” And I end, refusing to say more. So he leaves me, again.

Outside of our being, suspended again, and again, a being being withheld, my without. They permit me to wander freely, vagrant inside my tomb, I freely wander, I face the wall, in the quietest of the yards, a high wall. Peering eyes of those murderous eyes. See my back to you. Intercessors to each, exiled from ourselves, withheld, without, withdrawn, yet not still, my back to you, giving it to you, offering and falling away, in severance in sacrifice, each dedicated by each.

It's both impossible and manifest, two modes, like our curtain, that green screen and its language of material. Recall the return, elsewhere. Recall, I meant no mischief, yet you think my suffering is beyond reach and beyond return. Wrong again, love, gathering it intimately, the formless, abandoned being. Still caught between that yes and no, would you let yourself be caught too? In our inwardness, outside of form or figure.

“I am not particular,” as you know.

You may think it a tomb but let's call it my orchard, my dream inside, contained outside, inclosure of shells, covering. I turn not to refuse but to lament, perhaps, and to commune, no longer with you, still, love, but not yet.

The tired stupor of the butterfly. Suffering as passive as faceless as impersonal. Not yours not mine not the butterfly's.

Do I attract because I withdraw? Doesn't distance create space, form, mark the field, in the end what closeness is the possible of? Live in oblivion, I say to you, in butterfly stupor and pollinate.

I within grip the ground, face stares the wall, attend my orchard. A tame imprisoned turf grows softly under my foot. It is the heart of the pyramid wherein, through a cleft, grass-seed, dropped by a bird, has sprung.

CELLS

If never a bed, if never eyes closed, the closed eyes, if never properly slept, if never to be bed, if never sleeping well and if never soundly sleeping, if never bedding, if never shut eyes, if never rest, never repose, if never an end to wakeful, if never ending, if not never not, if never endless wakefulness, if never not eternally wakeful sleep, if never eternal, if never to live by sleeping, if never reposing and respiting, if never there and if never elsewhere, if never to rest of arresting, if never end to dying, if never end, if never making and marked already, if never to bed, if never a bed.

I have an erasing machine. Can you picture it? For well hidden and hiding. It allows me to wander, pathless, unfollowable in an unfathomable depth, tracking not, tracing none or myself. In search of what, you ask. Ask. What was there is missing, in a place you can't write, can't name, identify. In a passive, motionless place, sprung from formless dreaming. Inclosed in stillness, hidden and hiding behind if nobody goes. Fell in suspended far from the shore where love is, where weather shadow cloud, where gathers nothing more. Collected, love, from grief.

No one belongs here more than you. No one more than you, poor little. No one.

But it's my question, love, that concerns relation. And communication. Summed in the intercession that I am to you and you are to me. I can feel you looking. Face widening then narrowing within an expressionless relation. But I persist, yes, yet not in common sounds as

you might think of before, but after, after all, the ruin, the undoing, the obstacles, the grinding down, my unmoving love. In search of what, you ask. It's a dialogue, speaking and hearing, that limits the space from which you or I can speak, hear, relation. No one more than us, letters that sound the voice first.

I wander. They permit me. In the quietest of yards, grass-plaited and inclosed. I am as you find me, love, indeed within. The bell sounds a second time and you ask for an indulgent confinement. Until what? You hardly know. No one if never more than you.

Have you been seeing me in your dreams? My face, the dead-wall stare, overwhelming and wanting. There at unyielding, love, more than wanting. I am that erase.

How to surrender to whatever invades us or was it there at that crossroads where we kissed the ground? There.

The not now.

I'm occupied.

The this and that.

Your preference.

The that or this.

Not yours.

The never if.

If refusing.

The space undoing.

Promising the open sky.

You must know that I hold a part of you. Inside dearly, deeply to both. A telling part. I watch at all hours, sleeplessly to say tirelessly. But with love, love.

If the earth receives me. If hurling myself down gently, love. If I offended made offence, if preferring. If I turned to resist, love, your flight. If we face each other at last for parting. If we bow lowly, repeat, if we reach out a hand and withdraw, repeating, marking the atmosphere, the shadows, between. If my hand waving blurring affirming embracing towards you. If your hand doing in a like manner the same, waving blurring affirming embracing towards me.

Because I could find neither what to say nor how to begin to accomplish it, my obstinacy, my oblivion, without stopping velocity, the not doing but being where I await, am awaited, am erasing.

How can I be certain it is truly *there* that you want me to be or really *that* that you want of me or *here* that you want me or *this*? It's not the flesh that is weak but these words, a telling to reckon where and what I am or where I am as transported. You are my obstinant concern, love, my obsessive and everlasting one. I count on you to refer back to me the body if wounded, by love with the open skyfield of love, love. Drifting and disordering, nearly no longer, love, if never not now. If the earth receives me, if I turn to resist, as weather shadow cloud.

This skin of mine reveals you and unfolds the body inclosed. Unfurling time and measure in increment behind grass. I am against this wall, that backdrop of clearsky, openfield, filled with yet to be perceptible feelings, storms of them. For it is my climate that animates us, meteorologically. Endless circulations, pulsing vapor thoughts, temporarily of a possible form, that melancholic lure and offence.

As I am rain that is the possible of cloud, and as I am cloud that is the possible of shadows
that is the possible of weather, atomic, dividing and redividing, in never ending ways,
endlessly my asylum of thinking not thinking thinking. If in a mistiness, that twilight,
otherwise forms the shapes disappearing as once appearing, in this very moment, our
everlasting dusk, as I am, the possible of.

THE CUTLETS

You return to me involuntarily.

You say, "This is Mr. Cutlets."

"Your sarvant, sir, your sarvant," says the grub-man making a bow behind his apron. "Hope you find it pleasant here, sir; nice grounds—cool apartments, sir—hope you'll stay with us some time—try to make it agreeable. May Mrs. Cutlets and I have the pleasure of your company to dinner, sir, in Mrs. Cutlets' private room?" He moves his beefy hand towards mine.

It's not that I'm afraid of shaking hands, such an ordinary gesture, but to touch risks more, forgets also in this very act of recognition what is involved, what consequence of touching, being touched, a being shaken. Where would I be then? For more than speech and touch, there is caught and catching. Look, love.

I say to that Cutlets, "I prefer not to dine today," I say turning away, I say, "It would disagree with me: I am unused to dinners," I say and slowly move away from those two to the other side of my inclosure, taking up my position fronting the dead-wall. Staring this wall, dead wall staring inclosed in my inclosure. Fronting back to back. Are you looking? I can feel it.

"He's an odd one, aint he?"

“I think he is a little deranged.”

“Deranged? Deranged is it? I thought that friend of yours was a gentlemen forger; they are always pale and genteel-like, them forgers. I can’t help pity ‘em—can’t help it, sir. Did you know Monroe Edwards?”—pause for effect and sigh—“He died of consumption at Sing-Sing. So you weren’t acquainted with Monroe?”

Forgeries and copies, copyists and forgers. What unreason surrounds us. We who are hungry for letters, gorging on glue ravenously pulp for dinner. To forge a copy, copy of copies, of deeds and titles. Craving the consuming what had already been written, what law of wrong law, useless and unintended for my hands, return at least and irrevocable. I was an author, a mysterious fluttering silverfish, if not of my own, yours, letters sent as errands of life who speed yet faster to death.

But what way of not losing by it?

I arrived at your threshold, the door between neither and nor. There, where there is no actively not. And I see before seeing, the forms and shapes, and emerge out of an unaccountable field, that background I call thinking, out of that rumor of form, passive and pale, neatly imperceptible. For I feel the traces of matter without form, the never given. The if never I not. Nothing more than temporarily traces of darkness of other bodies on a formless of night, as weather shadow cloud as never ending ways.

My eyes, once dull and glazed, now moving like grazing animals in the open fields. Can you hear the pygmy owl or the finch? The marks making space point to different and various vias

to wander, surrender ways to loss, become lost. Your pathway between neither and nor
marks our elsewhere, traces our otherwise. Waking alone in a field, sheep and pastor to
witness, a fine rain is falling, the weather to this alien language, the possible of my shadow,
inclosed, untamed, your note at my side, our voices vessel, speak slowly, windhushed, dusk is
called dusk, faceless dawn.

WITNESS OR MY SHEEP'S RETURN

I could not enter what existing already, that already living, but my entrance, by entering, made it, makes it continually and ever changing. It's the steadfast yet temporarily shadow gathered to our impersonal atmosphere, the not yet, if never, as experienced. And what does happen to arrive, that is our error and errancy, whose failure most generally. How enter the never intended, the not born from my yet encountered endless, whose unaccounted? To put words on that horizon then, and through indirection find out.

My errancy falls in an alien language who speaks the weather of strangeness. In touching, being touched by what, we dwell within the possible of shadows in my unfrequented wood as a loss yet to lose.

I am still looking for nothing in particular but am less than singular without. You find me and you welcome my arrival in what was there, already, whatever strangeness, difference or otherwise. To reckon this now untamed and inraptured within the wilderness through which I wander, ecstatic. I am a being becoming a full stop, in open sky, arresting, scattering the nut and its shell. For I'd populate these wilds with whatever instinct, receptive semination, to gather rather than form. It's the formlessness that speaks myself, negligent in intention, as grass or stone or atmosphere, arrived like a seed on the wind. Come from without and coming otherwise lost, fall through the cleft, birdborne.

The doing of not doing. How I see and am seen to be being and the doing of the not doing, all a doing, for we are of various beings. I am your orchard, your garden to wander through. Increase the fragrance of flourishing, and prune what you please, I prosper by it, and am yours, for I bloom the better.

To review and in short, I arrived at my attorney's office where I remained, doing masses, then less, then doing nothing. My attorney tried to do something about me doing nothing, that is, he tried. At last I am taken to prison where he visits twice. I am found therein sleeping with kings and counsellors.

I didn't mean to mean, didn't assume to mean otherwise the unthought, formless promise, starved of all attachment, for there was no pause of digestion. As instinct I kiss this and this grows in unreason, sprouts in tending what is no longer hidden and hiding.

If to sleep at the dusk where our ship had wrecked, wrong ship and wrong love, wrecked in our vast Atlantic, scattered seeds at the bottom of the sea. I am as weather shadow cloud and as weather shadow cloud I am this everlasting dusk, this elsewhere that you find me, love, ever wrong, ever ours. Be ever the weather shadow cloud, be ever, be everlastingly returned, called back.

Listen, I keep to wander, to how weather wanders, shadows and clouds. If one into the other, the possible of each the other endlessly. Let my body become wind bewildering the twilight between us now. My forehead touches the wall, darkened by inwardness by shadow, above the tufted grass, uncarpeted fields, resting here.

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