

THAT MAN TO MAN IS AN ARRANT WOLFE

As if to starve, as if starving, between noisy helpings you gnaw through yourself, unable to forget the body you were born to. *I am sorry*, you say as you make your way through matter, tissue, bone, *I am sorry*. When does it stop? The apology for pissing yourself while on my couch, drunk, blacked out. *I would like to pay you for your couch*. Not to forget, but be forgiven. All of us moving in the shape of our own hunger. My drunkenness, my pissing. A remuneration, *I am sorry*.

To keep something without owning it, not wanting it even, is an act both horrible and affectionate. The way my carp-like mouth, as you say you are sorry, continues to mouth the silence out. How formidable our failures, how wearisome. And each just reminds us of whatever it is we have forgotten and grown tired of and now, indifferent. The night I stole your truck and drove to the East Side to smoke crack with a prostitute. See? It no longer takes imagining.

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Bring the maimed, bring the bereft. To seize from among us all that leads to want—a body of salt, a body of sugar. This peculiar and appalling hunger. My neighbor, who has just returned from a night in jail. He smiles at me as he moves on down the street, his mouth blood-soaked. *I am sorry*, he says, and the complexion of mind while looking at him is like a gash that almost wakes the bone. A colorlessness almost unseen beneath all that red, a reproval, a humiliation.

He goes from house to house, rapping at windows, crying through locks. *I am sorry*, he says, because he was too drunk to remember which of us he called *my nigga*. And we turn away or do not answer the door. Some of us, even, tell him it did not happen. But he continues down the street, his grin, like the ripped-open belly of an animal on the road, dragging its slow, rent body along. *My nigga*, he says, *my nigga*.

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