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Public Defender

Think Scheherazade. Not this story again. Think that perhaps you will avoid—won't see today—or smell one more time the one about the woman with seventeen fog-cutters on her breath, whose teen wrote in green marker on a bathroom stall at P.S. 254 (which is a crime) which teen now says to you in the courthouse lobby *I raised myself you know*

*

Think how poor is the place where every action has *of course*

every consequence-

because there were words exchanged over a bowl of pasta; because there was enough mixer in the freezer

for two; because

she spit in his dinner

to show he was not a man; because he wanted to be a man;

because he was stronger than she was and their verbal argument quickly became what her lawyer will describe

as a

physical altercation

(which is a crime)

and he reached the telephone first, because he was always faster

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Think Marx. Think about all the workers of the world at least once having been

in your office, how you caught yourself apologizing to a man for the smell—

you see— it wasn't— that's not—

and remembered it was sweat, that all you've smelled this October is sweat—

paydirt from the local build-up before winter-

oh forget it you said, but made a man twice your age feel ashamed—

and you did not know how to apologize

so you did not apologize

(which is a crime)

*

You think your ears will bleed from out their drums-

you think it is possible at twenty-seven to *hear enough* and be done with that sense, at least—

your tongue, too, for having said we can only do so much this many times, this many times, this many times.

your nose as well, because sweat has a smell and dirt has a smell and of course booze has a smell like desperation and a car in the black trees beside the road, in which a man repeats I should be dead I should be dead

(which is— which is—)

and your eyes should go, too, for being in places they never have light to see: twelve black men sitting two-by-two on the unlit stairwell, waiting to meet the *yes your honor no your honor* of this place—the burned-up extremities of this place where a thousand lives or more lodge each week

like ash—

(but at least you shook their hands)