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From Paroxysm

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JUSTIN PHILLIP REED

From Paroxysm

The men in the video fuck face down.
No, the men on the screen are
faceless, devised to be known

as achronic illustrations of a dare:
the dark organ enters antimatter
and attempts to retain a narrative there.

Bent over the arm of a couch, under
a body you called by a pseudonym
once, you try to ignore the painter

tarp hanging from the ceiling, the thumb
he keeps resting in his mouth—
minor deviations from the paradigm—

until the only condom goes dry with
the last dregs of lubricant and the scene
resumes its linear obligation to death.

Distorted across another screen
is the latest autopsy of Ezell Ford's
body rendered in diagram, a line

through each wound, the wounds records
of just how many ways
a person can suffer the word

[through]. For a second, you realize
that every single man in the room
has his back to another. Suppose

that this were not true all the time.

A feeling in which the rest of the world is a white couple riding horses down the spine of a beach at dusk: there are days upon days of this. You cannot help but assume the eyes behind their shades have only ever cried over sunsets in Venice. It seems that the horses drag the knots of their ankles through surf and are blessed enough to forget they only exist in this labored capacity.

The dead are becoming legion, and those in closest proximity to living shuffle dumbly past in the longest-ever commercial break. This is a show they feel generous enough to admit they co-wrote and produced and now can't bear to tune into. Nightly in the cold open, a character is assassinated, and you wonder if you won't eventually play the part of every prone body because no one looks long enough to notice any difference. Maybe it isn't just you but anyway all your low-resolution murder scenes look the same, says a critic.

If there is a spirit it wishes the body would impose.

You arrive at the university and stand out like a necrotic thumb. Hundreds of future leaders of your free world go out of their way to swim around you and you want to strip naked as a slave and scream **Don't I stink of blood** but you don't do this because you've been told to think an invisible "we" needs you in this space. You look for proof of your being there. You wonder why Edvard Munch's screaming figure isn't as black as the day is long. No one will say they saw you come in alive.

When the Black officer searches you,
his is the threadbare habit of having
another man in one's hands. You are
conscious of fucking's metaphor slipping
its dark head through the ajar door of this
as when, once a year, your father hugs you.
There is in any moment an urge toward
departure. Adding to the weight of
intimacy's ending are so many shadows
here. When the Black officer searches
your pockets, a chain rakes a wall. A splitting
of keys into stars, your night-dragged gut
full of bodies, brine, and waste. What are
the present-tense parts of the present? [weapon]
[the][onyx][juts][crudely][past][ouch][however]

~

you know that the night did not fall. it was dropped.

of this fact, the evidence is yet uncollected.

the onomasticon in the mind makes room:

a round of hangman.

you eat the salience of waiting, inhale it,

and teeter as a reed in wind at shore—

an indication of the will to move. (god, blow.)

a lamp / some star / vigil romancing the ripples,

a fox-quick pungency of burning wicks.

say it will emerge like a body from a lake,

gasping. splashes, flurry of upset geese.

say it will emerge like a body—

and for what did you last destroy?

and for what were you last destroyed?