Public Defender

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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
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)