

Saccades

sac-cade n. 1) A violent check the rider gives a horse by drawing both reins suddenly; 2) A strong pressure of the violin bow against the strings by which three or four notes are played at once; 3) The involuntary jerking movement in the act of swallowing; 4) The seemingly random scans the eye makes across an object; as in REM sleep; a rapid irregular movement of the eye as it changes focus moving from one point to another, for example, while reading.

Afternoon light on a stone floor—if only I were changing with it.

In middle age, so many still complain about pulling friendship along on cracked wooden wheels, even as they would never allow themselves such callowness about love.

It's by the edges of things, the boundaries, that we locate even our souls.

After dinner, our host says, "We don't clear the table till the next day. Clearing the table right away makes us sad."

When one looks upward, far upward, one grows younger.

Impetuous Sleeper

Waiting for the doctor in her examination room: the door is open, and this makes me feel less lonely—though I look at the examination table and know one day I will submit myself here. I will be submitted.

No one needs to learn how to stand and watch the rain.

“I’m lonely,” the aging bachelor confessed, “and so I save things up to talk to you guys about. I gossip to myself about you, too.”

Such a drought that knots fall out of our privacy fence.

In the newspaper today, a brief story of a kitten born with two faces. It died of the cold, evidently shunned by its mother.

He believes he’s tough. But he merely sees the world surrounding him as one dare after another, none of which he dares resist.

“He’s more of a person,” the girl said, “than the people you usually talk to in hallways.”

The span of a debacle: the time between uttering a genuine insight and repeating it to another, prefaced by “Of course . . .”

He wept as he touched her thigh and wept as he told her he loved her—this as he drove them down the highway home, this after a morning of spotted melancholy, an ache within like a squeaking vise, his reason flaking away like thin panes of mica. She should have been insulted.

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In a state of half-waking, I heard a voice say: *Two of the senses are mostly borrowed.*

The voice didn't say which two.

Tying up vines: hoping to ask yourself a new question.

He praised my invisibility as I spoke to the group. Is it a measure of my success that he wants me to disappear?

Alone, very late, smoke pouring from my slightly drunken, silent mouth: I am, at that moment, resembling a memory of my father.

To love a thing is to make it stranger.

The same "to do" note on my desk from two weeks ago: "Call Derek." Instead of calling him, I've thought of what to say to him, saying it differently each day.

She repeated her complaint—what his previous remark had done to her. She demanded that he hear what she had to say. *Any* other point of view she considered antagonistic. No other point of view could be recognized (even one that honored her point of view and tried to satisfy the wants spawned by it). Another point of view would have made her susceptible to other feelings about the matter at hand—not his feelings about the matter but some other feelings. And she could not allow herself to have other feelings about the matter.

The violin is mostly silence.

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After a glass of wine, we walked to our cars. At a turn in the sidewalk, we began talking about how the guest of honor for the evening (not then in our company) had left his wife for another woman; and one of the women among us began to explain how she must have made a fool of herself by not realizing this when she had spoken to the guest of honor. In other words, we had arrived at a confession. But at that moment, my way diverged from theirs, and we made no effort to stop. Instead, we tossed out terrifyingly flat good-byes, so inappropriate and abrupt that I peered up into the night toward the bearded oaks, hoping to be seen by those from whom I'd just parted as one with imagination and a curious, interested—and interesting—mind. In the trees, of course, I saw nothing but tree.

(Overheard): “Brian has always been around my age.”

Applause: the most effective solution for dissolving complex feeling.

The faint edge of an erotic dream suddenly returns to me. The dreamed-of woman was actually my lover, briefly, many years ago, and I never found her physically attractive. In fact, generally, the opposite. But now my head turns and my eyes jerk upward in some spasmodic thoughtfulness. Were the visitation only a memory, I might find it mundane or even repulsive. Instead, I'm tender toward it. The woman is still a friend, and I thought of her only yesterday, feeling I should call her. But I'd decided I wasn't ready to listen to her for an hour.

He looked at me twice through his unmoving stare.

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It is a comfort—and a measure of sadism—to think of someone like Borges weeping on the train to the office, heading toward the peeling dreariness and the plummet from a freedom some claim we do not really want.

By the time they go to their therapist (the appointment could not be scheduled during the time of crisis), they have no new ground to open. They recapitulate for an hour. They even admit things they have denied to each other, without a single re-
crimination. Then they go to lunch—to a little place nearby where they haven't been in years.

J lusts for my brother, but I happen to sit between them now at the table. So he looks at my brother and feels me up as they speak.

We attack each other's pleasures more readily than our ideals.

It's just a note to let me know she has gone out . . . or X has called . . . or the airline tickets are such and such a price—but it is always, also, a love letter that moves me to an immediate inner trumpeting so grand and excruciating I read the note as quickly as I can and hide it away for some unspecified later.

Habit is the indefatigable made transparent.

Most inspiration vanishes before it's recognized.

Wanting to pull into traffic, I wait for the woman to cross the street in front of me with her two iced drinks. Actually, I wait for her to look at me so that I can gesture, generously, that she should cross.

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Pity those who do not believe in their parasites.

In the end, empiricism's greatest achievement will be in describing its own limits.

D's childhood friend sat in his room all day and plotted exotic trips—the trips he would never take—memorizing the timetables of all the trains of Europe. He habitually cleaned his tongue with a spoon.

We wrong one another in manifold ways, many of which we could be persuaded to admit, if we could be shown, lovingly, that we were dead.

I need to own very few objects before I begin to fear for them.

(Overheard): “How can you grow if you don't lie?”

At the county bureau, we wait in line while two of the service windows remain closed so that the women can take turns holding the new baby of one of their coworkers. The mother and father, unhandsome, smile with pride. This is their moment. Others behind the counter smile. Those of us in line watch the baby passed from woman to woman, and we do not smile. Some of us have never smiled about a baby.

Subtlety undermines blessedness.

With them, there came a moment in the evening when your intelligence would overwhelm your sweetness. You'd have an opinion. They would believe it was unalterably vital to you. It

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would seem a clue to you, and you would try to obscure it. Not possible. You really wouldn't know how to unmark the talk.

"I started fucking at thirteen," she said. "It saved my life."

Nothing is more shocking in marriage than the repetitive success of an ultimate compliment.

I don't want to bore people with the deaths of those I love. My feelings are too simple or too inarticulate. In the former case, they are predictable and thus an object of dispatch. In the latter case, they are to be endured as an object of pity.

Glamour is desperation that doesn't get the joke.

What are you trying to make yourself into always having been?

Perhaps the dead can see everything that goes on in life—and so they are educated about something that is perhaps interesting to them but irrelevant to their current condition. Death would then be academic in the worst sense.

"She loves you so much she gives your sins to other people."

Most of us can withstand many deaths but only a hint of madness.

Marriage: How quick are you to learn what cannot be said to the other, to yourself because of the other?

Facts soon take on a second career as metaphors.

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He sang the phrase, beautifully, and then said to the unimpressed Germans, “My bad German.”

A compliment stupefies him—that is, it makes him polite.

She was revealing him, impulsively, to others, and so he could only stare at her, as she spoke at the dinner table, stare as though he were only listening.

Marriage wears down manners, until it gets to the strangers. That’s if it is a good marriage.

His talk teaches me how cheap my own is.

My former student nearly makes it out the restaurant door amid the group from his office. He’s thicker, heavier, now. Desperate to escape me, the first thing he tells me is that he’s still writing. Terrible to see a younger person think you care more than they do about the person they might have become—a figment they have put aside in their exhaustion at the demands placed on their present energies. It’s more oppressive to dream for others than yourself. You can talk your own dreams into a compromise. You can finally make them justify their pride—all dreams have their pride—and then attack their family.

Understanding is often the clutches of a diminished enchantment.

He seems to think I am needlessly happy because I am too subtle (for him?).

During the interview, when I ask the candidate why he would

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want this job—clearly a step down for him—he pulls out a watch (though he is wearing one) and checks its time.

“I don’t want to hate you like that again.”

His philosophy emanated from hangovers.

They had the rare pleasure of feeling they were joined in their hatred of a worthwhile enemy, though they spoke to each other as though they were trying to convince their auditors to change their minds.

Most epiphanies are outsized rationalizations.

Did I hurt him by seeming to overstep my assigned ability? To be friends, I must be less than him somewhere.

We don’t know how to be sincere to the dying.

Full moon. Cool air, like a sweet jelly. Now I begin to hear the agony between mother and daughter. How one says something, looking away.

Most things don’t require correction—or attention—if no one else is around.

In the shower, I notice a tube of exfoliating soap that’s nearly empty. It’s her current favorite, and I favor it, too. Though it’s a beautiful day on the island and we are on a family vacation that’s pleasant enough, the sight of the tube of soap spins me into . . . despair? I recognize, suddenly, that the life around me

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is a unity of things for which I feel responsible; I'm supposed to hold it together, replenish . . . I feel as though everything around me will sooner or later spin apart because I don't have the skill, or intelligence, or stamina to maintain it. I will be crushed by its demands. Everyone, in his own time, will be crushed by its needs. Life seems inexhaustible and I, weak and failing. How dare I pretend to proceed! I've already failed because I have done so little for those closest to me—my paucity of imagination in that regard is suddenly obvious. A crease deepens through the middle of my regular being and its usual wherewithal. Existence is so much faster and more complex than my will—all the time: this is what I must be learning again when I feel how impossible everything is, right next to ordinary chores and schedules and desires. How can I even keep up with that tube of soap, I think, sinking into grief and stasis . . .

Why is a dream any less a phantom than a thought?

On the phone, I heard that slight slowing in his speech as he looked up the title of my book so that he could lie to me about it.

I detect myself. (A sentence revised from: "He follows her.")

To determine your place in life, ask: Which laments do you forgo?

The stain merely embodies the potential of each thing to transgress. Things side by side await the chance to invade each other's status.

The man from the quarry came to the house and during his

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delivery caught his leg in a horrific unpiling from his truck.

To his terrified customers, he said, “no problem,” and detached himself from his trapped prosthesis.

They helped him drag it free of the rocks.

People say memorable things, and I make a mental note to record them, and then I forget. I imagine the Goncourt brother who managed to scribble a few things on his cuff at dinner . . . and one of the other guests, Flaubert, perhaps, pausing to make sure he’d gotten a particular *bon mot* down.

She misplaced her originality in teaching herself her own lesson.

The island is beautiful, but showing it to him, I’m ashamed. Its quiet becomes “too quiet.”

She watched him as he told the story, and she deferred to him. Now I can see how he complained about what she once said in a moment like this. (He doesn’t look the type, but he must be.)

On the interstate, we pass a battered, partially primed car without license plates. In its back window, written on a square of cardboard: a license number and “Tags burned.”

(Overheard): “Don’t put that there. It’s the most suspicious position in the sentence.”

If, then: the jaws of supposition—invisible devourer.

She enjoys our company, but she’s not comfortable with us.

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(Overheard): “The situation is like a circle going around and around.”

He was honest, apparently, statement after statement, and this seemed remarkable, given the deceit I imagined in his past. His honesty made me feel like a stranger; I wondered if I had fallen asleep and awakened in a fearless town where the tongue commands the apt.

I think I was jealous he had learned something of his life, and he had learned how to say it in different ways, calmly, as though complimenting us for listening.

Too many things occurred today—for the kind of life I know how to lead.

(Overheard): “We can no longer say that every family member that we know is alive.”

How dare we judge the beauty of those in an old photograph by the past epoch into which they were born! Their beauty has nothing to do with that time, now. Almost all of that era’s beauty vanished. And we still have only a very few ways to retain beauty, though we may mistake what our machinery of commemoration can apprehend and retain—because the beauty that always eludes us and abandons us returns from another angle, later, and chastises and teaches and haunts us, and will not forgive us for wanting it.