NEGATIONS

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Unyielding antagonism and stingering rebuke have a more abysmal source than the measured negation of thought. Galling failure and merciless prohibition require some deeper answer. Bitter privation is more burdensome.

Heidegger
1. The enumerated solitudes

1. The echo of a three-inch heel around the corner, fading.
2. Swaying shadows of plane trees on the whitewashed wall.
3. Lingering cigarette smoke over the bench.
4. The discarded ticket stub just to the left of the ancient gum stain.
5. What lies beneath the undermost scrap of poster paper on the billboard at the end of the alley.
6. Voices of pub patrons who have stepped out to empty their pints and release the week's tensions.
7. The time between the closing of the front door and your passing on the sidewalk.
8. The prints you would have left on the concrete if your feet had been wet.
9. Seven minutes left on the meter.
10. A chorus line of synchronized simulacra in the digital placards over the empty escalator.
11. The song that was about to play when you switched the radio off.
12. The one cloud that no one in the city is currently watching.
13. The one language that no one in the city is currently speaking.
14. The one thought that no one in the city is currently thinking.
15. Any item that remains on the shelf past its expiration date.
16. The taste you almost anticipated just before you discovered that the restaurant was closed.
2. Light Storm

They had settled here and there before any of us took notice: on a cheek, a windshield, a stoop, minuscule highlights. The glittering points drifted with the delicate summer breeze and accumulated in corners, thin, barely apparent, as if caressing the concrete.

When we saw that surfaces were starting to glow in the light flakes, we laughed or slowed in our movements, taking it in without reasoning. Vortices of light would coalesce now for a few moments over our heads. The illumination was condensing in corners that usually went unnoticed: gutters, stairwells, the tops of awnings. We appreciated these little revelations.

As the light precipitated more steadily, the coating of brightness became more uniform, and we looked down at our own clothing and limbs to see the fine layer of prestige and dazzle that was working its way into the folds.

There was no hiding -- things came out from disregard and opened themselves to the particles that no fingers could feel.

It was soundless, heatless, purely visual. Our eyes alone were witnesses. And we were eager, then, to document the phenomenon, taking hundreds of photos that never seemed to capture the event perfectly. They compensated for the extra light, and objects looked more normal in our images, although the absence of shadows was unmistakable, as if things were agreeing to make it impossible to sneak up on each other.

By evening, the light was dazzling and we started to pull our shades on. Through the sunglasses, themselves dusted with light, the world looked like it had been frosted or painted.

Every surface molecule, by midnight, was glowing with a light that came from outside but seemed to enter objects as soon as it settled on them. We lost track of things and places as we wandered, sleepy but unable to sleep, through a city that was becoming alien.

Kids ran, dancing and twirling, through the light drifts. They kicked at the light and sent it up in brief showers, spreading new puddles.

By now the light blizzard had coated the coats, had layered the layers, and all angles had become curves. Soft forms moved slowly down lanes that were starting to blend into their borders. Trails and cones of light extended past everything in the direction indicated by the wind. As the wind picked up, the contours of our city became symbols of themselves, shorthand reminders. Our cameras wouldn't take any more pictures once they themselves were coated in light.

I can hardly make anything out anymore. There are some sobs and shouts, soaked in light. Hearing, touch, balance are all infected by the overflowing light.

And still it comes down.
3. Underground

I'll just be right downstairs. Back in a minute. Just go on without me.

Watch my head and my step -- it's a narrow descent and the light isn't the best. The basement has never been finished. There's a trickle from a crack in the century-old stucco, and through the glass blocks a gray afternoon sunlight seeps in.

So where is it? I can picture it in my mind's eye, its folds and its lettering. Maybe in this pile on the ping-pong table.

Not in the laundry or by the fusebox. In this room we never use?

Fumbling for the light. One bulb illuminates the storage shelves and makes the corner darkness stand out, beckoning, so I'm pushing into this area I never go. The smell is unfamiliar but it's comforting, like cold soup or a guest room blanket, and behind this rack of shelves there's a door.

Narrow steps behind the door, heading down. So dark I can hardly see a thing. How can there be another level? The walls are faintly moist here. I almost believe that it's fallen down the stairs and I'll find it down here, in the dark. Then I forget it and am just exploring.

I have to take out my phone now and shed pallid battery light on the corridor at the base of the stairs. It heads slowly down. Was that a voice from above?

There's a tiny stream on either edge of the corridor, glistening in the phone's light. Each rivulet has left a mineral residue, copper and green, that spells something sinuous. I stumble a little on an outcropping. The path is winding and the roof is getting lower.

Is my phone running low already? How can it be this late? It says this is my last minute of battery life. But I have just enough time to reach that familiar bedside table standing in the rubble and mud.

There it is, waiting on the table.
As fast as I can, I unfold it. I know the sequence.
The sentence is there in the lettering I expected.
At the final flicker I am sure that it says what I thought it would, I am sure that if I'd had time to read it, it would have come as no surprise, I am sure that I was about to be vindicated.
4. The Last

The last time you said "see you later."
The last unphotographed square foot.
The last word in a sentence that stretches indefinitely, as if by uttering it you could postpone anything, as if it could
The last drop.
The last things you'd see as you closed the door on your childhood home if you were able to go back there.
The last opportunity to express a whim before necessity muscles out all frivolity.
The last minute of preparations for the trip.
The last glimpse of the shore.
The last glow of Saturday.
The last thing you think before falling asleep, as thought becomes imagination and imagination becomes hallucination.
The last straw.
The last empty chair on deck.
The last page of your first novel.
The last item in this list.
5. In the wings

I was the only one in the theater, savoring the blend of fountain Coke and stale popcorn, letting the director direct my attention without reflecting, finding myself pleasantly disengaged from the mildly interesting plot, but dutifully listening to the couple’s dialogue as they bantered at the cafe, ignoring the passersby.

Later, on the Manhattan sidewalk, they shove through crowds, shouting at each other. My Coke is already half gone.

Some of the extras look familiar. Are they reusing them? The budget for this film wasn’t the greatest.

I watch from the darkness of the seventh row, left, as the male lead brushes past a redhead woman -- was she one of the extras too?

I’m distracted by her, exchanging bags back in the wings of the film with some other woman. They’re slightly out of focus and the lighting is dim back there. Our male lead leaves and the women have disappeared.

But there they are again, a few minutes later. They’re approaching the female lead on the street. The second extra has bumped into the actress. She’s taking something out of the bag. It’s a revolver. She shoots the main actress in the chest and runs off in the chaos. The film is over.

It’s the final showing of the final day of the run.
I’m the only audience member, the only one I know who has seen the film.
All the other theaters in the cineplex are empty.
No employees are to be found.
I’m alone with my racing memory.
I’m an extra.