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**Guillotine**  
Morton Marcus

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## Morton Marcus

### GUILLOTINE

Doorway without a door. We approach it with everyone pushing at our backs, shouting in our ears, shoving us forward, flies and mosquitoes buzzing around our heads. What nobility we have we leave behind.

The room on the other side looks like the one we're in—full of faces, buildings, clouds, traffic beyond the square—but we don't want to cross *that* threshold.

The advice "Don't look up" comes with a chuckle from the unshaven ruffian who breathes tobacco and onions in our faces, as if it is all a fraternity prank, the one with a bucket of water teetering on the lintel overhead.

We know what's waiting above: God's steel tooth ready to careen from the sky and bite off our heads.

Full length mirror without the glass. We cannot see ourselves, only cheering crowds who look like us, who cheer as we did. And that's the most frightening prospect of all, the world going on without us as if we've never been here, and we'll have to tell our secrets to the worms.

So we approach the doorway, twitching and trembling, and kneel before that other room, poking our heads through to the other side, as if praying or begging indulgence. But suddenly, unexpectedly, we picture ourselves as children on our knees, peeking into the maid's bedroom as she undresses.

That's the biggest joke of all, but we can't turn around to tell anyone. Will we never get serious? Probably not. Besides, our necks are resting so comfortably now in the wooden groove, which seems to have been hollowed especially for us, that we don't care if we go to our graves without giving one more instruction or bit of advice.

And so with faces looking down into a soiled basket like the ones old women carry to market, we take our leave with a final image that brings an idiot cackle to our departing lips—the picture of a head in the woven darkness, bumping among the other vegetables like a cabbage.