

In Code

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for my old colleagues, who write the words of the law

Ours is a stunted tongue,
mostly unmouthed, rarely licked into life.

In it, one may not exclaim,
wonder, or boast. Threats
are common, though. Laughter
is illicit, poetry impossible.

This language mutters its orders
in Miltonic auxiliary verbs,

shall and *shall not*, repeating
the cadences of Leviticus,

nervously listing (1) particulars,
(2) specifics, (3) details, and
(4) cloudy mumblings.

Most utterances are stillborn.
The few that live lie breathless, with folded hands.

We gather them into the volumes
we hope they do not speak.

They bind us tightly, like wounds.

