Over His Sleeping and His Waking

Eric Pankey
was the end of something.
As he moved to the light,
light that would have saved him,
rain filled in the spaces.

OVER HIS SLEEPING AND HIS WAKING

Here, he thinks, was a kingdom. The leaf he crushes
crumbles into dust, woody threads and hard edges.

And the wind that scatters it is the same old wind
that blew before the ruining, that blew over
everything. Over his sleeping and his waking.
What was once a kingdom. Once he believed it all
his own. Each day and night a landmark on a map.
What he had forgotten was like a washed-out road.

Here—beside the splitting trunk of a Chinese elm,
its line of hard bark and wound sap, its weight pulling
itself in two, the skirt of leaves and damp plowed earth
of the earth and grub worm—here, he thinks, I begin.

AS WE FORGIVE THOSE

You’re excused, my father would say.

My father

was last to get up from the dinner table.
When I heard the word I heard its rhyme accused.
All my life I was a child. I waited
for someone to say my name. I stood in lines.
I learned to forgive from those who forgave me.
Was I supposed to forgive those who trespassed,
or my debtors?