

## Three Poems · *Eric Pankey*

### WITHIN A CIRCLE OF RAIN, MY FATHER

He waited for a light  
that might save him. Gray,  
the day spread from salmon  
to gray. The dawn damp smoke,

the sky tipped and spilling  
dark from the center, dark  
blotting the far torn edge  
until the whole day burned

whole. The static of rain  
like scratches that shiver  
white at a film's end, then  
white fills up the blank screen,

that rain surrounding him  
was the end of something.  
And he could see the lace  
which was the beginning

of light through the blue shreds  
of his private circle  
of rain. He could see light  
sway the green-stemmed brush

and drift of bridal veil,  
light catch on the ant-traced  
buds of the peony.  
That rain surrounding him

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?