

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?

I can't remember now which
I said as if part of a song each Sunday.
Trespass was what I did for apples, for fun.
I stole green tomatoes and dropped them from trees.
I crouched behind box junipers, waited,
my bare knees on the brown dried pricklers, bag worms
hanging as thick as the hard blue berries, waited
for a glimpse of someone naked, a crime,
something only I would see and know.

That year
in school I learned the word *omniscient*.
I learned other words as well, but what I loved
were the words that no one would ever really use.
We always owed someone or someone owed us
and that's why we didn't talk about money.
I don't think we ever used the word *debtor*,
except if that's the word we said on Sunday
in that prayer full of such words. *Give us this day*
or instance, as if it weren't already ours.
When I walked in on my parents as they yelled,
they would tell me not to worry, it didn't
concern me.

That's what I thought forgiveness was.
Being excused from something you knew nothing
about. Sometimes I'd wake and hear them talking,
kindly, intimately, with the care one takes
when a baby is asleep in the same room.
Those were nights I'd pray, nights I'd talk aloud
so I wouldn't have to listen to my heart
go about its business.

I knew enough
to pray for something possible. I said *Give us*
this day and when the night passed the day was there.
I walked out beneath the maple that ruled
our house half the day in sunlight, half in shade.
Its shadow swept every inch of what we owned.
When it covered me I knew I'd been forgiven.