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from "someone's dead already"

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Peer reviewed

from *someone's dead already*

Tongo Eisen-Martin

Abstract

Four poems from “someone’s dead already” (Bootstrap Press 2015).

Won't be working class by tomorrow

1.

Capitalists dropped ten tons of barbed wire on my Tuesday shift
We shot back at the chimpanzee pilots for the sport

The contractor has already smoked three cigars, only an hour into
my court appearance shift
my supervisor says he likes the smell. reminds him of when he ran
the streets
and all I remember is we shot back

2.

I am breaking fingers for my sister's bill collectors
Garage
casket
open
All third world parallels kill openly
Breaking my lungs for my sister's rent
Slave quarters glass craftsman
Sculptor of construction dust
I miss Hennessey by midmorning
I miss cigarettes by sun down
I miss murder by inches

Five dollar bills cherish
My days outside
Always behind

3.

Reoccurring cliff
Two blocks up
Along with slavers' paraphernalia
Along with an ordinary pan handler
Along with ethnic parade history
Along with ethnic parade
Along with 13th graders
But let's talk about the fact
That four dead children later

I still don't have a problem with beating you up in front of everybody
Let's talk about the fact that money is death

Down to my last five bucks
—a shoe

10 O'clock political education
—a dream

I got the job
—a blues

two days later
—a cliff

4.

title intersection / a city's beginning and end / everything
talks / except people / masses, baby, masses / industry and heaven
above us / on our faces / like backs / backs like oblivion / look down
here / we will listen to the war stories you cough / we dig war
stories / and December health / we dig masses / hell aint so
bad / where nobody commits treason / or hides face from
neighbors / there's not one cousin down here / so dig the class
loyalty / street fires and world war steam sound cozy / beer label
blankets / and some drugs done somewhere around here / bottle for
bottle / goes left foot and right foot / story for story they
go / December for December / Not one mention of cousins / Just
industry and heaven / Dig the masses / Dig the toothy
oblivion / Where shoulders begin / Where cities end / Where backs
are faces / The title of our dream

Buckets and Bus Stations

1.

Tennessee bound
And Tennessee was bound to do it
Shark to music
It's a pool room in the car
Cigar break

*I told you don't be no more than one woman late again
They killed your best friend for those songs
But I bet they don't get you too*

2.

Sea drifter in blue
Pea coat on miracle
Clear night for my love
Walk on the gulf
Like we been doing our whole life
A god's voice cracks
We only talking about water, baby
How many times you gonna write letters to the city?
How many times I gotta leave you at home?
You know guns don't really talk
And gods only talk to themselves

*I never knew your father
But one drifter to another
I see you never stood a chance*

3.

Tornado pick
Tooth pick for mask
185's gambler
Passed slaver trader' marble
Pass smoke back and forth
To a fork and back
Rec center's crumbling sign
On the back of his knuckles

The man
The myth
The summer
Dust puddle under dirty eyes
Ten numbers to rest
Messed up the cards
A deck of right eyes

I am
–three devils in a joke about a virgin
–worried that too much heaven is possible
–a fan of anxious comics
–waiting behind tornados for food

A Downtown Day near Timid Stray Dogs

My back to rusted tanks
On trains traveling through america's night
Ghost downtown howling *Govern yourselves*

25 stories at most
eye level masters
the last world moves
about pothole business
here
america sits decades dead
calming music
rusted track literature
cousin labor
middle class clothes
grenade pin
—grin and posture
pistol and polite
we shake hands forever, I guess
72 hour stranger
I had her at nod

On a one way sidewalk to everywhere
Wait for me
I'm never more than 15 minutes from home

New York Because I Said So

A day of minutes,
seconds like leaves. Like leaves are disloyal city characters in brittle
congregations. Near shelter dirt and department store cigarette breaks.

Stale Irish brew,
peels the white away from midmorning eyes that are already three
lies awake.
And to make matters worse, our hearts are broken.

Next morning,
our story starts more specific. Hearts don't matter here

Tiled grogginess,
tiling grogginess. A slow flying gutter puddle accompanies a man's
cage walk. Defines his punchline altitude.

This building works hard / This building works the same job for
three generations / This building works as long as epochs produce
money and minstrels / One third of this building does not know it
is a third / It woke up groggy / We want to get high

Imagine meaningless water
Imagine orphans making a pact to never have kids
Imagine going to work
—this is our first sip

Who knew that concrete would play such a big part in ecological
facts and that mid morning eyes would leak surprise and hate
laughter. Overcrowded is the emotion of conspiracy and toy
property rights

There's only two kinds of people in this world:
One kind owes you money

Category rooftops / Capitalism stands flamboyant / In lines that
wrap around water fronts / People pass through / Cadillac
swimmers / And children who walk on water / Category

rooftops / That building means margin / Half block toy
shelf / Gladiator industry / The Nothing business / The
nobody / There's a figure in the window / Why does it always look
nervous

The 5 train has pillow cases
throughout its Franklin Ave.
station / Subway station police
remind me of pillow cases

Soundless playground
—this 3am train—

Childish economics in full self-portrait
enthusiasm

In vulnerable slumps,
we race whistling tracks to some cousin of health. This is your city.
Your underground.

This
anonymously
high floor
became a friend
who doesn't
know me
A writer's
mountain where
lineage collapses
its span into
your girlfriend's
cigarette

Also, where strangers lend me temper and proletariat lunch.

Arms between bricks and
midtown fantasy

A manic border
—sort of back then

Enemies
Will not see each other later
In america's heaven

New York,
Because I said so

About the author

Born in San Francisco, Tongo Eisen-Martin is a movement worker, educator, and poet who has organized against mass incarceration and extra-judicial killing of Black people throughout the United States. He has educated in detention centers from New York's Rikers Island to California's San Quentin State Prison. His work in Rikers Island was featured in the *New York Times*. He was also adjunct faculty at the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University in New York. Subscribing to the Freirian model of education, he designed curricula for oppressed people's education projects from San Francisco to South Africa. His latest curriculum on extrajudicial killing of Black people, *We Charge Genocide Again*, has been used as an educational and organizing tool throughout the country. He uses his craft to create liberated territory wherever he performs and teaches. He recently lived and organized around issues of human rights and self-determination in Jackson, MS.