

Lower-Class Artist Imagines
By Tongo Eisen-Martin

Grip my heart tighter, Lord
Help me write on this sleeve...

like listening to Nina Simone later in life

The poet takes over for his
former self:
The secret to writing poems is
to not deflect.
If you do not know anything
fretted about the color blue,
don't go calling yourself a
child at heart.
If you have never improvised
an elevator ride,
don't go calling yourself in
need of prayer.

Grace be to gang tattoos

a Reagan meeting adjourns and modern plant life begins
along with dry out-of-body insight

strange fake forest in
a poor person's bird atrium

bark around the Mississippi mixtape or
Carceral state mythology of a factory's first Black Chaplin

Rotted food staring at a child
The minor progressions of revolution
drumming Molotov fills
three quarters and a floor stain staring as well

white children selling a child

(I mean I was there the night that
San Francisco disappeared)

Think of me when the sun dies

Half man on scratch paper

Half pickpocket with flailing arms

double fisted

Alabama in my Paris

I am an alcoholic in search of history books

ruining the light rail in search of

history books

(I am limping to poetry)

Along with a caste of haves-adjacent

A slave deck blossoms sweet baby Easter blood

Maybe loss of crossroad

along with unprovable music theory

(the poem turns into absolute political failure)

You know, not for nothing,

the way you all like to blame the devil for every fallen intellectual

every repass fist fight

for every 28 hours in hurricane America

blame him for every ballot burning

for every shallow pot, pan and murder-man

for every government plant, sloppy musician, and federally-flagged artist

for every floorplan of capitalists' emotive geometry

and private school's private anthems

for every kid in a cage

the way you all blame him, man, the devil must be in the sky too

eyes lowered in the land of the blind

a mumbler with a gun/I am the worst

of your weapons, Lord

Won't

you put a

space heater

in my grave

Tongo Eisen-Martin was born in San Francisco. He is the author of *someone's dead already* (Bootstrap Press, 2015), nominated for a California Book Award; and *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* (City Lights, 2017), which received a 2018 American Book Award, a 2018 California Book Award, and was named a 2018 National California Booksellers Association Poetry Book of the Year.