

Welcome

This issue has been a long time coming, and we thank you for rolling with us while we worked to complete “Healing.” To make up for the long wait, this double issue is one of our biggest ever and a proper way to celebrate the healing facilitated by our talented writers. We’re slowly catching up and adapting to the changes in the world of publishing, and we appreciate the grace we received while completing our final decisions, the careful assembly of the order, and the design work done by our Editorial Assistants here at CSU Pueblo.

For “Healing,” we are thrilled to feature photography by Jim Ross—thoughtful shots of coneflowers, roses, thistles, and swallowtails. These images cause us not only to slow down and reflect on the beauty we need, they also show us the sharp parts of ourselves as we see in nature. We are fragile and also guarded when we listen to the landscape, alive around us.

In 2023, we are still reconnecting after lockdown and processing the strangeness of remote work, as seen in the poetry of David Antonio Reyes. We are resting and recovering with Connie Wieneke’s regimen for treating epilepsy, using our rituals to struggle through our mi-graines, and growing stronger in the long year of post-op recovery.

We face grief, anger, and dread with Mary Kay Knief’s “Lost in Space,” a moving poem for a husband with dementia. We cling to memory with our mother’s recipe box and honor family stories of the lean times when they ate elm seeds for sustenance. We stitch ourselves together in time by playing with time ticking down and by speculating how time travel allows us to meet our younger selves. We dream and escape. We personalize Little Red Riding Hood, we save a porcupine by shooing it off the road, and we struggle and dream of playing the rice drum in the Moon Festival.

Healing unfolds the maps of where we have been and where we are going. It could be alongside Fernando Esteban Flores writing where “Spanish rules the paint peeling / paper walls” or Tomie Bitton’s witty essay about being forever stuck in Walmart. It follows the lead of frigate birds, and it walks along the coast to where we can calmly proclaim heaven as a beach and then apologize to the fickle waves. We are forgiving ourselves so we can laugh again without guilt, plant flowers

for the monarchs, relearn the power of verbs, and be nourished in the warmth of outstretched hands.

In the spirit of this theme, we are grateful that we can keep *Pilgrimage* in the world and work on the next steps to rebuild and grow stronger moving forward. We are taking practical steps to improve operations. We are organizing our submissions into new categories and adding readers to improve our response times. We also have plans in motion to connect and grow community. The digital space will help us celebrate our authors that are not in southern Colorado. We have resumed our social media, our website will soon include sample work, and there will be a new option to purchase a digital version of the issue. We will also begin workshops and outreach in our region. Stay tuned with more updates because our hope is that these changes will help us heal, rebuild, and grow.

Again, thank you to the contributors, our readers, and everyone on our staff who make up this community. We hope this issue was worth the wait. ♦

Juan J. Morales
Pueblo, Colorado
June, 2023

Claire Cella

A Strong Enough Feeling

Every apple I've bought recently, be it
Fuji or Honeycrisp or Granny Smith,
comes home to be split open
on the counter, a delirious yearning
to heave off summer's blanket of air
on skin. A need quenched
by the crisp sound of a knife
cleaving something open on wood,
a kind of cold confusion that something
from this earth could be so sweet.
But when I do this recently, the apples
splay out, rock on their undersides
and outsides, and reveal a rotting
brown core. I make this observation
as my eggs finish boiling on the stove.
The timer that tells me so reads, "End."

I come home from that night,
that night that I'm hating, and see
my neighbors in their yard also coming
home, and they ask, "How are you?"
And before I can think I am good.
And before I can think I am lying
and saying so. And we laugh, and it hurts
as I imagine the apples do. I make my way
to my open door, set a fan there to blow in
the coming dusk, its scent, its skin
that feels a thing different than mine. Distracted,
I place it on anything but stable ground,
and it falls, breaking a blade off inside its chest
Not understanding physics, I pick it up
try to turn it on again, it wobbles, unbalanced,

as unwell as a fan can be.

I continue to move out of habit, and walk
to the garden to water the plants.
When I return, my neighbor has left a salsa jar
on my table, clean and carrying
three yellow roses. Why is friendship never
a strong enough feeling? Tell me
it will come again, I say to the trees in my yard
the morning after the night, as they first
flush pink against the coming day, a color too
sweet to stomach, but then wink
back, gold, as if brave, but then return to
just a being here that no one notices.
What makes it cloying like honey is that I don't
trust it will ever come again.
What we're hating is our best effort
of loving ourselves.

Barbara Johnstone
Eating Elm Seeds

Siberian elms survived
the Dust Bowl, dropped
papery disks to cover
the dirt deep as snow.

I tasted.

They were good.

You'll do 'til a better one comes along,
that man told me.

A noxious weed, forest managers said,
Glyphosate.

Excavate.

Burn.

The man said, *I'll kill you if you tell,*
but he paid no heed of me
in the soft shade
where I pulverized the samaras
with a black driveway rock, formed
nuggets I called snickerdoodles
and spice cake. Formed
nuggets I called bread and
my doll Susie and I ate, on ovate leaves
with pointed tips. Dulcet loaves
of earth and grace.

Now the ovens run hotter,
and piñons and junipers die.

Siberian elms still thrive.

With my fingers I soothed deep gashes
in the dark gray bark
of the two elms. They breathed
wildly sometimes. One time--
one time they--
they whooshed me into the

cerulean expanse above their canopy—
Me!

Lorrie Wolfe

Elegy for my Mother's Recipe Box

for Flo

"She was a genius with a pound of butter." – Nancy C.

Scratched black metal, a fevered box of cards.

Three by fives, just stuck in all awry.

You were always cooking on the fly:

You made it look like it was not that hard

And you always seemed to know your way
around without a recipe for a guide.

Now as I scan the disorder inside

I can almost hear your voice, as you say

I need more butter. Here, bring me a stick.

And cinnamon. Here, chop up all these nuts.

You'd brook no arguments, take no ifs or buts.

That's not enough sugar –bring me some quick.

Look. Here's three cards for Pauline Zudick's Plum Cake.

Mom, I miss you. What I'd give to watch you bake.

Matt Daly
Of Reclamation

The Bureau, at the bidding
of farmers far downstream
has kept the flow out of the dam
unnaturally high all summer,

but now that the sugar
beet harvest in what Idaho calls
“The Magic Valley” is over,
and all those meat-red globes

are on their way to factories
somewhere where, by some
process unfamiliar to me,
they are turned into an addictive

white powder among the array
of addictive white substances
(like, for example, greed),
and the stored water is not needed

for producing, for at least this
lean season, anything anyone
anywhere is addicted to, the flow
of what was a cloud before

becoming snow will drop
to one tenth of itself by Tuesday.
I will stand in what is left,
surrounded by gold leaves still

shaking on cottonwoods
or already shaken into dirt

and I will feel myself growing out
of proportion to space and time,

and like a root that an animal
eats, I will still have the potential
for leaves and I will not huddle
or cower or even endure.

Hannah Siciliano

Little Red

Nights when you cry for me
I sleep walk to the nursery
bring you to the rocking chair
to feed and your teeth clench me
fingers tuck into the pockets of my armpit
breath spits out your nostrils
and like a doorway unhinged
I am back in those woods
the wolf's clumped hair
dried blood still shining like
a siren beneath the moon
bread soaked in the ground
my upturned basket abandoned
clutching that damned red hood
rubbing the cotton back and forth
across my lips I shut my eyes
open and I am back here with my
fist clasp on the nursery blanket
the doctors say it is hormonal
say for a woman of my age
how can they know those nights
alone in the woods were centuries
that I am never far from his gaping maw
how can they know I am still just
a girl who didn't listen to her mother
with my own pink tender life
to nurture and grow
I won't sing you a lullaby
won't shield you from what's out
there, only make sure you are armed

Tomie Anne Bitton
We Are Walmart

We are lost, carried in a tide of fumes and midnight snack stops.—"We are Greyhound," Robert Isenberg

We are the shoppers. Our feet ache, and our tummies grumble. We are the cart-pushing consumers leaning on our groceries in checkout lines. The TV looming above the cash register reminds us what we forgot to throw in. The chewing gum, the 5-hour energy drinks, the lighters all spark hope for fresh spunk for our dreary lives. We stare at the row of carts in front of us and at the balloons overhead wishing us well and listen to a child's tantrum two aisles over. All around us, we hear: *Beep. Beep. Beep.*

We are Walmart.

We are the cheapskates. We care more about price than quality, anything to save a penny. We save hundreds every year. We eat Great Value instead of name brand. We parade down rows lined with cans, boxes, bottles—packaging to load the landfill. A clean-up in the vitamin section, buckets to catch ceiling drips near the ketchup shelves. The air smells like day-old shrimp and generic bleach.

We peer at each other. Curve around not to bump into one another. Wait for the lady down the way to decide which bottle of mouthwash she wants. Is no one else in a hurry? A group of roommates huddle to count their change. A couple strung out on something buys a 24-pack of Ramen and a single pair of sunglasses.

We are Walmart; greeted at the front door, asked later if we've found everything all right. "You can save \$21.69 today by applying for a credit card, Ma'am."

A woman in a blue vest asks to see our receipt as we leave. "Would your children like a sticker?" We all know the drill as we walk through automatic doorways.

In San Jose, California the signs say "Hablo español!" A woman in the parking lot sells homemade tamales—\$1.00 each or eight for \$5.00. Tables of tortillas line the entrance, fresh produce positioned just behind.

Ten ears of corn for a buck. Gray-haired men shuck; throw husks back into bins, bagging dozens before leaving.

In Billings, Montana flat-screen televisions create a walkway into the store. The deli and bakery toss salty aromas toward those who enter. A Black Friday sign hangs from the rafters. In Honolulu, Hawaii we find swimsuits with neon pink plumerias or swim trunks splattered in the American flag strategically placed up front. Tour guide pamphlets promising enchanted luaus are offered along with Alohas. Everyone huddles around packages of chocolate-covered nuts, coffee beans to buy in bulk; racks of trinkets, and a spinning stand with postcards. We scratch our heads.

In Oklahoma, college gear takes up half the store. From T-Shirts to golf tees to \$20 shot glasses stamped with our Alma Mater's logo, nothing is overlooked. A young man who's picking out a present for his mother can't decide which scarf to bring home for Christmas. He asks a woman stocking shelves, "Which one do you like best?"

"The black one," she says, bending down to pick up a keychain that has fallen to the floor. She fiddles with one of a dozen or so buttons pinned to her cardigan sweater, one with a buggy-eyed, Santa-capped turkey blurting out the words "Seasons Greetings!"

"Really?" the co-ed asks.

"Yeah," she confirms. She pushes her cart full of returns over to the counter. "It'll go with more of her outfits," she calls back over her shoulder.

We are looking for gifts, things to give away or sell. We are looking for bargains. We are looking to impress. We are looking to fill our hunger. We are the hands that big business relies on, through which it gives, and through which it will take away. And because we are Walmart, we'll always come back for more.

In Salt Lake City, a homeless man huddles out in front of the store smoking cigarettes, asking for spare change. He holds a sign that says "I'm hungry. God Bless You." A picnic table around the side of the building, near the tire and auto center, urges employees to sit and take a break from monotony. In front of them, a banner for Pennzoil blows in the wind. *Dead Battery? Walmart, We've Got You Covered!* Walmart. Our

Savior. Our 24-hour never get a holiday or rest place so others can procrastinate place. We deliver. We guarantee our prices. We'll match everybody else's price place. Keep on coming, people.

In Colorado Springs, a woman offers me unsolicited advice on baby formula, diapers. Parent's Choice is just as good as Similac and Pampers. Her cart, neatly organized, contains organic, sugar-free products stacked below her well-behaved baby who is sitting in a billowy blanket made especially for kids in shopping carts. No junk food. "No touching," she whispers to her bow-adorned 18-month-old.

She says, "I can't stand going to the old Walmart across town anymore. I drive an extra ten minutes because of the cleanliness of this Walmart. I'm not afraid to get out of my car either if you know what I mean. The other day I read in the newspaper that a woman was assaulted over there. Did you hear about that? What is this world coming to? When I visited my brother in Texas he said he witnessed a hit-and-run in his Walmart parking lot. The man just drove off after backing into somebody else's truck. Can you believe it?"

She says, "I only come here because I know I save money. I can buy the same stuff as any other grocery store. I can get everything in one place, too. I know people who won't set foot in a Walmart. Others who call it "Wally World" or a place where only the obese go to shop. Die. Someday I'll only shop at SaveMart or Whole Foods or Target."

I've never seen a Walmart this new and not busy. No lines at the checkout. An employee directs traffic to those rows with their lights on. "Number 4 is open," she says and smiles at me. As I walk past and grab a Starbucks bottle from the mini fridge on the way to pay, I see the woman from the baby aisle about to leave the store. Her bag of dog food at the bottom of her cart, ready to fall off. She stops to push it back on with her foot. She looks over to see me watching. "See you next week!" she shouts across the store at me, waving. I raise my hand to wave back, feel guilty about the sweetened coffee in my other hand.

We are Walmart, and we have no boundaries. We cater to all. In Boise, Idaho the assisted living complex drops its people off at Walmart on the 1st and the 15th of the month. Some borrow a scooter to pile their fixed-income purchases into tiny baskets. They linger at the pharmacy.

In Tucson, Arizona the migrant workers visit at the end of the month. They come close to midnight with sore backs and swollen fingers. Several children in tow. Their purchases take a few extra minutes. A few more steps in the process to calculate WIC checks and communicate in a foreign language.

In Portland, Oregon a gang of blonde-headed teenagers with dreadlocks pulled back into bandannas set up early outside the storefront to sell their paintings, handmade jewelry, or street photography. A band of girl scouts takes their places after school lets out. An assembly of Amish arrives in Pennsylvania to pick up their bulk items that were not available through mail order. They appreciate the low prices and large quantities the superstore offers. The inexpensive clothing. Some arrive in Amish taxi vans or park their buggy in provided horse stalls. In Arlington, Virginia men in suits and ties stop at Walmart on their way home from work. They take the Metro from Grand Central or the National Mall or Georgetown. Every direction passes a Walmart. Walmart. Always on your route. Any time of day or night we are Walmart. We feed America. Wherever you roam, Walmart welcomes you.

Walmart becomes the topic of discussion at a 4th of July swim party in Sacramento. My best friend and her husband about to leave to go grab more grub jokingly say, "We love to go to Walmart together. You never know what you'll find. The kind of people there. So crazy. It's so fun to people-watch."

I do not know what to say. We sit in silence for a minute. I sip my wine. I look out the window to see the kids jumping on the trampoline, one in the middle surrounded by the others as they're about to play *crack the egg*.

"Last time we were there," my friend says to me and to her husband, "one woman could barely walk straight. She was standing in front of the tortilla chips staring into space. Just staring. At nothing. We picked out our pretzels and continued on shopping. When we came back around we noticed she was still standing in front of the tortilla chips. She must have been there for at least 10 minutes. It was so funny."

I sit quietly. Say nothing. My wine glass empty. My friend pours me more wine, empties the bottle.

“Crazy,” she says. “That’s what they are. Crazy. Does anybody want to join us in the fun? Come on, she says to her husband, I wonder what kind of crazy we’ll get to see this time?” They leave. Their laughter trails behind them and then announces their return an hour later. Their white plastic bags strewn on the kitchen floor make crinkling noises as they rehash another Walmart adventure.

We are my friend. We crowd together. We laugh about Walmart. We laugh at people who shop at Walmart. We go to Walmart although we don’t want to. We keep quiet. We hope for the days when we don’t have to shop at Walmart. We donate to the skyscrapers, pay homage to the altars. We drive by and forget. We stuff our faces with synthetic and faux. We try to fit in. We hide. “Hey, does anybody want to see crazy? Come with us!” We are America’s prosperity. Our wardrobes and toys come from China. We throw our toxins in our seas. We are the Walmart tractor-trailers barreling down I-25, avoiding any penalty. We speed through boarded-up Main Street to unload our shit at Walmart at the east and west ends of town. We are at the edge of our cities. Our communities separated. Painted up to look like wealth. We are consuming our humanity.

I think of the mother shopping with her beautiful child. I think of my children bouncing away outside. I think of my air-conditioned home and well-fitting shoes and the food I throw away from my fridge each week. I see myself giving more. Recycling more. Yet, I see myself always shopping at Walmart.

We are shoppers. We are customers. We are gathering together in a place where the lights are always on. Where we believe there will always be more. Because we are Walmart, and we can never have enough.

Because we are Walmart, and we can never have enough. ♦

Hisham Bustani

Time Difference

(Translated by Thoraya El-Rayyes)

I. Waiting for 0.01 seconds to lapse

1

In her time zone, it is now eight minutes past midnight.

My world is one hour later than the actual time, and it never arrives. I wait for it, on a chair in the garden: now, she is going to send me a message but my phone is lying dead next to me. In a little while – I tell myself – her name will appear in my inbox, but letters fall without forming her name.

Without arriving. They never left to begin with, for them to arrive.

I leave myself in the garden chair, and go for a short walk. Nothing happens. Nothing at all. Me and the man waiting resemble each other. I circle him, contemplate him.

In the past, when I got hit by a car and hovered outside my body, I saw – from above – that body flung onto the asphalt, unmoving. And I saw those who gathered around him, and the ambulance, and the splattered blood.

Now, this body is not like that other. I am not watching myself from afar. That was me, and I am me: unseparated. A mirror of time is the translucent barrier between us. Time that is equivalent to precisely, exactly, one hour. One hour.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

2

An hour is sixty minutes, and a minute is sixty seconds, and a second is split into infinite segments, and during that time, momentous events occur.

The universe exploded and expanded a million, million, million, million, million times during 0.01 seconds, and here I am sitting in that endless hour between a Beast of Doubt and a Beast of Waiting.

A distant heat pierces my eyes. I open them quickly: the sunrays of noon strike my pupils and I do not see a thing. It is now eight minutes past noon in her time zone, and my sun has started to descend. I am still alive but I am dying. I will join my phone that does not ring.

3

A few days ago, she told me that her lips had fornicated with someone else. That their red snakes had embraced as they went in and out of the two caves fitted together. Maybe he had licked her lips and held the lower one of them with his teeth, sucking it like I do to her. "Only for a couple of minutes..." she said, but I remember that the entire universe had formed in those 0.01 damn seconds. How many 0.01 seconds are there in two minutes?

4

There is a sound muddying the purity of my silence.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

The walls are bare, and there is nothing under the couches.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

I turn the drawers upside down, I root through the closets, I scatter the books.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

To the toolbox then. I lay myself out on the kitchen table and begin to saw a straight opening in my forehead, inserting a screwdriver and slanting it once, twice, three times – and the two halves separate. The sound becomes clear: Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

I take the clock out and hang it over the bed, then sit and sift through books of poetry and philosophy, looking for that phrase about memory remaining as an echo in the heads of the defeated, but I do not find it.

5

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

She asks me: Then what?

I, too, am awaiting the explosion.

II. Descending into the rocky abyss

New Years' Eve had turned old, and so I awoke from the glasses of vodka that had played with my head to find a hand playing with my hair. It's her again. I used to know her, she visited me last New Years' Eve. She spends those decisive moments with me, between sobering up and the break of morning, then disappears.

"I don't have anywhere to stay."

I knew she would say that sentence and then – enchanted – I would be drawn along, out the bar door behind her.

The faint drizzle falling from the miserly sky made us hurry a little. Where will I find a pharmacy open at this hour? My penis, about-to-become-erect, was occupying my thoughts. And the girl, was anonymous – I do not know her name and only see her at this particular time of year. I had to be careful. Where will I find an open pharmacy?

We get to the car, I opened the door for her and she stepped in like a queen and smiled, then we drove along a path covered in stones. As far as I know, we are in the city. A city that has a name – Amman – whose streets are paved with asphalt and covered in holes and speed bumps. The stones were new.

There was no one in the street except for us, and the street was narrowing, constricting, besieging us from every direction as if we were moving in a tunnel. We are in a tunnel, and the car is panting and stumbling and choking.

Amman, city of stairs. This thought returned to me when our path ended in stairs.

“Alright, let’s go down....”

I knew she would say that sentence then, bewitched, I would be drawn along out the car door after her.

Hop... hop... hop... She started to jump down. And what I saw was no ordinary stairway: every stair was lower than the one before it by the height of a single person. Every stair was suspended in the air like a floating platform surrounded by nothing. There was a lone railing at the right of the stairs, but: if the first stair was attached to the railing, then the next would be three people wide away from it, then the distance would alternate until the end. Beneath the stairs was an abyss embellished with protruding rocks, ensuring that a fall would not be a contemplative experience or one that was painful merely because it was terrifying.

Hop... hop... hop... Here she is jumping like a mountain goat, like a child playing hopscotch in front of the house. As for me, the vodka in my head tells me: don’t do it.

I assure myself that I am rational, and that my life is more valuable than a woman who suddenly appears to me once a year then disappears. More valuable than a penis wrapped in a condom, more valuable than the magic drawing me along by my shirt collar. That is what I said, and when I decided to listen to myself, people appeared behind me walking towards the stairs with heavy steps and a light wind started to blow, sending plastic bags and newspaper sheets flying.

The arch-backed old woman was able to jump on to the first stair by leaning against the railing but her next jump became impossible so she got stranded.

The Egyptian labourer – taken with his own agility – jumped one stair, then another, then another, then was betrayed by a newspaper sheet stuck on the edge of a stair that was far from the railing. Under it was empty space and he fell in. From him came the sound of three screams after three collisions, so that my heart turned into a vast room with horrifying echoes ricocheting off its walls.

As for her, she beckoned me to come along. She had reached

somewhere around the middle of the stairs, while at the bottom of the stairs, a shop appeared lit up with the logo of a snake and chalice. It too beckoned me to come along.

The old woman sat on the first stair, spread out her sheet and started to beg. The New Years' Woman continued her descent and disappeared. The stones turned back into holes in the street, and as for me, a noise of some sort is muddying the purity of my silence:

Tick

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

The hands of the clock move towards me with sharp nails, ready to kill. I am between the pincers of Tariq bin Ziyad: the stairs of the abyss before me, and the clawed fingers of time behind me. There is nothing for me but a collision.

The hands of time.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

She asks me: Then what?

I, too, am awaiting the explosion.

III. The inevitable age of sand

A sea of sand surrounds me. I cannot see its individual grains and my hands cannot push aside its clumps.

The tide of this sea attacks sometimes when I am sitting on the balcony, turning a demitasse of coffee and finding shapes on its inside walls. There, too, I see sand surrounding me and I suffocate though I know I am sitting on the balcony watching cars and smelling their exhaust fumes.

It might not be sand. It might be exhaust fumes that surround me. It might be the grounds of coffee gathered in my cup that surround me. It might be the rays of the sun condensed into granules of light that surround me.

There is someone else with me. Is that also me? Could it be that I am sitting with myself? But the other person sits in the opposite chair, puts one leg over the other and jiggles the first. Could it be me? I don't know. The olive tree opposite our house is laughing at me/us, so she hits it – the woman standing under it with a stick. Then I hear the groan of the olive tree as its fruits fall on pieces of cloth made to gather all that pain.

Next to it, I hear another olive tree in pain. Its screams are a few more fruits falling on a piece of cloth in the street. Do you hear it like I do, you sitting opposite me in the chair on the balcony? They will compress those screams in glass jars with salt and water.

Salt.

Sand.

Coffee.

Exhaust fumes.

Smoke.

And we all get pickled in that glass jar.

I am going to tell him what I think of him. Him, sitting opposite me in the chair on the balcony. I don't know if he will like what I am going to say. He is not that important. He can go to hell. Who said I am capable of feeling anything towards another thing? But his presence terrifies me, awakens in me that particular instinct: survival. Does he want to kill me? Does he want to crush me? Will he swiftly bring his shoe down on my head? Slowly, I started to creep along the wall, then started to crawl.

Ah, he has gone. But I am still pulling myself along the floor and have become convinced that the ceiling of the world is right above my head. When I raise my arms, they collide with the ceiling. It pains me that I am confined in that narrow space which is as tall as I am. I am short, but nevertheless my head keeps colliding with the ceiling of the world when I try to stand up.

I tried to push it. To lift it. It would not budge but dropped towards me, cramming me in even more. Anger will not do me any good now as I will be crushed between sky and earth and in that narrow space – shrink, becoming shorter.

A clock is ticking somewhere, every movement of its arm makes me feel my height being pressed down. I will return to my bed of sand, I

know it will swallow me and that this warm vortex will take me below.
But at least my height will stay as it is, or even increase a little.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

It is a sand hourglass. It is not supposed to make noise. But – oh, misery – here, everything is possible.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

She asks me: Then what?

I, too, am awaiting the explosion.

IV. At the station

So, we have to die here... as we wait for a country that does not arrive.

A country? It is you who names the country. You who blows the spirit into it. You who fashions it into a pillow for your head and a mattress for your body.

I tried. I grasped handfuls of earth and smelled it. I played hide-and-seek with the neighbours' children. I visited my grandmother every week – she used to make me cake. All of that didn't mean a thing. And there, where there are no children, grandmothers or earth, it also did not mean a thing to me. My real homeland is: waiting.

Listen: I was born in a lemon tree. Can you believe it? I mean that my first memory was between its branches, and they told me that after my first year they dripped lemon in my mouth. 'These countries melt iron, so how about what they do to people?' My father used to say, and squeeze the sour liquid, passing it to me. That is why my skin thickened and I stopped complaining.

You listen: There is a sun that sets, and there is a man standing inside a plate of mountains – he is me. One of them poured soup over my head. One of them shot at me, and many stabbed me in the back. Look at it, riddled with holes like a sieve. I hear the melody of a funeral. The bugle call of last return. Do you remember it? They used to play it as The Leader watered The Tree of Life, accompanied by wind instruments through which ran the breath of a bunch of clowns. Maybe one of them took a piss in the gold-plated watering jug. Listen, don't talk to me about

sour lemons and thick skin. My hand is a crystal cup, and my mind is a time-bomb.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Can you hear it?

Then what are you waiting for?

I think the situation has become clear. I am awaiting the explosion. ♦

Endnotes:

Tariq bin Ziyad was an Islamic military commander during the time of the Umayyad Empire. Upon the arrival of his troops on the shore of the Iberian peninsula as part of the Umayyad effort to conquer Spain, it is said that he burned his ships and in a speech to his soldiers said "Where is there to escape? Behind you is the sea, and before you the enemy. There is nothing for you but steadfastness and patience." Gibraltar (Jabal Tariq) was named after him (translator's note).

In Middle Eastern tradition, the patterns of coffee grounds left in a cup are used to predict fortunes (translator's note).