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POETRY | FALL 2016

## Sovereign and Severe

By Woods Nash

*From Moshi, Tanzania*

Dawn arrived with an onrush  
of vomit and antibiotic in my butt,  
which stung like death.

And I slept, slept sluggishly

through a morning language lesson,  
beyond the ripe avocados of lunch,  
and past an afternoon sliver  
of carrot cake severed from its home

in American Café. And still I  
slumbered like sawdust in the shed  
while someone else tugged on gloves  
and clipped the novel top of the hedge.

Nor were they my hands that lit  
candles in the evening. I kept to my  
sleeping and could not be roused  
for even a sip of tea or pinch of bread

before the others went to bed.  
It must have been 3 a.m. when a pipe  
burst in the kitchen and sent its  
steady gush sliding for the slump

of my bunk. And I awoke like a ghost,  
surprised to find the slick tiles awash  
with papery plankton—journal jetsam  
inking like a dead squid—

and my steps in the tepid water  
no longer aloft on the topography  
of sentences, but sounding  
mere splashes of *loss, loss, loss*.

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