

First Run of 2018 and other poems...

By James Croal Jackson

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes:

Who? Other than a poet, would write about a toothache rather than have it fixed? Jackson is a dear soul. I only know this because he keeps resubmitting his work; but he remains as good or better than most taken on the fly...still he persists, and a fine candidate for a guest /guessed / ghost poet editor. 'Surry down to [his] stoned soul picnic' It's Jackson...I only write in two dimensions—paper and print... But he doesn't... "charred remnants / your ghosts live" Don't dare to miss 'Love in the Time of Snapchat' or 'Autumn' either...HS (Spacing is poet's own.)

First Run of 2018

Mid-June. Don't judge.

The list of ways to better
myself always melts off
the tongue: be grateful, eat
carrots, exercise. Period.

Used to be I ran for courtship
but now I think how settled I sound,
gliding over the sidewalk's grass clippings,
a product of suburban domestication.

Stones jangle in my stomach
as they do at the start
of each new thing: I'm leaving
this city, finally— magenta

in the sunset peeking out
from possible storm clouds.

It rained earlier. And at the end
of my route I'll be a lake
packing for the move. Boxes

to open later— memories

of transformation, every
day running from
the younger self to now.

Viola

In the grass, at the top of a steep hill
off Route 28, a viola lays in open case.

Panes rattle from the wind, cold
shivers up and down the spine

of the landscape, a cartography
lacking names of streets I know

I walk each day without
any kind of passion.

The Lion Takes Pride at the Salon

To have a mane
like the lion—
long, luscious,
and fertile.
Instead
I roam
the countryside
with black carpet
of hair. I
could not sleep
last night
between
car windows,
cracked-open,
in the void
separating
the grasslands
and savannahs,
summer air
a suffocation.
At least
I still look
enough
like myself

to pass
for myself.
In Los Angeles
I was vulnerable
to indifferent
eyes, took shit
personally
when I should
have dug
my claws
into the sand,
said *I look
enough
like myself.*

Rural Restlessness

Now, when I am shackled in my mother's home
in the middle of the woods, with nothing to do

but write & fuck & consume, especially the day
after Thanksgiving, when not frigid enough to stay

inside forever but it *is* frigid, I want to roam
what seems the unattainable world, missing

the skyscrapers I hate & the open seasons over
Pittsburgh & the rows of rowdy bars I get wild in.

I want to drive my Ford Fiesta up the hill in shadow
& never come back down, accelerate to a hundred

and become the blur of pines, windows
down, forest mornings so thick with unease

I want to be shackled by trees & serve
the unattainable world the oxygen it lacks.

July 4th, 2019

We cook corn over the mountains—
all are doomed. Smoke billows
from grill to everlasting wildness.
I take a pan and season trees
with what I deem appropriate:
water, oil, roots. I bring
my shovel and dig
a deep hole for the world.

This Morning You Texted Me

Years ago there was a normalcy
we documented. The theater

rife with real life. Now
the beacon: a speck

of light on an electronic
device. So cyborg. Brain connected

to a netherworld of litigious
desire, purple forest of thirst

in the leaves. I am allergic
to attachment, instead a soft clay

to be passed
on the highway, tires

roaring toward
a familiar entryway.

Small-Town Comedian

maroon cardigan against brick—
I fade into the city's
aging architecture. chameleon
piled on comedians,
a mountain of forced laughter.
haven't found success
outside my tiny town, a steady
hand to click a shutter
to capture a memory, as bland
as they were, just few
in the crowd staring vacantly
at nervous laughter
that filled small stages, how
the water glass steady
on the stool began to tremble
as I lifted it to drink,
how thirsty one can be for a
reaction, how blank
faces stamp eyelids, present
still with closed eyes

trying to impress you

trying to impress you through stained
window you are more cat the way
you watch the world & react a hunter
I am more insect so full my own buzzing
an *artist* I take mustard splotches on glass
& call it canvas but I show you &
see your eyes already bumblebee

Poetry Break

I attempt to translate the goo in my brain into something both palatable and relatable whilst contemplating my grim employment prospects. Zigzag, zigzag go the roads in a city I never expected to inhabit. Pittsburgh's hills are steep. I expect at a certain acceleration at an erroneous angle my Ford Fiesta will slow-motion backflip and scrape the top side metal against the gravel and I'll drop to where I started. You ever read Catch-22? I keep picturing the pointlessness of the flying. The missions, day-to-day. Figure eights inside the clouds and never further. I can't with supervisors. Hierarchy, don't tell me what to do. I will, though. Mop, drive, fetch, catch, *good little doggy*. I can barely keep my tongue in mouth. Can barely control my saliva.

Why the Butterflies

just a little simple contact
inconsequential fist bump
against the knuckle of

your silver bling fingers
the rain has ceased
underneath this bridge

and you polish your new
tattoo of blue butterfly wings
you say the ink is peeling off

and I get it how something
beautiful can quickly turn
into blears of dark how long

it took to learn you to get
the rhythm of you we have
been cruising through the

busy streets of Pittsburgh
in constant contact swerving
to avoid listless walkers

and even that I understand
how I wander through the
world underneath the cig

smoke sky not caring that
the secondhand will kill
me when I choose to inhale

THE POET SPEAKS: *I am a little obsessed with the retention of memories. Poetry, for me, serves in the way journaling used to: personal accounts of my life that will always somehow be meaningful for me, and depictions of my life in that moment. In that way, my poems are my skin: flecks of remembrance and perception that have floated off into the river, landing— hopefully— on someone else's shore.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: *James Croal Jackson (he/him) is a Filipino-American poet. He has a chapbook, *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017), and poems in *DASH*, *Capsule Stories*, and*

Ghost City Review. He edits The Mantle Poetry (themantlepoetry.com). Currently, he works in film production in Pittsburgh, PA. (jimjakk.com)