

# 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 4<sup>th</sup>, 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](http://themantlepoetry.com)). Currently, he works in film production in Pittsburgh, PA. ([jimjakk.com](http://jimjakk.com))*