

HOOD VACATIONS

Michal “MJ” Jones



For my family:

My mother, the writer.

My Pops and two brothers, the rhythm section.

My son, the heartchild.

Contents

i. goings

| | |
|---|----|
| Gone | 3 |
| At the San Pablo & 34th Ave Filling Station | 4 |
| And Everything Nice | 5 |
| Rita's on Stenton | 7 |
| 1998 | 9 |
| Invocation | 10 |
| "That and 52 cents will buy you a cup of coffee." | 11 |
| Mama's Weight | 12 |
| In the Wake of a Transfer | 13 |
| In the Mitten's Jaw | 15 |
| All Terrain Armored Transport (AT-ATs) | 16 |
| Praying Mantis | 18 |
| Jazz Crusaders | 19 |
| The Summer My Cousin Stops Playing With Me | 20 |
| Safe Passage | 21 |
| Golden Oreo | 22 |
| Palimpsest, Urban | 23 |
| Popular Poisons | 24 |
| Praying Mantis Is Remarried | 25 |
| The Question Is: | 26 |
| Dove | 28 |

ii. channelings.

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Chambers | 33 |
| Channelings | 34 |

iii. comings.

| | |
|--|----|
| Turnstiles | 43 |
| Unnamed | 44 |
| ALIVE: The Simple Acronym That May Save Your Black Child's Life! | 45 |
| When fam says he could never be Trayvon cuz he knows better— | 49 |
| Embrace | 50 |
| The cashier has a thing for Black girls | 51 |
| “I Always Wanted to Bang a Black Boi” | 53 |
| Compensation | 54 |
| Record of Birth | 55 |
| Nature Nurture | 57 |
| Role Reversal | 59 |
| Blemish | 60 |
| Prequel, Saturn's | 61 |
| What do you encounter in the void? | 63 |
| Skyward & Yawn | 64 |
| This Poet | 68 |
| Touch Me Not | 69 |
| Incise | 70 |
| Three Hearts | 72 |
| Pandemic Ode: A Partial Prayer | 73 |
| | |
| Acknowledgements | 75 |

i. goings

Gone

after Arisa White

We believe we are scarce. We believe
unknowing. I wake unafraid embracing—you
have seen the silver screen fall. We fight, are
star-gazing its might, race into dusk the
arid space. Gave it my best shot at most
disgruntled shrug at least. We were mighty beautiful
once, in golden dust. I rub this love a sacred thing,
penance for our despair. I believe we are scarce, that
we sum up holes in the whole of what happened.

At the San Pablo & 34th Ave Filling Station

Black folk scream at each other—
off some poison we swallowed to
bring back rainbow soap colors.

It shatters my psyche
to a ragged rattled breath,
sets my teeth on edge,
makes me squeeze the nozzle
that much harder.

Pumping gas wasn't always a trigger.

On pit stops toward Philly, we kids hopped out
to stretch our daddylong legs, got high
off gasoline fumes, stuffed faces
with beef jerky & pork rinds
greasing thick petroleum on our lips—

On special days we'd go through carwashes.
Pops became a pirate
and the huge tentacles
scrubbing down the car's sides
lathered Leviathans
we raised blades to.
And there'd be screaming.

Tear-streaked laughter & *Lemonheads*.

That soursweet.

And Everything Nice

after Wanda Coleman

Before we warred
there was sweet.

We would sneak the stuff—
our saccharine secret—

somehow sure it made us sinners.
It started at four (or sometime before):

Slurping of Log Cabin syrup
right down from its cap,

Brother & I howling. Passed it back and
forth on Saturday mornings. We'd

rocket across grasshopper green yard
til fuel burnt up & needed

re-stocking. We sweetened unnatural
places: Brown rice n chicken,

Kraft mac n cheese,
or guzzled it straight no chaser,

let grains dissolve in
gluttonous caverns.

Stirred six cups into Kool-Aid pitchers.
Before-during-after we learned

of bitterness, of absence,
we slammed sugar unsupervised.

Knew nothing of what
too much could do to our

insatiable bodies. Knew nothing
of restraint. Knew nothing of life's

undoing. But we knew enough
to keep this secret sacred &

beneath the kitchen table.

Rita's on Stenton

*“What you know about struggle? Bout real shit?
You take hood vacations, you don't stay there.”*

I am nine, caramelized in summer's time,
cradled in our van, en route to Philly.
Brother and I, chestnut and beige, sleep deep
while the night sky blues to pale morning.
We wake in Ohio, turnpike in sight,
eager and saving our breaths for wishes.
Up front, Pops rocks to *Heartbeat Reggae Now*,
drums the steering wheel, thrumming hot leather,
his rearview gaze concerts its camouflage.

*“Suburb soft, high yelluh bougie behind.
Haven't had to work for nothin, have you?”*

Pops cruises through tumultuating earth,
tunnel then green, tunnel then falling rocks,
until hills fall flat as his promises.
We pummel old man with “*are-we-there-yets*,”
Pops, cool and sunglasses, trades tracks to Jilly,
who asks if he remembers loving her.
Silent stoic, he rolls past rowhomes.
Ivy swallows red bricks, drapes down friezes,
white van a golf ball against verdant shrubs.

The car slows, our heartbeats quicken to gold.
We do not pause for a dawdling Pops—
we bolt, slap happy, to grammama's door.
We jump up high, beating chests, buzzing bells,
hot sand overflowing our thin-skin frames.
My sweet giraffe of a cousin appears,
I fling my arms around his bag of bones.
I straddle-dance the archway, swivel back,
and see Pops still there.

*“Took a beatin to get y’all what you got.
You understand? I’m takin a beatin.”*

He folds his cinnamon hands, looks misplaced—
like a praying mantis in wooder ice—

with his back to the hood.

1998

It's 1998. As far as I know,
body parts grow
from bean sprouts.
I plant one deep inside myself
and hydrate it in Sunday afternoon bathwaters,
pray for extensions outside my self
to formulate. Big Bang, sprout up,
finally make me make sense.

The caterpillar I grow in
an emptied Welch's grape bottle
never leaves its chrysalis,
caught between phases.
My daddy leaves, moves out and on.
And the appendage does not grow,
stays mythical, a mystery.

And just like that—
I do not believe in magic.