

SELECTIONS FROM
HOLDING COMPANY

Major Jackson

BEDRAGGLED

All afternoon, plunging deeper and deeper.
I deplete myself noiselessly. The closet-mirror
debuts again its silent film of cap-sized ships.
She sees me. I see her. We wave our first world premiere.
Don't look for father here whose kamikaze smile,
for all you know, is more Samaritan than
an Adirondack above the sea. How wonder-struck
I seem draping my ballerina completing
her soprano bellow. What one feels
when light rises from everywhere.

BEREFT

Seemingly without consequence, we're all here,
a tribunal of insomniacs. I'm the one leaping,
a dolphin catching treats. The room smells
of sand-crusting seaweed. In a single evening, soft women
have moved like wind-blown clouds over my dark body.
Your wife is not at home but hosting this spell
of fine light slanting through poplars outside
a bedroom window. Language died the moment
desire disrobed and bodies made fine striations
of solar flares. And while you sleep, a mouse
sniffs its snout along a baseboard floor.

LYING

Such a dislike for transparency, he'd overdid
himself, monitoring caves. True enough,
he wanted a row of filaments inside like Times Square.
The sockets were dead. To live freely
presages danger in a democracy: major irony.
Such a gift he possessed of reading facial bones,
even in the dark. Hearts placed in a dream
over his city, each encounter an exercise in touch ups.
In every house, portraits abound. Last night,
he fell asleep listening to sad people sing.

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MORE FEELING

How did I come to make a crisis of the body?
I could give your palace more glass shine,
undreaming the sea from the mountains.
Had I possessed the poise to possess
my faraway thirst for mornings. I'm glum.
Your sportive flesh in the empire of blab
is the latest guy running his trendy tongue
as if every evening your body beneath his snarl.
Over our shoulders, our bodies fall — the lamps.
For I was born, too, in the muted winter of History.

FAR OUT WEST

We spoke Stalin and Amin to the point of tears,
a time when I thought cruelty explained
everything: Which of us asked for directions?
We longed for the painted eyelids of dowagers in Macy's.
I coughed badly that month in stairwells.
Storm clouds passed over the curbs of my ribs.
I walked from gallery to gallery sampling various delicacies.
Canvasses of lemon tisane & I thought of you.
O, the allure of remorseful despots! & I thought of you.
I no longer want this weather on my breath.

NARCISSUS

Some years ago I recall someone paid attention,
like when an invalid half rises, gripping an armchair—
the street captains and priests busy clicking latches.
The homeless withdrew their luxuries. At night,
distant highways whispered long sighs to the world.

How many hours have I spent crushing mangrove leaves,
turning my face to the unbearable grandeur of this heat-soaked sky? When I spun
around, I felt suddenly filled with birds.
Still, I returned, wallowing in the brothels of myself.
I thought of my life, caressing more ruins.

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ROOF OF THE WORLD

I live on the roof of the world among the aerial
simulacra of Things, among the faded: old tennis shoes,
vanished baseballs, heartbreak gritted with dirt. My mind
alights like lightning in a cloud. I'm networked
beholding electric wires and church spires.
I lean forward and peer at the suffering below—
Sartre said: man is condemned to be free.
I believe in the dead who claim to believe in me—
says, too, the missing and forgotten. Day darkens
on. I hear our prayers rising. I sing to you, now.

THINKING OF LUCRETIUS

I follow her to the floor of a canvas,
to bonfires at daybreak, to highways of scenic
strangeness, to calla lilies alive in courtyards of pain,
past fathers marching in mud, silence, and rain,
to battlefields and fissures in earth, beyond
baroque façades and that rapt spell of widening voices
arguing with the sea. Then, and only then, do our shadows
commence their deep communion, and a summer evening
of stars yawns its bare shimmering. We stare down
the arson in us with a ceiling fan turning above.

THE GIANT SWING ENDING IN A SPLIT

Why was I ashamed to be seen on the waterfront
with her? We both felt the past slip
from our shoulders, rose-lipped and listening to
jet engines Doppler across the night.
Wasn't I also me when I lay with her?
Maybe frighteningly more. My sleepsmile
and low whispers hers, too. O,
delicious agony, I'm divided right
to my body's historic wharf. I only trust the sweat
salting down my back her fingernail tracks.

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EXQUISITE MINUTES

When we are separated on two train platforms:
The other's antithesis for the 7:20 Express,
think of it as some angel-liberating moment
sans the putrid swoosh of subway air.
The radio struggles to neaten its long wave ban.
Its susceptibility to seraphic interference
reveals the white fractures of our bare intelligence.
Yet some of us arrive capable of reading
the clanks of tracks, lights in a tunnel,
the arrival of birds in underground channels.

YOU WHO CARRY DAYLIGHT ON YOUR FACE

You, who carry daylight on your face
the best of us all, the sky is lust,
and stills my zippered spine. Observe my envy
of the sea where you wade, its surface
like an afternoon of swordplay.
You shun the lips of infants disguised as men
Philosophers cherish the mirrors where you
quickly collect yourself. The neighbors
know your comings and goings, but the syntax
of your smiles is revealed only to little children.

HEAVEN GOES ONLINE

When the sidewalk's eyes were weeping
When snowflakes burst from the pillows
As the mayor talked from the bottlecaps of his ears
& the old women dusted off their beauty marks
When the graffiti artist's hand became a saffron scarf
When the breeze flashed its grilled teeth
& the sun torched the forest to a moon
When sad Amelia pierced the clouds in her veins
When my lips gathered at the beaches of your lips
& my tongue at the on-ramp of your spine

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AT THE CLUB

Just then I saw her inhabiting me and inhabiting me
from other moorings of her own molding.
I moved like an island bequeath to the forlorn.
The way light splashed across her nose
said she bore no razors in her sushi but
I had not the yoga to pour myself into one ocean
and lacked courage to unzip the skin of prisons
prized by the scarred and those who know
only how to breathe with their back to the horizon,
a vainglorious solo. She gave her license away in the dark.

Major Jackson is the author of three collections of poetry: *Holding Company* (2010, Norton); *Hoops* (2006, Norton); and *Leaving Saturn* (2002, University of Georgia Press), which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has published poems and essays in *Agni* , *American Poetry Review* , *Best American Poetry* , *Boston Review* , *The New Yorker* , *The Paris Review* , *Poetry* , *Tin House* , and other fine, literary periodicals. He is a recipient of a Pushcart Prize, a Whiting Writers' Award and has been honored by the Pew Fellowship in the Arts and the Witter Bynner Foundation in conjunction with the Library of Congress. This spring, he is the Sidney Harman Writer-in-Residence at Baruch College. He has taught in the graduate MFA programs at Columbia University and New York University. He lives in Burlington, Vermont, where he is the Richard Dennis Green and Gold Professor at University of Vermont. He serves as the Poetry Editor of the *Harvard Review* .