

# REVERSE VOYAGE

## MAJOR JACKSON

### 1

My midway journey, my emancipated eyes  
like runaways, exposed, and the row homes stacked again,  
colorless, drab LEGO blocks, I come  
back to unlit alleys, avenues in sheathes of grit  
and utility wires like veins stitched to power supplies  
buzzing above a different kind of hum.  
Just when my seeing was rectifying into  
something faultless, extraordinary as a cat's refuge  
beneath a parked car, they change the silence  
into something oblique, hidden deep inside  
the ventricle caves of a city's chambers, charred:  
nail salons, check cashing stores, pawn shops.  
How characteristic of them to greet me though,  
the old folk, in such a way: magisterial.

### 2

The corner store with its faded graffiti lines,  
finally whitewashed, nearly expunged,  
doubtless like its author save for his palimpsest,

and yet, behind a first floor window, a young boy bends  
over an old encyclopedia, a remarkable script,  
a genuine compendium that shows his people's Africa  
like a sculpted mask for tourists in an open-market  
which he slowly turns contemplating skin,  
the color of almonds, and other such beauties.

3

Human strength never before seen kept those  
mystical relations alive until they touched themselves  
again, revived albeit injured, but no less rich.  
Even here, all's remixed. In Fairmount Park,  
a posse plays the same din, but with fresher strains  
of freedom. This shall never pass. That is the message,  
always, of its august chorus lines, a rangy dignity,  
the message, too, of what one refuses to never forget  
about this place: a grandmother, a domestic worker,  
Mrs. Pearl thirty years boarding SEPTA early mornings.  
I think of her, clutching a tan purse, statelier than these lines.

4

So memory vacates oblivion—these connecting  
columns of bricks, and wires, and me, its last deportee  
which the blood forever sings no matter morning  
finches and bluejays that skitter my sight in a valley  
far away from these pigeons who hop and settle off electric  
wires near street gutters to peck heads at one crumb  
or another, where local inhabitants, too, study skies  
with a certainty affixed to rooftops and flashing  
underbelly green & red lights going elsewhere.

5

The city's skyscrapers tower over a retired janitor  
and his wife, locked in a grid of streets and their  
still-standing three story on a strip of mostly weed-laden lots,  
like a tore up mouth, where their minds recall,  
for sixty years, just where to lay a hand on a railing  
& then the stairs that not long ago led up to you or me.  
Return to us, say the white marbled steps, and boarded up  
doorways, and the basement windows spilling  
out debris and rusted springs—you've become all there is  
to become: the mocking, blissful smile of an addict  
who's half here, nods off on a stoop in a miniskirt,  
understanding too well, the perpetual voyager, then suddenly  
jolts up to greet a sparkling, lustful car slowing to a stop  
while her daughter upstairs puts both hands under her chin  
amused for years, watching an endless stream of images.

6

And always, I call a taxi or pack my rental,  
and inaudibly say no, recalling the days  
my eyes rarely veered away from a book,  
even while walking, one day from elementary school  
when a boy with dirty socks and face, lunged  
a fist in my stomach like a question mark.  
I was already awake, a surfeit of ambition struck:  
to roam like decomposing clouds and roll deep,  
reforming constantly and away, above  
sooted, blackened streets, above sunlit ruins  
and piles of crumbled rubble.  
My eyes went elsewhere, open and determined.

That was childhood, something  
that often ended in fear or a throwdown  
in the dusty streets and its shadows,  
and now find myself pulsing  
between two mountain ranges,  
passing through maple, beech, and tamarack,  
as cold winds pour through  
branches, knocking lines  
of snow into cloud bursts of sparkle  
in late winter morning light.