

MacArthur eats dinner with The Atomic Man

Seoul Invaded!
—*The Albion Journal, January 5th, 1951*

I need you to go into Manchuria.
Show them what it means to interfere.
You ask if that's wise. You fear escalation —

A raised fist will provoke the gun.
But every cell in your body can split atoms,
just bleeding could divide a country in two.

Don't argue your godhood. Be a symbol.
Float above their bunkers, let them try
to destroy you. Let them fail.

When the Chinese and the North witness
you floating miles above them,
eyes burning red, they will recall

the image of mushroom clouds,
conjure the taste of ash and smoke
and pull out of Seoul within days.

Work

I should be twelve again.
My body ephemeral, myth,
muscles as large as a child's eye.
Able to swap this body for whatever
the next adventure calls. Villains
populating my father's front lawn,
vanishing back into dream
as I break their phantom jaws.

Instead, it's lunch hour
on a Tuesday, I wrangle the Red
Patriot from the sky, we drop
like a hawk chasing stone.
We crater the ground, our bones
rattle in our skin, bodies
real as sunlight when it spills
under door cracks like milk,
cold and white, annihilating
all color underneath.

Over dinner — green beans,
battered potatoes, braised pork
and oranges pale as sunlight —
my oldest boy asks
how work was.
How do I tell him
that I have seen planets
collapse into themselves,
burned in cities of fire, caught
the arc of angels' wings
as they descend?

The Atomic Man Carries Her Home

The young girl shivers. Her body enveloped by his cape, her small arms tight around his neck, reminds him of his son, who would be her age by now. Smoke rises from the skyline. She laughs as the night air laps against her. A thrill, no doubt, that reminds her of Captain Saturn — the after-hours flights to and from his bed. The Atomic Man does not think about this, about the girl bundled in his arms, about all the other girls that must have needed a ride home. He thinks about the city on fire, the next villain to break with an empty fist.

Birthday

Heavy as burgundy, the day
elevator gray — I did the usual
routine: shower, dress, buttered
toast & coffee, a quick brush, tie flung
behind me like a limp noose. During break,
tuna sandwich half-eaten, I saw
the CNN news ticket scroll
Mr. Astonishing found dead.
Some guessed his powers just ran out.
Left him like lightning spat from sky.
Others guessed invulnerability
only worked when you saw it coming.
Or maybe he simply burnt out
like so many others.
The guys started a pool. I put in five,
but by four still no one knew.
I rode the bus home under unbroken
clouds — day wet as a phantom
pain. Settled in for a beer and a slice
of red velvet cake bought the day
before. Thought of how none of us
knew, and poured a double of Wild
Turkey. Felt the burn in my throat
coil around my heart.

Born and raised in Topeka, Kansas, Gary Jackson is the author of the poetry collection *Missing You, Metropolis*, which received the 2009 Cave Canem Poetry Prize. His poems have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Tin House*, *Tuesday*, and elsewhere. He is an Assistant Professor at the College of Charleston in Charleston, SC.