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— Jasmine Ann Cooray, Poet

“Jerold’s poems have always been startlingly tender, soulful and enigmatic. But there’s an intriguing new wave of experimentation with form in this volume, as he strives to map out his relationship with his father and his years abroad as an undergraduate in the UK.”

— Ng Yi-Sheng, author of *last boy*
and *SQ21: Singapore Queers in the 21st century*

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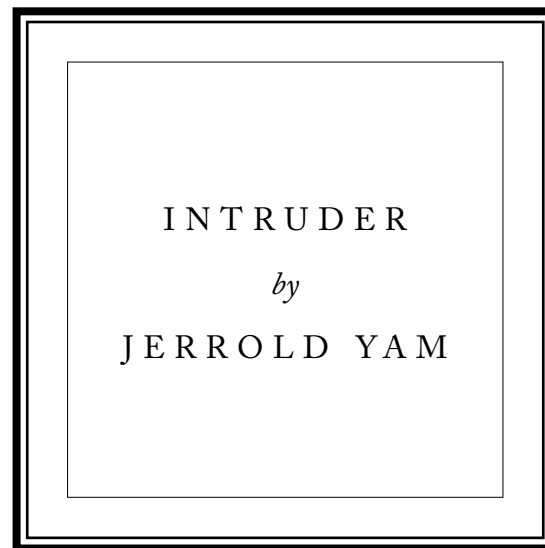
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“I dwell with you as a foreigner,
a stranger, as all my ancestors were.
Look away from me, that I may enjoy life again
before I depart and am no more.”

Psalm 39:12–13

*For my parents who, in loving me, both lose and find themselves.
For family and friends (especially Jessica, Rachel and Theresa)
whose capacity for love eclipses the myopia of judgement.*

Triptych

I. Bird

They gather in the park but
are gone by morning, grass
abandoned to its patchwork
of leaves. No ageing couples
to entertain. If I wish hard
enough I can imagine roofs
hiding their earnest bodies,
the way winter hides its own
undoing. Come back, when
sun weighs down the earth,
come and see what remains
of the square, the chestnut
and bare oak, the moving on.

II. Tree

What does it feel like to feel
nothing, stranded between a
seed and its burgeoning fate,
the constant race for warmth
and devotion? Where I come
from, a hollow in the world's
bleak mansion, disappearing
is imperfect surrender. Here
there is existence, soil, rain.
Your snow-dusted branches
tell me happiness is greater
than the sum of fears. Shrug
off your bark and confront
the wind. Then feed me the
same insolent words again.

III. Wind

I cannot accept who you are,
stranger, or speak a language
of invisible omens. I do not
pretend to matter. Knowing
you is knowing the planet's
exhalations, how one talks
winter into spring. At least
be indifferent to my longing
and intolerant walks home,
my feet bound, fastened to
the ground. Promise to warn
before coming, the way love
departs without a whisper.

Picasso

I

The answer rests in folded arms.
The answer is always a blue paper bag.
The answer stops vacillating by daybreak.
The answer chokes *suquet* with olive oil.
The answer knows everything of futility.
The answer. Not how it makes an entrance.
The answer hides a repertoire of brushes.
The answer may be a postcard. Repeat
The answer? Visitors are untangling
The answer with their mouths.

II

Tell them the orange ocean. Make fear
a nude woman. Two characters are more
likely competitors than companions. Or
the cautionary tale with shadows?
Nothing is uglier than an angle struggling
under the weight of mismatched colours.
Lanterns are exaggerated faces. Be quick
to judge but slow in remonstrance. See
the fruit bowl stepping into a *trompe l'oeil*?
Follow its lead. Stub your pencil out.

III

Benevolence is
paint overcoming the cheek
of a palette knife.

IV

The first time I walk into a gallery
I am busy convincing myself
how little you know of perseverance,
that each corridor, carefully lighted
as scented candles, are bridges
interrogating the past to make
a future more bearable. Nobody
would have guessed, the way we
stand as strangers before a painting.
I am thinking of the master's hands,
stippled by pigments and time's
persistent colours—did he
not understand that happiness,
to the unwilling viewer,
is also defeat? Between us,
distance
like the silent, awestruck
woodwork between a painting
and her audience. I spot you
at the edges of my eyes, almost
unrecognisable in the crowd,
almost as fresh and unexplored
as we find each other before,
the master setting brush
to pliant paper, becoming more
like his fabled creations
in order to lose himself.

V

Nothing an artist regards is longevity.
When applause fades, paintings shyly
undressing their camisoles of amber
and pearl, the room a whispering cave,
every sound is greater than the sum of
a crowd's intolerant cries. Canvases
house the scenes which already know.
A brush is a means to an end. When
the clarion coursing through his veins
breathes its last triumph, he will place
the stool in the right corner, away from
light's cruel distortions, and audiences
will take time to interrogate themselves.

Intruder

Back when I could stare without bitterness,
my brain easy enough
for toying a newfangled scene
or surprise, I would hop on a train to
watch meadows swim by,
mud slathered on fields
like toffee, my reflection in the glass
lighted by the novelty of the countryside.
For a moment there is no shame
in becoming my own best companion,
no remorse or loneliness
pushing me to disentangle words
from strangers. When I wake,
there would be no need for a future.
Give me unsettled coffee
by the window. Give me suitcases
muffling the snare of permanence
with leather rind, and I
can almost believe the life
hurrying before me
is not my own.

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'Kin' was awarded a runner-up prize at the Poetry Book Society (UK) National Student Poetry Competition 2013, and first published in its anthology of prize-winning poems.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Born in 1991, **Jerrold Yam** is a law undergraduate at University College London and the author of three poetry collections, *Intruder* (2014), *Scattered Vertebrae* (2013) and *Chasing Curtained Suns* (2012).

His poems have been published across twenty countries in more than eighty literary journals, including *Axon*, *Counterexample*

Poetics, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Third Coast*, *Wasafiri* and *Washington Square Review*, as well as featured by the Overseas Singaporean Unit, Poetry Society (UK), Singapore Memory Project, Southeast Asia Globe, The Arts House, The Straits Times and The Substation. His work has been selected for anthologies such as *Manoa* (2014), *Fatherhood* (2014), *Off the Rocks* (2014), *Mildly Erotic Verse* (2013), *Petua* (2013), *Ayam Curtain* (2012) and *Moving Words* (2011). They have also been translated into Spanish.

Jerrold won first prize and three honourable mentions at the National University of Singapore Creative Writing Competition 2011, first prize at the British Council History and the City Competition 2011, was runner-up at the Poetry Book Society Student Poetry Competition 2013, and in 2012 became the youngest Singaporean to be nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

He has been featured at the Interrobang Book Fair, Ledbury Poetry Festival, London Book Fair and Singapore Writers Festival, invited to speak at educational institutions such as the National University of Singapore, Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) and Anglican High School, and to events such as Singapore Day 2014 and the Southbank Centre's Festival of Love 2014. He is listed by the National Arts Council as one of the "New Voices of Singapore 2014".

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