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COME CLEAN

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

JOSHUA NGUYEN

May 2020

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ABSTRACT

A collection of poems.

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CHAPTER 1

COME CLEAN

My Sister Listens to 'Run River North' For The First Time

My sister & I normally do not ride in the same car.
She is comfortable in our silence.

[My playlist of *Run River North* plays at half volume.]

I tell her that, John, the drummer, is leaving the band.
Some people are meant to leave, she says. They have no alternative. Our grandmother left us.
Ya'll weren't as close, but she is to me what I am to you. There is a time where your
hero must embark on their own journey to the sky. If you—forever—watch how high
smoke flies, you'll be engulfed by the sun.

[I'll never bear the sound of someone calling me home]

You left too, you know. When you came back, I thought it was for good. Alas,
you will depart as fast as you came. In a few months, you will travel the world on your
own, which is to say, your premonition to die young & alone may come true, and I
will hear of the news late.

[I was the beast all alone in my hell!]
[I was the beast all alone in my hell!]

Is it okay to have doubt in people?

Brother, our differences are present, but we both hold our feet against the window.
Remember, your room was once mine, peel the paint & you'll see. We both are
light sleepers. We both don't know why our father ordered us those embarrassing
uv-ray-protecting-transitions on our glasses. We both can't stand to see mother
cry. I think you, me, & our brother, follow this idea that we don't need anyone to be
happy. We can be happy on our own. And knowing this, we still choose to be
with someone, which makes the love we carry more powerful.

So?

[I think I've changed my mind about a million times]
[To run or hide]
[To run or hide]

Brother, all I know is this. You are the brightest person I know. Every car on this road may crash into each other. Every driver here may sink into their car seat, airbags failing and glass shattering. Every city may not give the answers you need. And every city may murder you in a different bed with a different knife. But all phoenixes return from migration. & all roads lead back to home. Whether you are right or wrong or burning, this home will give you shelter to flame without fear of the wind & I will use your ashes to spell out your answers on the driveway.

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My sister & I normally do not ride in the same car.
She is comfortable in our silence.

[My playlist of *Run River North* plays at half volume.]

I tell her that, John, the drummer, is leaving the band.
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Ya'll weren't as close, but she is to me what I am to you. There is a time where your
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lead back to home. Whether you are right or wrong or burning, this home will give you shelter to
flame without fear of the wind & I will use your ashes to spell out your answers on the driveway.

My Sister Listens to 'Run River North' For The First Time

My sister & I normally do not ride in the same car.
She is comfortable in our silence.

[My playlist of *Run River North* plays at half volume.]

I tell her that, John, the drummer, is leaving the band.
Some people are meant to leave, she says. They have no alternative. Our grandmother left us.
Ya'll weren't as close, but she is to me what I am to you. There is a time where your
hero must embark on their own journey to the sky. If you—forever—watch how high
smoke flies, you'll be engulfed by the sun.

[I'll never bear the sound of someone calling me home]

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you will depart as fast as you came. In a few months, you will travel the world on your
own, which is to say, your premonition to die young & alone may come true, and I
will hear of the news late.

[I was the beast all alone in my hell!]

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Is it okay to have doubt in people?

Brother, our differences are present, but we both hold our feet against the window.
Remember, your room was once mine, peel the paint & you'll see. We both are
light sleepers. We both don't know why our father ordered us those embarrassing
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cry. I think you, me, & our brother, follow this idea that we don't need anyone to be
happy. We can be happy on our own. And knowing this, we still choose to be
with someone, which makes the love we carry more powerful.

So?

[I think I've changed my mind about a million times]

[To run or hide]

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happy. We can be happy on our own. And knowing this, we still choose to be
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So?

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My Sister Listens to 'Run River North' For The First Time

My sister & I normally do not ride in the same car.
She is comfortable in our silence.

[My playlist of *Run River North* plays at half volume.]

I tell her that, John, the drummer, is leaving the band.
Some people are meant to leave, she says. They have no alternative. Our grandmother left us.
Ya'll weren't as close, but she is to me what I am to you. There is a time where your
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[To run or hide]

[To run or hide]

Brother, all I know is this. You are the brightest person I know. Every car on this road
may crash into each other. Every driver here may sink into their car seat, airbags failing and
glass shattering. Every city may not give the answers you need. And every city may murder you
in a different bed with a different knife. But all phoenixes return from migration. & all roads
lead back to home. Whether you are right or wrong or burning, this home will give you shelter to
flame without fear of the wind & I will use your ashes to spell out your answers on the driveway.

My Sister Listens to 'Run River North' For The First Time

My sister & I normally do not ride in the same car.
She is comfortable in our silence.

[My playlist of *Run River North* plays at half volume.]

I tell her that, John, the drummer, is leaving the band.
Some people are meant to leave, she says. They have no alternative. Our grandmother left us.
Ya'll weren't as close, but she is to me what I am to you. There is a time where your
hero must embark on their own journey to the sky. If you—forever—watch how high
smoke flies, you'll be engulfed by the sun.

[I'll never bear the sound of someone calling me home]

You left too, you know. When you came back, I thought it was for good. Alas,
you will depart as fast as you came. In a few months, you will travel the world on your
own, which is to say, your premonition to die young & alone may come true, and I
will hear of the news late.

[I was the beast all alone in my hell!]

[I was the beast all alone in my hell!]

Is it okay to have doubt in people?

Brother, our differences are present, but we both hold our feet against the window.
Remember, your room was once mine, peel the paint & you'll see. We both are
light sleepers. We both don't know why our father ordered us those embarrassing
uv-ray-protecting-transitions on our glasses. We both can't stand to see mother
cry. I think you, me, & our brother, follow this idea that we don't need anyone to be
happy. We can be happy on our own. And knowing this, we still choose to be
with someone, which makes the love we carry more powerful.

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VITA

Joshua Nguyen is Vietnamese-American, a collegiate national poetry slam champion (CUPSI), and a native Houstonian. He has received fellowships from Kundiman and the Vermont Studio Center. He has been published in *The Offing*, *The Acentos Review*, *Rambutan Literary*, *Button Poetry*, *The Texas Review*, *Auburn Avenue*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Hot Metal Bridge*. He is currently an MFA candidate at The University of Mississippi. He is a bubble tea connoisseur and works in a kitchen.