Handwritten Poems from Prison

-by Jevon Jackson
"HANDWRITTEN POEMS FROM PRISON"

a poetry collection

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Other published poetry collections:
"Why The Prisoner Only Writes Love Poems" (2013)
A Thousand Thank Yous...

to my mother, Rosetta, for continuing to show me,
    by example, what it takes to move mountains;

to Ms. Peg Swan, for being a brilliant beacon of Light
    to those of us who are being buried alive on the inside;

to Erin Baumley, for always making me laugh and for being
    the epitome of what it means to be the Perfect Friend;

to Pat Jones— your loving Spirit continues to motivate,
    inspire and surround me;

to Maureen Geraghty, for consistent, unwavering support,
    and for being solid in the trenches with me;

to Dennis Sobin, for giving prisoners a forum to share
    their voices with the entire world— you've given me
    a million acres of Freedom and I thank you;

and to Jaylene Bennett, for always bringing a splash of
    color and a little excitement to my dull and drab
    environment.

Thank you all,

[Signature]

Jevon Jackson
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First Day of Rule

whistle walking through the front gates
as the whimmy shake-shake
of the shackles
distracts us from the vulture crew
swirling dervish high above,
the buildings,
blocks of pewter, wrack and limestone
stand to greet us with their long,
old gnarled teeth,
anxious to tear into
every single one of us,
narrowed into the long, shallow wheath
of corridor,
resounding with a sharp hollow CLICK,
a dink, a BAM!, a clink,
clustered
in a bright wide room,
we are stripped clean
to the whistle,
where every hole is exposed
and every fear is brought near
to the nostril,
this is the akin you’re in
(no escaping).
Without Wings

when love is not enough
and the prayers
that you've mastered
go unanswered,
you must leave from this place
and push onward
to the break of the rising sun,
where the perfect earth encircles us
all
with April showers blue
and Point wispy reds
swirling about our nervous heads,
the horizon,
who will catch us
if we run
and jump to.
What is Prison Like?

division feels like this —

colossal cold rigid stones,
will rags drenched in diesel gas,
vinegar, the only oxygen,
we struggle from the yoke
to breathe,

no colors, no cream,
nothing soft but bleached wool
and a scene we once dreamed
about love (blessed) and acceptance,
but now that all our dreams
have burned into weapons,
daily do we hunger for a moment of slumber
without trazadone, without risperidone,
without super-duper morphine and more;

the collisions feel like this —

racing at a million miles a minute,
the speed-train
barrels through our bodies,
barely recognizable
to brothers, sisters, mothers

(continued) →
What is Prison Like? — {continued}

when they arrive to untie us
from the rails of these endless tracks,
just for a weekend,
just for a moment
we are not entwined in derailments
or the detritus of bones
broken everywhere,
woods broken everywhere,
stones poking everywhere,
once we are lassoed back to the
tracks,
and the steel bull engines towards us
for all our life, galore;
decisions feel like this —

boiling black molasses venom
scorching through the brain,
the psychotomy of our slumconscious,
impoveryishd old
from the pool's gold
they give us all for wisdom,
and if certificates for janitorial Services
were enough to quell violence, {continued} —

Jevon Jackson

Handwritten Poems from Prison / 9
What is Prison Like? — (continued)

we were born into riot bare
and now we live in the perfected chaos
of warplanes falling on our heads,
a hundred years, the sentence
for a juvenile’s crime, our minds
undeveloped at the time where
we combuat and implode into air,

now we erode slowly over there,
in the cold solitary cell, bare naked
and afraid of angels,
unresponsive and unwilling
to awake for breakfast —

and it is in these moments
where I can’t decide
whether I have perished,
or alive.
Purple Zen

relax into the skin
breathe deeper than the ocean
release everything
this moment —

your life, your why, your view

wealth is earthless
on thin surface
when you're dancing on the moon.
F out Stamps

you should probably
write someone
in prison
tonight

you could probably save a life

with just a single simple letter
you could restore order,
prune chaos from his
depressed, disconnected mind,
you could dispel a hundred riots, easy,
with just a couple lines
(a paragraph, a monologue, maybe)
crafted out of love
and legitimate well-being

you should probably
write someone
in prison
tonight

you will probably save his life

{continued} →
(Forever Stamps — continued)

chase the snarling savage dogs
from the blizzard of his acurried dreams,
haul him from the darkside-out
with just a fraction
of your stellar-light
(there are men dying there
everyday, starving from
love deprivations and
choking on the hard stone atrocities of sin)

you should probably
write someone
in prison
tonight

you will surely save a life
doesn't have to be long —
for even expressing the boring mundane
minutia
that you live through everyday
is so much better than
the cruel and coldest darkness
of three weeks
with no sun.
Millions of Prisons

We're all doing time,
somewhere out in an open field
there are hell hounds chasing us down
down deep into the bottom dirt,
whether we're covered in addictions
or greed, malfeasance
or abuse, vanity
or infidelity, hatred
or untruths

we run like a muthafucker

no matter what ain we're in
we just wanna run
till we survive
so we can make it home
in one piece.
Message to my Brotha

the world is not against you

although you are folded in welts and scars, arrow wounds and deep psychic burns, this place is full of healing, as the spirit is quicker than the eye;

the world is not against you

although they sometimes shoot for no reason, "HANDS UP! FACE ON THE GROUND!" they still shoot for cold reasons, this place is full of overcoming their ratchet weapons of oppression;

the world is not against you

although it seems like god don't care when they've dangled us, haphazard, from the rabid air, between a limb and a slip-knotted rope,
Message to my Brotha — (continued)

this place is full of whining Hope
because I know that we can make it
if we believe that we can can;

the world is not against you

although they're quicker to
drag us deep into prisons, and keep us there
for a blawt hundred years,
this place is full of the riot-hearted
who torch ears and toss dreams
high into the ether;

the world is not against you

because the world is such an ancient place,
and for the love it gives to rivers and lakes,
to tadpoles and salamanders,
hummingbirds and whales,
it beseeches us,
in each moment,
to love without fail.
The Faith Group

when the room goes silent
and despair ripens in the air
like the old dead fruit
of carrion flowers;
we are there
to pluck the bud away;

when the shadows
gather like gangues in the scour of the night,
coming to rob you of willpower, wafe,
and hours,
we arrive in the moment
on a sliver of light
to remind you of grace, allotted;

when the weight of what you own
becomes monolith,
titan, overgrown,
we surprise you with this here —

you won't carry it alone.
The Girl from South Spokane

She only loves me when she's lonely,
the girl from South Spokane,
when the echoes of her house are empty
she climbs into my prison
with bubblegum pink polish on her toes,
berry blossoms for lips smacked together
like the inside of a warm, sweet cherry pie,
and the smoothest length of legs
living eyes will ever see in eighty degree heat,
"I want to get your name, right here." she says,
two fingers pressed against
the hollows of her bosom
six weeks after the disaster
with boyfriend number three;

She only loves me when she's lonely,
when pain has elected to use all its weapons
against her heart, her mind, her glow,
she writes me six-pages deep
about how boyfriend number four
is a great big whore, and I listen
to awaken the Light inside her, shine,
even after she disappears for stretches of time
unaccounted for, by Faith and Reason;

(continued)
The Girl from South Spokane — (continued)

she only loves me when she's lonely,
when husband number one
succumbs to lust that unwinds
the soft, silky ribbons of her soul,
she asks me, with a tone full of towering sorrows,
"When are you coming home?"
I carefully collect her every tattered ribbon
from the dark and, gentle,
revive them all into wide bright bows.
"In a hundred years," I answer, "I'll be there
in a hundred years, my dear."

Slowly, she survives
beyond boyfriend number five,
she is blessed to find another
to wow her Yielda, grow happiness,
and in this distance, we are distant,
(same ol' song, jazzzy blues)

she only loves me when she's lonely
yet, I
practice for her love at every chord,
every beat.
Limitless, In Waiting

your boyfriend is stupid,
your heart deserves much more—
cathedrals built on a bed of roses,
sweet, white and pure,
it's likely he doesn't worship
your every single strand of hair,
or the way that your laughter
soothes the hereafter
of all my future sickness,
aches, pains, afflictions;

your boyfriend is stupid,
your heart deserves much more—

I was born to love you
and with this limitless gift
a vow to give you every shining song
from beyond the rising sun,
a thousand orchards,
a single flower; yellow, bright
and blooming,
for all that you want and need
I will achieve as possible, goals,

(continued)
Limitless, In Waiting — (continued)

forever, I am blessed to be duty-bound
to your heart, your spark, your truth;
your boyfriend is stupid,
your heart deserves much more —

and I do, I understand
you care for him, true,
but Real Love never sleeps
and when I am released from the bottom deep
I will bring to you a home
made of
every single whining
love song.
Tiny versus the Psychiatrist

"How are you feeling?"

in my body? or in my brain?
in my brain I am a hurricane,
tossing houses, pew, baby shoes
thoughtless into the rising winds,
in my body I am sludge,
black lava in the low swamp earth;

"And how are you coping in such circumstance?"

I eat up all my suicide
I eat up all my suicide
I eat up all my suicide
just to survive
the aimless hours of the nameless nights
where I sometimes awaken in mine fields
and my mind feels
unfuckable;

"My notes indicate you were noncompliant
with medication."

(continued) →
Tony versus the Psychiatrist - (continued)

high-octane in the blood lane,
speed indicative of
collisions,
either it's too slow or it's too fast,
but I always crash,
too slow, too fast,
but I always crash
into the world
that drops in front of me;

"I have a worksheet to help you with coping skills."

you mean where I've seen the Buddha
I must kill the Buddha?
how many mantras in a dose of gabapentin?
mania in a song I've hanged,
but I'd rather eat stones.
What Have You Learned in Prison?

Pain has sections—
two and two,
one earth and one ocean,
three reasons to give you up
to the ghosts,
with no brain, no memory,
pain is ruthless;

Patience is new torture,
waiting for a hundred things,
like whatever cube of sugar
the beloved postman brings,
waiting for self-inflicted wounds
to acab and heal over, waiting for
hope to mature, waiting for
a portunity of light to break beyond
the blackened window, waiting for
the waiting to end;

Love is a clam
and soulmates are useless,
with no mail and no calls,
the stones will fall
and gather all around you
in a sarcophagus of cold winds.

(continued)
What Have You Learned in Prison? — (continued)

where the blood vein constricts
and the Future
restricts your breathing;

Depression is a nuclear weapon—
it drags you to the deep, the down deep
and drops you there,
just when you think
you've had enough of falling
the pit gets deeper,
the burn, the ether,
the disassembled soul
in all its tolls,
will never
ever
forazeke you.
they call it The Wall, 
Wisconsin’s oldest prison, 
where they specialize in 
Deep Brain Psychosmia —

they’ll throw you in the hole fuh nothin’,
in this oligarchy of hell hounds,
they’ll throw you in the hole fuh nothin’,
or the last hundred days,
wrapped in chains two hundred scads long,
where your first name is Inmate
and your breakfast is a block of stones,

they’ll throw you in the hole fuh nothin’,
ignore you if you’re bleeding,
if you’re pleading for rescue from
bone-chilling winter,
they will stare at your clinched naked body,
shaking (whiner),
and utter to you
the coldest words ever known:
"There’s nothin’ I can do for you."

Jevon Jackson
Handwritten Poems from Prison / 26
The New Death Row

we used to be the strange fruit
dangling from red oak trees,
the steely white lasso
wrapped around our stubborn-nigger-necks,
this was back when
we had to enter through the back
and if we came in through the front
we had to be seated in the back,

now
we've got national purchasing power
and big chief executive political power,
and we can send our little nigger girls
and little nigger boys
to University State
so they can be captains of industry,
masters of science,
commanders of art

if they want to,

but still,
somehow, still
they gather, scatter us in cages

(continued)
with our little nigger boys
facing fifty-seven hundred years
for attempted and intentional,
for conspiracy to commit,
for aiding and abetting,

and Jimmy Whitekid gets probation
for the same damn whit!

Lil' Jimmy Whitekid gets a pardon
for the same damn whit!

and now
there are prisons deep inside these prisons
where the wingle wullen chambers grind
(and scientifically designed)
to break a little nigger's mind
so he will, voluntarily,
wrap the steely white laasso
around his own stubborn neck
to dangle, hang
lifeless
from the red soaked vent.
No Sugar

the Warden makes
ninety-nine thousand
a year,

and I can't get no
sugar for my grits —

ain't that a bitch!
Gloria

long long letters she reads
like old rabbinical bibles
in the land of night
where his oceans of love
surround her
into the zero-deep of quirky miracles —

in these moments
distance is not a hindrance,
but a half-note of a heartbeat
where lavender and milk
make a home
amongst ruins and
disassembled beams of wood,

she reads
and she reads
and she believes that he'll be home
before sunrise.
The Science of Deprivation

At this moment,
you have found me in a ditch,
I am dirty with dulled speech,
my heart in a dying fox
(his hope is ancient),
you feed him love, artesian water,
and I survive the night
as he laps it from your steady hands,
a warm meal to fill his belly, stretched,
your kindness, remarkable
and pure,
his coat, all clumped and caked
with weed-grass and old mud, you clean
deep to the delight
of my black aching bones,
he will sleep a dreamful
tonight;

Sometime after sunrise,
the ready, whining fox
will peer at you
from afar, as if
you planned to prepare him for slaughter,

(continued)→
he will dash and dart
away
and, timid, I will apologize (to you)
and I trail after him
into a deep
and narrow
hole.
she (When It All Falls Down)

your name
has become
bitter acid,
where love once lived
there's a flock of crows, a murder,
a gang of screaming vultures
plucking 'clean', the bones
of every song
I have ever sung to you;
your words — rotten peaches,
Road Walt against a silent tongue,
a thousand hammers upon this dullen head,
listening to your reasoning;
there are ways to procure water
without jumping in the river, wild,
without busting up our bleeding boats
we have sailed prayers on
for the past thousand years;
this grueling non-physical distance,
a crueler, more ancient prison,
where the slow tortured moan
is not a glitch
but a normalcy.
she (Make Up Sex)

heat
like
jury
Kisses
burning
bang bang

hands
lips
waist
singers
truth
bang bang

eyes
blue
oceans
rocking
higher
bang bang

sky
spinning
speeding
shaking
skewed
bang bang

delence
quiet
shining
perfect
new
boom.

Jevon Jackson

Handwritten Poems from Prison / 34
she (Again and Again)

If your name is
Sun Rose
then call me
the emperor of water,
I have come to imbue you
with scriptures from the altar
and bright iridescent sugars
from the gentry of the sky,
soft bantam blues,
wild canary gold
glowing at great lengths
to give us all a proper chance
to view you, tall, in full bloom,
from the infusion of the river, near;

If your name is
constellation
then call me
rebel rider of the sky
until I mine all of you,
wedged against darkness,
I will study the life cycles of utars,
one by one,
with the electromagnetism of love

(continued)
she (Again and Again) — (continued)

pulsing over Jupiter and Mars,
wedged against darkness,
you dance a life that is
bold and beautiful, a titan diamond,
the king awaits to hold you,
blessed, in his hands;

If your name is
again and again,
these words could ascend into fire,
for passion cannot be consigned to language,
only blood knows its devotion
and the yellow flame seizes
its growling head.
No Crochet

I've got all these colors
of yarn — camel, Kelly green,
pink, dark coral, and even
electric boogaloo blue,
I've got all these colors,
the uncoordinated excess of
afghans completed years and years ago;
three shades of white, one softer than
baby feathers, the fingers cannot
stop this feel, this will to stitch
one naked hue into another,
I've got all these colors
and I cannot decide how to
string them all along,
together,
do that none of us will be alone.
Perspectives

This is not a prison cell,
this is home for most of us,
this is gone for both of us,
eleven pictures on a crooked wall,
some I miss, some I wish I could
snuggle-buggle till' the break of dawn;

This is not hell adjacent,
this is Psalm 26, for some of us,
this is much too long for both of us,
this is the guest of Gilgamesh
plotting the fall of bull bull bull;

no long-long letters in forty-six weeks,
no short sweet petals in forty-six weeks
and yet a week to build from this missed love
as if my hope wells were oceans, plus;

This is not some stupid dumbfuckshit,
this is three degrees before triumph,
this is where the fighter uses all his fire
to vanquish King Joe, scale higher;

(continued)
Perspectives — (continued)

This is not the saddest song
you've ever heard,
this is just one verse
where it hurts the most,
where the callous little cruelties
arrive to reject your wishes;

This is not the worst
arrangement of pain, ever,
this is not the rickety old
guillotine
waylaying your survival,
this is, right here,
exactly how light
finds you.
Not Alone

Loneliness
is not a big empty house,
it could be a hundred people
crowded all around you,
cloned in the chicanery
of wax, plastic smiles;

Loneliness
is not a thousand miles from here
over and yonder and through
the woods,
it could be
a week of silence
with the wide and thriving
sun;

Loneliness,
she could be
Solitude's most cherished daughter
who'd come to collect her kisses,
the love you give
when there is nothing left
to confound you.
For Water

my kin is not my friend
but my friend is my family,

the stranger's love
had no sections—

it is one big
brilliant ball of light,

blood may be thicker
than water

but the well that you find
on the long, wicked road

in splendid,
god and true,

and you never want to stop
drinking.
Live Your Life

tomorrow
someone will tell you
to walk away
from love

today
you must show them
the seventh mountain
that you moved
yesterday.
--- INTERVIEW ---
Interview with a Poet

After publishing his first poetry collection, *Why The Prisoner Only Writes Love Poems*, online, in 2013, Jevon Jackson is back with a new collection. In this interview, he opens up about what inspires him, his thoughts on prison reform, and he discusses why love is a common theme in his writing.

What inspired you to publish this new poetry collection in your own handwriting?

Handwriting is becoming a dying mode of communication. And I guess I just want to keep the “art” of handwriting alive for a little while longer. Handwriting also reveals so much of someone’s personality, so this is just another creative way to reveal more of the stuff within that I can’t unconsciously hide.

The handwriting thing may be a little easier for you to pull off because yours is actually neat. A lot of people are a little self-conscious about their handwriting.

For some guys, that’s probably true because we, as guys growing up, don’t utilize our handwriting-muscles as much as women do. I remember, in high school, girls used to pass back-and-forth these spiral bound notebooks where they would write notes and gossip to each other. A girl once asked me to write a Happy Birthday message, to a friend, in her notebook. I started paging through it, reading some of the previous notes, and it really blew my little 15-year old mind because so many of our high school secrets were revealed in that notebook. Who had a crush on who. Which teachers were dating each other. Who was being systematically ostracized. It was all in that notebook. And I was completely engrossed. I was supposed to be writing a quick little birthday message and I was lost in reading this elegantly handwritten point-by-point 3-page outline, written in green and purple ink with curlicue flourishes, of why Sarah thinks Megan is a Dumb-Drunken-Bitch. So yeah, girls get A LOT of early practice exercising their handwriting-muscles.

You studied graphology and handwriting-analysis for a short time?

Yes, but it wasn’t through a formal education, just self-taught. It’s really an interesting science— to accurately capture someone’s personality just from analyzing the way they curve a lower-case ‘g’, or cross their ‘t’.

Give me an example of what you can glean from someone’s personality by the way they cross their ‘t’.

Well, if the cross-bar of the ‘t’ is consistently slanting upwards, then that could be an indication of someone who is optimistic and attentive. If the cross-bar is consistently slanting downwards, that could mean that they are more guarded, emotionally, and prone to be more depressed. But it’s a lot of other factors to look at.

In your previous collection, there were about 14 different “she” poems, but this collection has only 3, and for the first time, one of the “she” poems expresses a sort of heavy heartbreak. Are the “she” poems about an actual woman, and if so, who is she?

There are aspects of the “she” poems that are about an actual woman, but there are also aspects that are idealized and speak to a love that is other-worldly. “she” is a koan [a puzzle/riddle within Zen Buddhism meant to enlighten]. Yes, “she” is an actual woman with a name and a history; “she” is also a million hundred thousand different women who will recognize their own desires and needs, and possibly, their potential, within the layers of the poems.

So basically, you’re not giving up the goods—you’re not going to tell us who she is?

Pretty much. (Smiling).

“The Girl from South Spokane”— is that another extension of the “she” poem series?

Jevon Jackson

Handwritten Poems from Prison / 44
No. "The Girl from South Spokane" is about a collective experience. Some guys in prison, who have been down a long time, have a woman like that in their lives where she pops up after a bad break-up with someone out there. She rekindles a connection with the guy in prison, and there's this intense display of romanticism and fireworks and this delicious supernatural euphoria that lasts for a short time. Then the reality of the situation sets in and, eventually, she moves on to someone who isn't fenced in and who doesn't have his name stamped on the inside of his underwear. If a guy is down 10 or 20 years, he may go through this cycle with the same woman a number of different times. It is a very complicated and contorted kind of love.

Love is a common theme in many of your poems. Why is the message of love so important to you?

Because the grand commodity of love is so scarce. Due to my status of prisoner and persona non grata—a person convicted of taking the life of an innocent human being—it is sometimes a difficult task to demonstrate to others that I am still human and worthy of being loved. Love is definitely a scarcity for me, so when I see it, feel it, taste it, get near it, I want to ring it from the bell towers for all the world to hear. I want to let everyone know just how precious and invaluable and redeeming it can be.

Is it a scarcity because of the crime you've been convicted of or because of the nature of the prison environment itself?

It's both. Maximum security prisons in Wisconsin are designed to deteriorate the family unit. I've been locked-up since I was 16 years old, I'm 37 now and I've been housed in maximum security prisons for 20 years. These places serve to toil the grind of constant deprivation. There are stacks and stacks of 3-ring binders full of policies and procedures and rules that facilitate further penalties and the extremities of discipline, but there's almost nothing available to foster meaningful rehabilitation and cohesion of the family unit. Right now, at the Columbia Correctional Institution, where I'm currently confined, it's so overcrowded that they [prison administrators] are forcing guys to sleep on the floor. Plus there's a staffing shortage, so every single day there's some kind of activity or essential program being canceled. Some of the staff are becoming more hostile and completely disrespectful. They create this volatile atmosphere and, in turn, there have been many more outbursts of violence just within the past few months. It's crazy.

Some people would respond to that with: "Well, prisons aren't meant to be comfortable."

It's not about being "comfortable"—it's about creating an environment that advances rehabilitation and personal growth. And this is something where the people out there, the people who vote, the people who care, are going to have to put all their cards on the table and figure out what it is that they actually want. Do they want 21st century extreme deprivation tanks where inhumane conditions and psychological mistreatment is a standard policy? Or do they want efficient treatment facilities where people are reasonably disciplined for their crimes and given adequate means to mature beyond their criminal thinking? Because right now what we have in a number of the Wisconsin prisons are bastions of inhumane mistreatment that serve to only make guys worse than what they were when they came in. And these guys will eventually be released back into society. They'll be back in your community somewhere.

What do you think is needed to establish a social dialogue on prison reform in Wisconsin?

I believe it's already started. There are local grassroots groups, like WISDOM, that are leading the charge on prison and parole reform. The previous governor, Jim Doyle, made a late push to get some of the prisoners with non-violent convictions out early. But then the current governor, Scott Walker, came along and immediately put the dagger in that. We have a governor now who believes that prisoners cannot be rehabilitated. He supports the model of systematic deprivation, excessive punishment and consistent denial. The problem with this kind of thinking is that it's not sustainable. Public policies all around the United States—Texas, California, New York, etc...—have demonstrated that no matter how blindly conservative and get-tough-on-crime-and-throw-away-the-key you are, there will come a time when you will need to go search for that key you threw away because the prisons are
overcrowded and there isn't enough tax-payer money available to continue adding to the prison population.

**Do you feel a sense of injustice in your particular situation?**

I have to be mindful with how I talk about this because I did take the life of another human being. She was someone’s mother. She was someone’s sister. She was the love of many people’s lives. And although it wasn’t intentional, what I did was callous. I can’t explain it away. I’m sorry for what happened, for being thoughtless, reckless and selfish, and for causing grief and unimaginable pain for her kids and her family. There’s no question that I should be punished for what I did. But what’s the proper measure of punishment for a 16-year old who commits such a crime? Life in prison? In the same society where we find that 16-year olds are not mature enough to make adult decisions, is it appropriate to punish a 16-year old teenager the same exact way you would punish a 30-year old adult? I believe there’s a huge disparity there that needs to be resolved.

**So instead of keeping you in the juvenile justice system, you were waived into adult court and treated just as if you were an adult, although you committed your crime when you were 16 years old?**

Yeah. And the irony is that after I was convicted and sentenced, I continued running into situations where I couldn’t do certain things because I was “too young”. In the County Jail, I couldn’t take my GED test because I was too young, at 17. I get transferred to the Green Bay Correctional Institution, and I think I was about 18, I try to order a pack of Newport cigarettes from the prison store and they refused to sell them to me—they said I wasn’t old enough. There I was serving an adult sentence, LIFE, for a crime I committed as a teenager, and they’re telling me I’m too young to buy cigarettes. It was so ridiculous that I couldn’t do anything but shake my head.

**How have you made the most of your 20+ years behind bars thus far?**

A lot of self-education. A lot of reading. A lot of writing. A lot of love from kind strangers. A lot of prayers. A lot of healing. A lot of coffee. And a couple honey buns here and there.

**What, or who, are some of your literary influences?**

Right now I’ve got William Earnest Henley’s “Invictus” taped to the wall next to my pillow. It’s one of the most beautiful inspirational anthems I’ve ever read. I need to constantly remind myself “I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul.” Some of my major influences are Rumi, Khalil Gibran, e.e. cummings, Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes, etc... There are also a few rap artists that influence me, artistically, such as Rakim (from Eric B. & Rakim), Conscious Daughters, Common, and Kanye West. There’s this spoken word poet named Prentice Powell who is amazing— he’s revolutionizing the genre right now.

**What other current projects are you working on?**

Maureen Geraghty and I are working on a documentary book, *Between Writers and Lifers*. You can find it on Facebook. It’s about our unlikely connection through writing. And within the next few months, look for a collection of true personal narratives from me on the Prisons Foundation website.

[Interview date: January 2, 2015]
January 4, 2015

PRISONS FOUNDATION
2512 Virginia Ave. NW, #58043
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Staff:

Enclosed please find a 75-page manuscript (Poetry Collection), titled "HANDWRITTEN POEMS FROM PRISON", which is single-sided. Also enclosed is a SASE for verification.

I ask that you please post & publish the manuscript on your website. [NOTE: You published my previous poetry collection, "WHY THE PRISONER ONLY WRITES LOVE POEMS" in 2013.]

Within the next couple of weeks, I'll be able to send you some money for a donation.

Thank you for all that you do for incarcerated writers.

Sincerely,

JEVON JACKSON

JEVON JACKSON

ENCLOSED: 75-page manuscript
FIRST DAY OF RULE

shuffle walking through the front gates
as the shimmy shake-shake
of the shackles
distracts us from the vulture crew
swirling dervish high above,

the buildings,
blo...
WITHOUT WINGS

when love is not enough
and the prayers
that you've mastered
go unanswered,
you must leave from this place
and push onward
to the break of the rising sun,
where the perfect earth encircles us
all
with April showers blue
and faint wispy reds
swirling about our nervous heads,

the horizon,
she will catch us
if we run
and jump to.
WHAT IS PRISON LIKE?

division feels like this—

colossal cold rigid stones,
silk rags drenched in diesel gas,
vinegar, the only oxygen,
we struggle from the yoke
to breathe,

no colors, no cream,
nothing soft but bleached wool
and a scene we once dreamed
about love (blessed) and acceptance,
but now that all our dreams
have burned into weapons,
daily do we hunger for a moment of slumber
without trazadone, without risperidone,
without super-duper morphine and more;

the collisions feel like this—

racing at a million miles a minute,
the speed-train
barrels through our bodies,
barely recognizable
to brothers, sisters, mothers
when they arrive to untie us
from the rails of these endless tracks,
just for a weekend,

just for a moment
we are not entwined in derailments
or the detritus of bones
broken everywhere,
songs broken everywhere,
stones poking everywhere
once we are lassoed back to the
tracks,
and the steel bull engines towards us
for all our life, galore;

decisions feel like this—

boiling black molasses venom
scorching through the brain,
the psychotomy of our slumconscious,
impoverished old
from the fool's gold
They give us all for wisdom,
as if certificates for Janitorial Services
were enough to quell violence,
we were born into riot fare
and now we live in the perfected chaos
of warplanes falling on our heads,
a hundred years, the sentence
for a juvenile's crime, our minds
undeveloped at the time where
we combust and implode into air,

now we erode slowly over there,
in the cold solitary cell, bare naked
and afraid of angels,
unresponsive and unwilling
to awake for breakfast—

and it is in these moments
where I can't decide
whether I have perished,
or alive.
PURPLE ZEN

relax into the skin
breathe deeper than the ocean
release everything
this moment—
your life, your why, your view

wealth is earthless
on this surface
when you're dancing on the moon.
FOREVER STAMPS

you should probably
write someone
in prison
tonight

you could probably save a life

with just a single simple letter
you could restore order,
prune chaos from his
dejected, disconnected mind,
you could dispel a hundred riots, easy,
with just a couple lines
(a paragraph, a soliloquy, maybe)
crafted out of love
and legitimate well-being

you should probably
write someone
in prison
tonight

you will probably save his life

chase the snarling savage dogs
from the blizzard of his scurried dreams,
heal him from the darkside-out
with just a fraction
of your stellar-light
(there are men dying there
everyday, starving from
love deprivations and
choking on the hard stone atrocities of sin)

you should probably
write someone
in prison
tonight

you will surely save a life

doesn't have to be long—
for even expressing the boring mundane
minutia
that you live through everyday
is so much better than
the cruel and coldest darkness
of three weeks
with no sun.
MILLIONS OF PRISONS

We're all doing time,
somewhere out in an open field
there are hell hounds chasing us
down
deep into the bottom dirt,
whether we're covered in addictions
or greed, malfeasance
or abuse, vanity
or infidelity, hatred
or untruths

we run like a muthafucker

no matter what sin we're in
we just wanna run
till' we survive
so we can make it
Home
in one piece.
MESSAGE TO MY BROTHA

the world is not against you

although you are folded in welts and scars,
arrow wounds and
depth psychic burns,
this place is full of healing,
as the spirit is quicker
than the eye;

the world is not against you

although they sometimes shoot
for no reason,
"HANDS UP! FACE ON THE GROUND!"
they still shoot for cold reasons,
this place is full of overcoming
their ratchet weapons of oppression;

the world is not against you

although it seems like god don't care
when they've dangled us, haphazard,
from the rabid air,
between a limb
and a slip-knotted rope,
this place is full of shining Hope
because I know that we can make it
if we believe that we can can;

the world is not against you

although they're quicker to
drag us deep into prisons, and keep us there
for a blast hundred years,
this place is full of the riot-hearted
who torch fears and toss dreams
high into the ether;

the world is not against you

because the world is such an ancient place,
and for the love it gives to rivers and lakes,
to tadpoles and salamanders,
hummingbirds and whales,
it beseeches us,
in each moment,
to love without fail.
THE FAITH GROUP

when the room goes silent
and despair ripens in the air
like the old dead fruit
of carrion flowers,
we are there
to pluck the bud away;

when the shadows
gather like gangs in the scour of the night,
coming to rob you of willpower, safe,
and hours,
we arrive in the moment
on a sliver of light
to remind you of grace, allotted;

when the weight of what you own
becomes monolith,
titan, overgrown,
we surprise you with this here—
you won't carry it alone.
THE GIRL FROM SOUTH SPOKANE

she only loves me when she's lonely,
the girl from south Spokane,
when the echoes of her house are empty
she climbs into my prison
with bubblegum pink polish on her toes,
berry blossoms for lips smacked together
like the inside of a warm, sweet cherry pie,
and the smoothest length of legs
living eyes will ever see in eighty degree heat,
"I want to get your name, right here." she says,
two fingers pressed against
the hillsides of her bosom
six weeks after the disaster with boyfriend number three;

she only loves me when she's lonely,
when pain has elected to use all its weapons
against her heart, her mind, her glow,
she writes me six-pages deep
about how boyfriend number four is a great big snore,
and I listen to awaken the Light inside her, shine,
even after she disappears for stretches of time
unaccounted for, by Faith and Reason;

she only loves me when she's lonely,
when husband number one succumbs to lust that unwinds
the soft, silky ribbons of her soul,
she asks me, with a tone full of towering sorrows,
"When are you coming home?"
I carefully collect her every tattered ribbon
from the dark and, gentle,
revive them all into wide bright bows,
"In a hundred years," I answer, "I'll be there
in a hundred years, my dear."

slowly, she survives
beyond boyfriend number five,
she is blessed to find another
to sow her fields, grow Happiness,
and in this distance, we are distant,
(same ol' song, jazzy blues)

she only loves me when she's lonely
yet, I
practice for her love at every chord,
every beat.

Jevon Jackson
Handwritten Poems from Prison / 57
LIMITLESS, IN WAITING

your boyfriend is stupid,
your heart deserves much more—
cathedrals built on a bed of roses,
soft, white and pure,
it's likely he doesn't worship
your every single strand of hair,
or the way that your laughter
soothes the hereafter
of all my future sickness,
aches, pains, afflictions;

your boyfriend is stupid,
your heart deserves much more—

I was born to love you
and with this limitless gift
I vow to give you every shining song
from beyond the rising sun,
a thousand orchards,
a single flower: yellow, bright
and blooming,
for all that you want and need
I will achieve as possible, goals,
forever, I am blessed to be duty-bound
to your heart, your spark, your truth;

your boyfriend is stupid,
your heart deserves much more—

and I do, I understand
you care for him, true,
but Real Love never sleeps
and when I am released from the bottomdeep
I will bring to you a Home
made of
every single shining
love song.
TONY VERSUS THE PSYCHIATRIST

"How are you feeling?"

in my body? or in my brain?
in my brain I am a hurricane,  
tossing houses, pews, baby shoes  
thoughtless into the rising winds,  
in my body I am sludge,  
black lava in the low swamp earth;

"And how are you coping in such circumstance?"

I eat up all my suicide  
I eat up all my suicide  
I eat up all my suicide  
just to survive  
the aimless hours of the nameless nights  
where I sometimes awaken in mine fields  
and my mind feels  
unfuckable;

"My notes indicate you were noncompliant with medication."

high-octane in the blood lane,  
speed is indicative of  
collisions,  
either its too slow or its too fast,  
but I always crash,  
too slow, too fast,  
but I always crash  
into the world  
that drops in front of me;

"I have a worksheet to help you with coping skills."

you mean where I've seen the Buddha  
I must kill the Buddha?  
how many mantras in a dose of  
gabapentin?  
mania is a song I've hanged,  
but I'd rather eat stones.
WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED IN PRISON?

Pain has sections—
two and two,
one earth and one ocean,
three reasons to give you up
to the ghosts,
with no brain, no memory,
pain is ruthless;

Patience is new torture,
waiting for a hundred things,
like whatever cube of sugar
the beloved postman brings,
waiting for self-inflicted wounds
to scab and heal over, waiting for
hope to mature, waiting for
a fortuity of light to break beyond
the blackened window, waiting for
the waiting to end;

Love is a slum
and soulmates are useless,
with no mail and no calls,
the stones will fall
and gather all around you
in a sarcophagus of cold winds,
where the blood vein constricts
and the Future
restricts your breathing;

Depression is a nuclear weapon—
it drags you to the deep, the down deep
and drops you there,
just when you think
you've had enough of falling
the pit gets deeper,
the burn the ether,
the disassembled soul
in all its toils,
will never
ever
forsake you.
they call it The Walls,
Wisconsin's oldest prison,
where they specialize in
Deep Brain Psychosis—

they'll throw you in the hole fuh nothin',

in this oligarchy of hell hounds,
they'll throw you in the hole fuh nothin',

for the last hundred days,
wrapped in chains two hundred scars long,
where your first name is Inmate
and your breakfast is a block of stones,

they'll throw you in the hole fuh nothin',

ignore you if you're bleeding,
if you're pleading for rescue from
bone-chilling winter,
they will stare at your clinched naked body,
shaking (shiver),
and utter to you
the coldest words ever known:
"There's nothin' I can do for you."
THE NEW DEATH ROW

we used to be the strange fruit
dangling from red oak trees,
the steely white lasso
wrapped around our stubborn-nigger-necks,
this was back when
we had to enter through the back
and if we came in through the front
we had to be seated in the back,

now
we've got national purchasing power
and big chief executive political power,
and we can send our little nigger girls
and little nigger boys
to University State
so they can be captains of industry,
masters of science,
commanders of art

if they want to,

but still,
somehow, still
they gather, scatter us in cages
with our little nigger boys
facing fifty-seven hundred years
for attempted and intentional,
for conspiracy to commit,
for aiding and abetting,

and Jimmy Whitekid gets probation for the same damn shit!
Lil' Jimmy Whitekid gets a pardon for the same damn shit!

and now
there are prisons deep inside these prisons
where the single sullen chambers grind
(and scientifically designed)
to break a little nigger's mind
so he will, voluntarily,
 snap the steely white lasso
around his own stubborn neck
to dangle, hang
lifeless
from the red soaked vent.

Jevon Jackson
Handwritten Poems from Prison / 62
NO SUGAR

the Warden makes
ninety-nine thousand
a year,

and I can't get no
sugar for my grits,

ain't that a bitch!
GLORIA

long long letters
she reads
like old rabbinical bibles
in the island of the night
where his oceans of love
astound her
into the zero-sleep of
quirky miracles—

in these moments
distance is not a hindrance,
but a half-note of a heartbeat
where lavender and silk
make a home
amongst ruins and
disassembled beams of wood,

she reads
and she reads
and she believes that he'll be Home
before sunrise.
THE SCIENCE OF DEPRIVATION

At this moment,
you have found me in a ditch,
I am dirty with slurred speech,
my heart is a dying fox
(his hope is ancient),
you feed him love, artesian water,
and I survive the night
as he laps it from your steady hands,
a warm meal to fill his belly, stretched,
your kindness, remarkable
and pure,
his coat, all clumped and caked
with sod-grass and old mud, you clean
deep to the delight
of my black aching bones,
he will sleep a dreamful
tonight;

Sometime after sunrise,
the ready, shining fox
will peer at you
from afar, as if
you planned to prepare him for slaughter,
he will dash and dart
away
and, timid, I will apologize (to you)
as I trail after him
into a deep
and narrow
hole.
she (WHEN IT ALL FALLS DOWN)

your name
has become
bitter acid,
where love once lived
there's a flock of crows, a murder,
a gang of screaming vultures
plucking clean, the bones
of every song
I have ever sung to you;

your words,
rotten peaches,
road salt against a silent tongue,
a thousand hammers upon this sullen head,
listening to your reasons;

there are ways
to procure water
without jumping in the river, wild,
without busting up our blessing boats
we have sailed prayers on
for the past thousand years;

this grueling non-physical distance,
a crueler
more ancient prison,
where the slow tortured mean
is not a glitch
but a normalcy.
she (MAKE UP SEX)

heat
fire
fury
kisses
burning
bang bang

hands
lips
waist
fingers
truth
bang bang

eyes
blue
oceans
rocking
higher
bang bang

sky
spinning
speeding
shaking
skewed
bang bang

silence
quiet
shining
perfect
new
boom.
she (AGAIN AND AGAIN)

If your name is sun rose
then call me
the emperor of water,
I have come to imbue you
with scriptures from the altar
and bright iridescent sugars
from the gentry of the sky,
soft bantam blues,
wild canary gold
glowing at great lengths
to give us all a proper chance
to view you, tall, in full bloom,
from the infusal of the river, near;

If your name is constellation
then call me
rebel rider of the sky
until I mine all of you,
wedged against darkness,
I will study the life cycles of stars,
one by one,
with the electromagnetism of love
pulsing over Jupiter and Mars,
wedged against darkness,
you dance a life that is
bold and beautiful, a titan diamond,
the king awaits to hold you,
blessed, in his hands;

If your name is again and again,
these words could ascend into fire,
for passion cannot be consigned to language,
only blood knows its devotion
as the yellow flame seizes
its growling head.
I've got all these colors
of yarn— camel, kelly green,
pink, dark coral, and even
electric boogaloo blue,
I've got all these colors,
the uncoordinated excess of
afghans completed years and years ago;
three shades of white, one softer than
baby feathers, the fingers cannot
stop this feel, this will to stitch
one naked hue into another,
I've got all these colors
and I cannot decide how to
string them all along,
together,
so that none of us will be alone.
PERSPECTIVES

This is not a prison cell,
this is home for most of us,
this is gone for both of us,
eleven pictures on a crooked wall,
some I miss, some I wish I could
snuggle-buggle till' the break of dawn;

This is not hell adjacent,
this is Psalms 26, for some of us,
this is much too long for both of us,
this is the quest of Gilgamesh
plotting the fall of bull bull bull;

no long-long letters in forty-six weeks,
no short sweet petals in forty-six weeks
and yet I seek to build from this missed love
as if my hope wells were oceans, plus;

This is not some stupiddumbfuckshit,
this is three degrees before triumph,
this is where the fighter uses all his fire
to vanquish king foe, scale higher;

This is not the saddest song you've ever heard,
this is just one verse
where it hurts the most,
where the callous little cruelties
arrive to reject your wishes;

This is not the worst
arrangement of pain, ever,
this is not the rickety old
guillotine
waylaying your survival,
this is, right here,
exactly how light
finds you.
NOT ALONE

Loneliness
is not a big empty house,
it could be a hundred people
crowded all around you,
cloned in the chicanery
of wax, plastic smiles;

Loneliness
is not a thousand miles from here
over and yonder and through
the woods,
it could be
a week of silence
with the wide and thriving
sun;

Loneliness,
she could be
Solitude's most cherished daughter
who's come to collect her kisses,
the love you give
when there is nothing left
to confound you.
FOR WATER

my kin is not my friend
but my friend is my family,

the stranger's love
has no sections—

it is one big
brilliant ball of light,

blood may be thicker
than water

but the well that you find
on the long, wicked road

is splendid,
god and true,

and you never want to stop
drinking.
LIVE YOUR LIFE

tomorrow
someone will tell you
to walk away
from love

today
you must show them
the seventh mountain
that you moved
yesterday.
ANNOUNCEMENT FOR WORK SOON-TO-BE-PUBLISHED >>>>
Soon to be published...

Between Writers & Lifers

A documentary book by:

Maureen Geraghty & Jevon Jackson

This is a story about connection. Between teacher and student, male and female, black and white, free and imprisoned. Writing became their bond. Jevon, at 16, during a petty armed robbery, took the life of an innocent woman. Maureen was a teacher at the juvenile detention center where Jevon spent a year and a half waiting to be tried, convicted and sentenced, as an adult, to Life in prison. Writing began as a class assignment, and more than two decades later, it has been the unequivocal seam that connects, maybe even saves, two very different lives.

-A poem by Jevon Jackson

The Hope Room

I go there
when the light weighs a thousand tons,
and I am unable to move
from this cold boulder, locked;

I go there
when What Is Next leans offensive
against my surface, my purpose,
my name;

I go there
not to get away,
but to get a way to heal this,
to feel the good God medicine
warm quiet against the rind;

I go there
when I am most confused, when
I fall nauseous to the wicked creep
of wretched circumstance, the dragon;

I go there,
the vacant old pagoda,
to soothe crumpled wings,
make rich— the tiny pauper;

I go there
(frequently, I show up there)
when I am broken,
a billion smithereens
from scattered dust to gathered stars,
truly I show up there,
way-way up there,
with asteroids for guts
and green planets for brains;

I go there
to sip slow, the sun,
to feel the glorious weightless push
of bliss plus bliss plus melody;

I go there
whenever I am not here,
when the soul needs a good place to eat,
a space it knows as roam sweet.

Follow "Between Writers and Lifers" on Facebook.