**Food For Thought: Systems Overload by Joshua Merchant**

My friend James is in the eighth grade.

Doesn't have enough money to support his own diet

not a vegetarian for fear of starving in his own home

doesn't know what it’s like to work in a factory

but he pictures something similar to his current public school

When he first imagined farming

he saw straw hats, pitch forks, cows and barns.....

It was like a fairy tale.

He didn't know about the mounds of metal and synthetic material used

to create what he eats

Because of this twisted food system

He's subdued to,

His body is systematically inclined to break down

Like the buildings that were broke down for new shopping centers

Forcing his neighbors into homelessness

At this rate

He won't be able to differentiate

Corporate farmers from drug dealers,

similarities are too strong,

selling harmful products to innocent people

for extensive profits.

But like crack,

The dollar menu is cheap.

The ingredients are addicting

He keeps buying from it.

When James wakes up in the morning

The most difficult question he has involving food is

how much is there in the fridge?

Three boxes of generic pasta in the freezer

One box of sugary cereal he might have if there's any milk left.

He'd build walls out of sugar

Easy to hide behind the taste buds

Bombarding the focus of issues in his life

It’s like being high for at least ten minutes

Whenever he’s able to find room to consume

He's not eating to save the economy

Or the geological state of the planet

He's eating for comfort

For personal survival not realizing

He’s hurting himself in the process

James hasn't experienced the taste of fruits

That haven't been attacked by pesticides

Just like he hasn't experienced a neighborhood

That hasn't been attacked by bullets

Some things just go hand and hand in his life

Corruption and lack of money

Money and lack of opportunities

Opportunity and non-organic meals

He can’t hear the cries of exploited farmers

When he bites into big macs

Because the cries of mothers with shattered backs

From their seeds slipping into cracks with no sunlight

Are a little bit louder

Too close to home

The stains of blood

Permanently marked on flesh

from a friend dying in his arms

Are little bit brighter than the tears of slaughter animals

He was raised to treat spilled milk the same way he treats spilled blood

Gotta suck it up

doesn't matter if it's full of puss lying across the floor,

his mother paid too much for it

"suck it up!"

Doesn't matter if wounds are fresh with gun powder

Tears won't fill bellies or heal scars

He's not caring about eating responsibly

His responsibility is to shut down the sound of his stomach growling

He hates that noise

It’s a constant reminder

That he’s a product of his environment

Genetically engineered to fail

Blood lines

Tell the stories of ancestors

Harvested from their natural habitat

shipped across the ocean in tight packaging

In order to be processed into free laborers.

He can still feel the whips of America's stamps of approval on his back.

He can't take being ridiculed

being a part of two uncontrollable

destructive systems at the same time.

James is only 13

His mind wants to forget it all

While his body is getting weaker,

His heart

The bridge between his mind and body

Is leading the way to his unhealthy soul.