

THE OWL

2020 - 2021 ISSUE

THE OWL

2020/2021 chapbook

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santa clara university's
undergraduate
literary art magazine



SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY'S UNDERGRADUATE
LITERARY ART MAGAZINE

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COVER ART BY JOCE PULIDO
FRONT COVER / PLANTS

EDITOR'S NOTE

DEAR READER,

Welcome to The Owl, Santa Clara University's undergraduate-only literary art magazine. It's been an honor to serve as the Owl Editor this year, despite all the unconventional circumstances.

I am so proud of all the work we have been able to include in this year's digital chapbook. The Santa Clara student body is truly unmatched in creativity and talent; the contributions to this chapbook as well as everything on SantaClaraOwl.com are a testament to that. You can visit the site to see the films, music, visual art, poetry and prose that we could not include in this issue.

Thank you for all the ways you engaged with The Owl this year, from attending virtual writing workshops, to entering our contests, to being vulnerable and submitting your work, to checking out this publication right now. The Owl has helped me stay connected to my fellow students during this tumultuous time, and I hope it's the same for you.

I will extend a special thank you to everyone who helped produce this year's Owl: the Santa Clara Review staff, as well as my dedicated assistants, Frida Rivera and Sarah Schulist. Thank you, thank you!

So without further ado, please enjoy this small display of the immense artistic prowess present in the Santa Clara University undergraduate community. Remember to keep creating. The world needs it.

Hoot hoot,

ALEXA ALFANO
EDITOR

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Smothering Cigarettes

JADEN FONG / POETRY

It's been a month and a half
and ash is already filling
the pockets of your hips.

Where once stood forests
of peonies and sundews
now sticks to the tips

of my shoe's decrepit soles: dried
flowers moldered to tar, veined leaves
rotted to paper mâché rubble.

Where delicate hands once sculpted
is now painted in dry heat,
as my marred face statues

under the sun, hot breath piercing
through my eyelids—my irises
only one degree away from burning:

a summer remembered only
as a balloon filled with the cinders
from the cigarettes that we never smoked.

The Wake

KAITLYN ALLEN / POETRY

shed shirt shoes shape
wash away in ocean
shallows. seashore splashes
turn to ashes turn to shed souls
searching. sunshine fishes and
pushes them towards the finish.
only cessation and graduation
only the ocean's shivering stop.

Covid Sculpture

ELLIE FENG / ART



Covid Sculpture

ELLIE FENG / ART



Covid Sculpture

ELLIE FENG / ART



Hippie Dippie Lippie Lovers

SARAH LACKEY / POETRY

We're serious now. But when I close my eyes we're hippie dippie lippie lovers, stars in your eyes and roses in mine. Everything's pink and spinning, you're spinning me around in circle after circle and somehow I'm never sick. Moons, goons, tunes. We have perfectly stupid times in perfectly stupid places, there is an absence of want and an abundance of now. Now now now now now.

Sometimes. Sometimes you hold me in the shower, and sometimes I hold you. One time I found you sitting in the shower with hot water pouring on you. I held your face in my hands, felt your soft black scruff between my fingers. It was like holding my heart in my hands and watching it beat. We're serious now.

Island Summer

JIA SEOW / POETRY

june finds me on an island, shipwrecked
on the shores of southeast asia.

twenty-nine storeys above reclaimed land,
a single glass pane seals me

from the humidity of my hometown.
this hotel room is the bottom of an hourglass

filling up with quicksand, steadily rising
with each passing day. i once loved solitude;

now, it's coarse and rough and irritating
and it gets everywhere. there are only so many conversations

i can have with myself. no one told me
this is the most dangerous place i can be:

with my heart and mind, in quarantine
for fourteen days.

You would think the world would look small from up here.

NATE METZ / POETRY

My grandfather, John Metz, was a decorated paratrooper in the U.S. Army. After his service, he enjoyed recreational parachuting. One day, during a routine jump, his parachute did not deploy. He left behind a wife and two sons, aged seven and four.

I am standing still, floating
frozen in time in the cold, the sky
hauling my body

with its soft
formless
palms.

I am standing still, but the zodiac pushes
me away for my sins,
my faults.

I am not holy
enough for God's huge blue hand;

I feel no *pressure*.

I am standing still, but the ground
rushes towards me, without malice, for the ground
is lonely, and

I am an old friend
she hasn't felt in so long,
our final touch to be one righteous blood-red hug.

I am transformed weightless; my blood
air,

my head
hummingbirds,

my memories
paper and flying out of
my eyes into the blue truth around me.

My heart is the only real thing now –
my wife, her hands, my sons, a good foamy beer –
hallow weight and the faint
buzz of hummingbirds.

The Indiana sky
 stings sweet around me like pale neon.
Gravity pins my cheeks wide as
I plummet – if you didn't know any better,
I may look as if
 I am
 smiling.
 I have never been so still.

I am
small, and the world around me seems so immense,
 getting bigger.

1:45 A.M. February 15th 2021, With You

NATE METZ / POETRY

Tonight, a hushed rush of your reality ripples through me as I slowly
 caress your
fingers, knuckle to tip, tip to knuckle.

These fingers were your mother's silk smooth hand-me-down tools; she
 whispered, "These are
my gifts to you: create, experience, interact: live with them."

The same fingers that, at six months, you crawled upon fresh into
 freshness; they were little
rockets, launching you into unseen meaning.
The same fingers that, in naive summers, would annihilate anthills and
 garner red Hawaiian
Punch stains on their inquisitive tips.
Fingers that, coated in yellow and blue paint, created lines and shapes and
 galaxies
on blank paper, refrigerator masterpieces.

They grew with you – clumsily tugging at double-knotted shoestrings,
 grasping
sharp-and-then-dull pencils, twitching nervously.

Fingers you had broken and sprained and split and sliced, yet, with
time, they always reanimated:
Blemished, but restless for action.

The same fingers that learned your grandmother's ancient recipes in a
 thick-aired heart-filled
kitchen; chopping peppers, molding dough, performing your ordained
duty in the drooping family pendula.

The same fingers that wiped away consequence of your first heartbreak
 and wrote
elegy, crestfallen and raw, in rusty diaries tucked away for you and you
 only.

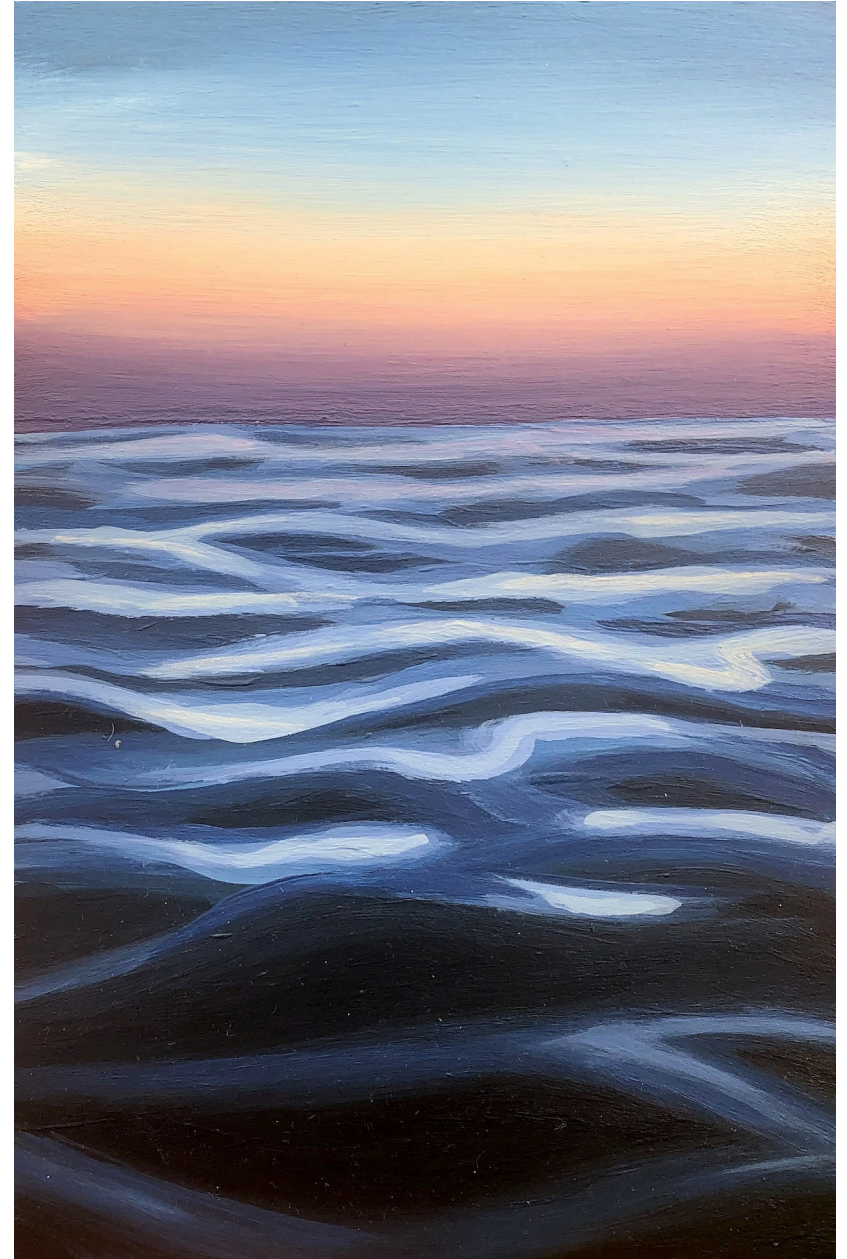
Fingers that anxiously gripped a steering wheel for the first time. That draped over your prom date's neck while pianos purred. That dug deep into your grandfather's back as the family wept. That dipped into unbaked brownie batter and brought sweet to your tongue every Sunday morning. Fingers that have waved hello and goodbye.

You *lived* with them.

These same fingers, knowing of twenty years, now wrap around mine tonight, tight. I feel memories printed permanently along each of their unending paths, knuckle to tip. They tell me more than your beating up-and-then-down chest, up to your soft neck. They tell me more than your vibrating lips, your eyes like warm velvet – I have always known you love me, darling; Your fingers told me.

Sunset Ocean

JAMES MERTKE / ART



To Give or Take a Childhood

SOFIA WOOD / POETRY

The Guardian's February 20, 2020 Headline Reads: "California formally apologizes to Japanese Americans for internment camps"

Hard to imagine someone old so young
 Without the wrinkles,
 hands like tree branches
 When the whole time I knew him
 As cashmere sweaters,
smell of safety
 Bruised feet with a past I was too young to know
Planted his wooden bones in my heart
 Carved a spot under my ribs,
 left me hollowed
Wise and unwavering, the one who taught me
 How to be kind to the world
 To be generous and strong
 Think of others before myself
 I'd throw myself in the depths
Of a lake to find the floating light
 His soul sinking to the
 bottom
 Shake it off in the hot sun to forget
Icy hands in a hospital room
 Smell of antiseptic and silence extinct
The man who loved food won't eat
 Smiles at me and tells me a story
 Of a child looking for someone,
 family
Found it in his constant presence,
 steady
Hard to realize the man of stone
Is no more than brittle bones and secrets
 Past he won't talk about,
 silent soldier
Knew more about him after he was gone

And could no longer get selfish answers
 To sink my hands into the soil of memories
Dig up the grave of a stranger
 Who wore shoes too small for his feet
Lived a lifetime in pain and never complained
 Worked in the mines that killed him
 Years after he got out, history not in the past
United States government lying through teeth
 Issuing apologies to ancestors who can't hear them
 My grandpa in a camp,
 a child with no childhood
A man who grew up to give me what he never had
 Fought in a war for a country that locked him up
 Shamed a family for having dreams of a better life
By forcing them into crowded rooms
 No privacy, only fear, dreams shot with gold bullets
 Words mean nothing when they do not
 Reach the ones who need to hear them

Color and Acceptance

NATE METZ / POETRY

When I could focus, I would imagine
What color you were forever and why
That changed. I'm remembering yellow clothes
And blue faces and slow red beating hearts.
I mixed and matched palettes in my clumsy
Klutzy cruel attempt to reimagine
A simple fact. A green gone grey, I dreamed
All day you overcame nature's cruel ways.
As time transformed and hours towering
Above displaced me further from your shades,
I saw coal black. The fact remains that you
Do not. I am a mad man. I know I
Am wrong for wrongly thinking pinkly when
The truth was steel. The years, I said the years
I cried the years since you became stardust.
I could not see it all that time, stardust.
A brighter shade of astro-fuschia, why
Did I chuck grief for years, I cried for this?
A mad man yes, but blind then too! For I
Could not see utter liberation of
Your color in its ostensible fade.
Sincerity and clarity show me
A new array: your grey was suffering---
Your green is free. One day I too will be
With you, creating heart-bending displays
Of hue; until that day, I break away,
Embracing life anew: a blank canvas.

When I think of lightning

SARAH LACKEY / POETRY

I see the canyons of your face darkening
My screams cracking in the storm
The night pulses in us the night presses
Your light steps heavy on wet concrete

My screams cracking in the storm
Broken by your North Carolina summer
Your light steps sharp on wet concrete
A thousand nickels turning down the road

Broken by your North Carolina summer
I sit in the old phone booth and cry
A thousand nickels running down the road
Waiting for something like Heaven to show up

I sit in the old phone booth and cry
Watching you lie on two yellow lines
Waiting for something like hell to show up
Pine trees halo the lightning halo the light

I watch you lie on two yellow lines
The night pulsing in us
Pines trees halo your body they halo
All that once was.

Untitled

JOCE PULIDO / ART



Big Mike's Horse Auction

MARLI STELLHORN / FICTION

"I'm terribly sorry for the confusion, young girl. But unfortunately, my hands are tied. Rules are rules," Big Mike gently told Astrid.

Astrid had attended Big Mike's Horse Auction a few times with her mother in the past, but she had only ever heard Big Mike speak when offering bids in that awful and impressive auctioneer voice of his. It sounded like he was speaking through molasses as he spoke to her in this way.

"But Mister...uh...Mr. Big Mike...I don't understand," Astrid hesitated.

"Well, let me explain, my darling. It's quite simple - you filled your paperwork out wrong! At the top of this here line," he pointed to the top of the horse breed registration paper, "you wrote Astrid McDowell. Your horse's name is Halo McDowell, you silly, beautiful girl. The Smith family made a bid - an expensive bid for that matter - for Astrid McDowell. Thus, Astrid McDowell is who they shall get."

Astrid stared blankly at Big Mike. She found that she lost her ability to speak.

"Great. Thank you for understanding," Big Mike continued. "As I said earlier, rules are rules. We have a very strict way of doing things around here at Big Mike's Horse Auction. And you, sweet girl, are no exception. Come on in, boys! She's ready!"

At that moment, two large men entered the stable in which Big Mike and Astrid were discussing. One was holding a halter and a horse bit, and the other was holding a needle syringe. They gently took Astrid and wrapped the halter around her neck loosely, put the horse bit far into her mouth, and warned her that if she was not a good girl, they would use the horse tranquilizer. They led Astrid outside - in line with the forty-nine other horses sold that day. The horses were being loaded into five different trailers. Astrid was the last one loaded in. The men fed her a carrot once she was inside the trailer for being such a good girl.

She stared at the horse next to her. Or, rather, she stared at herself inside the horse's eyes next to her. She thought she looked pretty in the dim trailer lighting, and she smiled.

The trailer came to an abrupt stop. The driver opened the trailer door and led Astrid outside. She looked in front of her and saw a beautiful yellow home.

A beautiful yellow home with three pastures.

A beautiful yellow home with three pastures filled with around twenty horses.

Astrid smiled.

The driver led Astrid to the front door, knocked, and waited. A woman with beautiful golden eyes and beautiful golden hair opened the door. She smiled as if it was the last smile God had granted her.

"Oh!" the woman exclaimed. "She's beautiful! Just as beautiful as the day I met her."

This confused Astrid. Nonetheless, she smiled.

The woman took the horse bit out of Astrid's mouth and the halter off her neck. She refused the complimentary horse tranquilizer that comes with a typical horse drop-off from Big Mike's Horse Auction. She took Astrid upstairs to the bathroom where a hot bath was running. She unclothed Astrid slowly, deliberately, and gently. Astrid stepped in the bath as the golden-haired woman washed her with lavender soap. She began in the crevices of her fingernails and toenails. She slowly rubbed the soap into her arms and legs, letting it seep into the girl's skin. She brushed Astrid's long, black hair. She ran the brush from her scalp down to the edges of her hair mid-waist until Astrid's hair became as smooth as Astrid's mother's had been.

Astrid had never had her hair brushed before. As the woman brushed her hair, Astrid caught a glance of her reflection in the bath water. She looked clean.

When the golden-haired woman believed that Astrid was sufficiently scrubbed, she left her a yellow dress hanging on the door. The dress seemed to be exactly Astrid's size, but what was strange was that, etched delicately on the tag on the back of the dress, was the name "Nellie."

Astrid put the beautiful yellow dress on and walked downstairs. She found a table set with the most exquisite china and glasses filled to the brim with sweet tea. There was a very small golden-haired child sitting at the table, who beamed at Astrid as she entered the dining room. The golden-haired woman walked in, holding an exquisite meatloaf. A golden-haired man with a golden-haired mustache followed her. They both took a seat at the table with the child. She noticed at the head of the table, on the wall, hung a large family portrait. The golden-haired man, woman, and child were in the family portrait, but, surprisingly, Astrid noticed that there was another body completely cut - no, ripped - out of the frame.

Before Astrid could properly think about the eerie absurdity of this family portrait, the smell of the meatloaf hit her. The smell was absolutely delicious, even hypnotizing. Astrid was not used to smelling home-cooked meals.

Astrid slowly approached the table and sat down.

"Welcome home," the golden-haired child said to Astrid. "We've been waiting for you for quite some time, sweet, beautiful Nellie."

Wounds

JEN PARKINSON / POETRY

In a dark room
He gave me a rose.
My face lit up.
I smiled and smiled.

I gripped it so tightly
That I didn't even notice
The thick blood running down my hands
Onto my wrists.

Realizing what He'd done,
He gasped and took it back.
He didn't want me to bleed.

I cursed Him.
I couldn't believe
He took my rose away.
The one thing I loved for so long,
The one thing He gave to me,
The only thing I ever wanted to keep.
I was desperate to feel its thorns again,
My wounds still raw and bleeding.

I should've been listening as He touched my head
And spoke softly,
Consoling me.
But I ran right past him,
Angry and hurt.
He didn't understand.

I stayed in the corner of the room for a long time,
In my own darkness.
He tried to talk to me each day
But I would not turn around.
I would not look at Him.

"Don't you know that I love you, child?
I was just trying to protect you."
But I couldn't hear Him.
I didn't want to.
I didn't care.
He took my rose away.

On the 40th day I heard His voice again,
As I did every night.
What more could I do?
I knew I had to look at Him.

I turned around.
There He was,
a beautiful bouquet of roses in hand,
And a big gleaming smile.

Tears came to my eyes.
"I thought you didn't want me to have any more roses?" I said.

He smiled gently.
"These don't have thorns, child."
My hands still ached
The blood had only begun to dry
My hands shook in fear and awe
But I slowly reached out to take them.

It wasn't until He extended his hands
to give me His perfect bouquet
That I saw His hands.
On His palms
There were wounds like mine,
but deeper.

"I always understood, child."

Untitled

JOCE PULIDO / ART



The Hero

CAMILLE SEM / FICTION

Michael grabbed his cape and raced downstairs, meeting his mother in the car. She mumbled something or other about him taking too long, as she usually did. It didn't matter. Today was an important day. Today they would save his sister. She'd been taken from them last month by someone evil. Mother wouldn't tell him any more than that. It was his job to get her back, because it was his fault. He was supposed to be keeping watch, and the evil people must have come when he fell asleep. When he woke up, she was gone. They drove around her favorite park, Mother said she would show up today.

"She might look different. It's been a month, and evil can change you," she'd warned him. He was grown-up, he could understand these things. He was prepared. After an hour of switching between driving around and sitting and waiting, Mother announced that she saw her. Michael's eyes darted around the playground, trying to find her.

"She's right there, stop twitching. Go get her." She was pointing a little left of the swings, at a girl who was singing quietly to a cricket. She didn't look like his sister, but he remembered Mother's warning: "evil can change you." He got out of the car and approached the swings, stopping to listen to his sister sing. He glanced over at his mother, who urged him to hurry up.

"Elizabeth?" he tapped her, "it's me, Michael. Are you ready to go home?"

"My name's not Elizabeth. Who are you? Why are you wearing that stupid cape?"

"I'm here to save you, to take you and your cricket home." She looked uneasy, but he smiled reassuringly.

"Like, you're the hero? You're here to save me?"

"Exactly!"

She shrugged, and pulled herself off the ground. "Alright I'll play. But next time I get to be the hero."

He grabbed her hand, shouting "safety is this way!" and he ran with her back towards Mother. He did everything right, he faced the curb so her back was to the street. Mother pulled up, and he shoved her into the open door, then slammed it shut. He waited for Mother to congratulate him, but she just shoved headphones into his hand.

"Get in the front. Remember what I told you."

He sat down, put his headphones in, and faced forward. Mother said it was

best, he was too young to understand how harsh it would be for Elizabeth to return home after being brainwashed by the evil. He thought he was grown-up enough, but he didn't want to argue. So he sat in the front seat, waiting for Mother to get her settled in the back. Before long, Elizabeth was sleeping, ready for the drive back home.

"I can tell it's her, Mother. She still likes to play! When she wakes up, can we play together?" "Let her get readjusted. Remember, she's returning from evil. Best to let her rest." Michael sighed, but again, he didn't want to argue. Instead, he looked out the window at the trees passing, pretending he wasn't in a car, but was flying, his cape flowing behind him, Elizabeth running beside him. He nodded off at some point during the drive, and was jolted awake by Mother. He stood outside his door, trying to shake him awake.

"Elizabeth is settling back into her room, it's time for us to eat. You've had a long day." It didn't take long for Michael to finish his soup, and then he quickly fell asleep, dreaming of all the fun he and Elizabeth would have when she was ready.

As the years passed, he and Elizabeth grew much closer. The coldness she'd shown him at first had faded, and now they did everything together, with Mother's supervision of course. They had moved houses, had moved very far away, in an effort to keep Elizabeth away from the people who had taken her. He didn't have to keep watch over her anymore, Mother had alarms and cameras to keep them both safe. Mother said no one was around for miles, no one who could possibly bother them. Sometimes Elizabeth had bad days, and Mother said she was remembering her time with the evil people.

For the most part, however, they were a happy family, and Elizabeth enjoyed reading books, or playing with Michael. Once a week they had a family dinner, and it was the best part of Michael's week. Mother said it was important for families to eat together for "bonding." They weren't allowed to talk, but Michael smiled the whole time. They got special food that day, warm chicken instead of soup. Elizabeth picked at it, she didn't seem to enjoy family dinners as much as Michael.

Elizabeth often asked Michael if he was happy, to which he replied yes, of course, what more could he want from life? She would sigh, and hug him, saying this wasn't fair to him. He didn't understand, but he always hugged her back, burying his face in her arms. He loved to sit like that. He felt safe with her. Not just safe, but cared for.

Mother said affection wasn't necessary. She gave him food, a place to sleep, that was all someone needed. Elizabeth said being hugged was important. She said it might not be important for survival, but it

was essential to being alive. That didn't make much sense to Michael, because he thought they meant the same thing. He nodded, pretending he understood. Then she would hug him again. He felt happy. And why shouldn't he be, he had everything he needed. The only bad times were when Mother was upset. When Mother was upset, there wasn't any dinner.

"Michael! You and your sister stay inside today. There's something I have to take care of." She turned towards Elizabeth. "The doors are bolted on the outside. Remember, I see everything."

Michael waved good-bye, excited to spend time with his sister. She ran up to the door and pressed her ear against it, scrunching her eyebrows.

"Is this a new game?"

"Shh. Let me listen."

Listen to what? Sometimes he heard birds outside in the morning. They sounded so pretty, he wished he could run outside and hear them. They weren't allowed outside without Mother, however, and she didn't care about the birds. She only cared about the rules: no leaving the house without her, no eating between meals, no windows open, no loud noise. He'd had to learn these well; if he forgot one there were consequences. Elizabeth learned them quickly, for she was smart.

Elizabeth. She was still listening to the door. She looked over at him, and her eyes looked different. He felt a flash of fear, a bad feeling in his stomach.

"Michael. I need you to help."

Michael watched as she crossed the room. She pulled up some of the floor, it wasn't supposed to do that. He jumped back as she slowly pulled out a knife.

"No weapons no weapons! Put it away!"

"Michael, I need you to calm down. We're getting out of here."

"What? No! No leaving the house without Mother, you learned the rules."

She walked slowly back towards a window, as she grabbed a blanket and wrapped it around the hand carrying the knife. Michael watched, frozen. This wasn't right. This didn't feel like a game. This felt like breaking the rules. He didn't break the rules. But she was slamming the knife into the window, glass shattering around her. Michael covered his ears.

"It's too loud Elizabeth! Stop!"

She didn't stop. She didn't stop until almost the whole window was gone. She looked at him again, her eyes digging into him. He noticed her eyes were watering.

"Michael please. Please come with me. You know she'll be mad when she sees this. Come with me."

"No! I didn't do it, it's not my fault. It's not!"

"Please."

She reached her hand out, inviting him to grab it. He felt queasy. Was it his fault? Would Mother be upset? He was supposed to be in charge. He was supposed to take care of her. What if she ran into the evil people? It was his job to protect her. He took a few steps towards her, reaching his hand towards hers. She smiled, and slowly moved her body through the broken window. She helped him through, navigating his bulky body through the narrow opening, but he slipped, cutting her hand and his stomach on the jagged edge of the window. He started breathing heavily.

"Stop! We have to stop. We have to go back. Have to fix it."

"We can't, we have to keep going. It's not deep, we'll get help soon."

Michael started screaming.

"No we have to go back inside, I can't do it!"

"Shh Michael, calm down; I need you to calm down. It's not a bad cut. You'll be okay." She hugged him, and slowly he relaxed and followed her out of the yard.

Out of safety.

He saw movement out of the corner of his eye, and looked up. A bird! They looked as beautiful as they sounded. He felt a jerk on his arm, pulling his eyes from the sky. "Hurry, we have to find someone, we have to get off of the property."

He was getting more worried now. How far would she take him? They couldn't be leaving, not without Mother. But they were getting further and further down the driveway, the house getting smaller and smaller behind them. His stomach sank with every step.

They plodded along the edge of the road for miles, gravel and dust swirling around their shoes. Michael felt dizzy, he wanted to stop. Elizabeth kept pulling him along though, and she promised they'd stop soon. He was getting ready to tell her he couldn't do it, he'd have to stop, when Elizabeth's eyes lit up.

"There's a house! Come on, we're so close."

The only place Michael wanted to be close to was his home, but he sped up with her. It seemed like Elizabeth was about to break one of the most important rules: don't talk to anyone outside the family. He was too tired to protest, however, and let himself be dragged up to the front door. He stood still as she pounded on the door, unable to move when an old man in

overalls eventually opened the door. "Sir, you have to help us, call 911!"

"Is this some prank? Never liked you dumb teenagers."

"Please!"

She stuck her foot in the door as he tried to shut it, tears starting to run down her cheeks. "Please you have to believe me. We can't keep going. We--"

"Alright alright stop crying come inside, just sit down. I'll call the cops."

Michael stood in the doorway, watching her step through the threshold. They didn't need help, they needed Mother. They shouldn't be here, they should be at home, where it was safe. "Michael please trust me, just come inside."

The man squinted at Michael.

"You okay son?"

Michael didn't answer, instead turning towards Elizabeth.

"Is he helping us get home?"

Her eyes pleaded with him, and her voice broke as she answered.

"Yeah Michael. We're going home."

He let himself be pulled into the living room, and sat down on the couch with Elizabeth. She kept her hand intertwined with his.

"Miss, what should I tell them?"

Elizabeth glanced at Michael. "I'll be right back."

She joined the man in the kitchen and whispered something to him. The man looked over at Michael and gestured. Elizabeth shook her head. He sighed, and turned around, talking back into the phone. Elizabeth rejoined Michael on the couch, and they sat there, holding hands, until the group of men arrived. They all had on matching hats, and shiny badges on their fancy shirts. Michael grew restless, how could he know these weren't the evil people? He couldn't let Elizabeth go, not again. She started to get up.

"Michael, I have to go talk to them."

"No! No they'll take you again, they can't take you from me!"

One of the men started walking towards them.

"Sir I need you to let go of her. Ma'am, is that blood? Did he hurt you?"

He reached towards his belt, his eyes never leaving Michael.

Michael shoved Elizabeth behind him. "I'm protecting her, you can't take her!"

Elizabeth was crying. "Michael, let go, let go please."

He released his grip, but as soon as he did so one of the men grabbed him,

shoving his hands together behind his back. He tried to fight, to protect Elizabeth, but he couldn't move his arms. "It's gonna be okay, trust me it's gonna be okay," tears ran down her face as she watched the man shove him into the car. She turned towards one of the men, shouting, "He didn't understand, he doesn't know what's going on please--"

"Ma'am right now he's at the very least an accomplice, and very likely the only chance we have at finding her. With all due respect, how can you know he wasn't faking his mental state, you've been through a lot. It's common for victims to try to find some sort of comfort in their kidnappers." "That's not what happened, I know that's not, none of this is his fault!"

"You've done your part. Trust in the law. Only the guilty will go to jail."

"He's not guilty of anything, please!"

"Ma'am we have another witness, a former victim who escaped before you were kidnapped. We have reason to believe he was directly involved with the planning and execution of the kidnappings." A flash of doubt crossed her face.

"No. No, I know him, I lived with him everyday. He isn't- he never realized it was wrong." "Thank you for your concern, but now it's time for us to do our job, we'll take you back to the station for now, and try to contact your family."

"My family?"

Tears welled in her eyes and one of the men jumped forward to help her sit down.

"Yes, your family. It's time to forget about Michael. We'll take care of him."

Royal Sphynx

JAMES MERTKE / PAINTING



The Whispering Grass

SCOTT DILENA / POETRY

The grass where we once stood has gone grey
and the love that gave it life has gone stray
but under loss that soot's still good
and because of loss our love still could
could reap the pain we sowed so long ago
could keep the stain of life's deep lows
for knowing what is wrong won't give life its mean
but losing what was right can make grey look green

Through the Ashes

MARTIMEANO VILLA / POETRY

The rain outside is dripping droplets of water down my window. My eyes are moving with it, further and further down, until we have both hit rock bottom.

Gray clouds surround me. Large presence. Out of my control. The grumbles are getting louder and surround me. The grumbles turn to yells and I'm reminded of when my stepdad controlled the weather. I hear him, "Shut up!" "No son of mine is un joto!"

A familiar fear rains down on me, and the thundering screams of nature strike me with painful memories of when I was a boy. The boy that was going to be a doctor. The boy that was going to make money. The boy that was going to have a beautiful wife.

The boy that was going to stay a boy.

Bud-um bud-um bud-um. I hear you my heart, trying to beat away the beatings of the past.

More water reveals the darker shades of the asphalt, reminding me of the memories that were trashed on a similar dark road.

HIM

He stomped at the memories, and in sync with the thunder, bellowed yells of anger.

Vivid thrusts of his arms swayed at random.

Destroying images that bloomed seeded memories.

All cindered in his angry sad downpour.

The clattering droplets above his figure gushed more and more pressure that overwhelmed my inner walls.

Pillars of comfortable support all collapsed.

WHY?

Mother, why?

Why did you leave?

Father, why?

Why do you hurt all of us?

Brothers, why?

Why do you want to forget?

Roars of more thunder and lightning spark a rampaging fury that consumes and burns the mountaintops.

Outside, I can hear the crackling and thudding sounds of jagged power hitting the verdant forests.

The wrathful smoke, just like before, is killing me.

I contemplate.

Should I walk into the fire like I have thought about before?

Should I end the slow suffering of life's cruel divine jokes?

ME

He destroys our family memories and leaves them on the road to be washed away.

I remember the tears that trickled from the tip of my curved nose.

"Why is mom still gone?"

"Why are you angry?"

"Why do we have no home?"

The louder I wanted to belt out why, why, why, why, WHY? His anger boomed more loudly.

"It's your fault. Our failure of a son, a faggot!"

SMACK!

Maybe it is...

Smoke fills my lungs and I fall to sleep.

Everything I had, gone.

Engulfed by unfortunate cinders.

Bolts of lightning matched his swings.

It will be done, it will be done, I will be done.

AFTER THE STORM

Alive. I am alive.

Coughing, but alive.

There are traces of the lifedrainning haze that engulfed me.

But I'm still alive.

Stepdad, the restraining order removed you.

Mother, you never came back. I still miss you.

Brothers, I won't forget, so you won't need to.

Ashes all around. I'm not sad.

Roots are still here. Seeds for tomorrow.

New rains are going to come and lead me anew.

Pillars of friends, of new loves, to support the me of today.

Hug me, as I hug all of you. The battered, the hurt, the beautiful.

Together, holding onto the broken parts that only in the deepest despairs that we feel.

Loving and loving and loving.

When I was young, my favorite plant was lamb's ear

JADEN FONG / POETRY

I could just recognize the way
the shiny dew from daybreak
would bead off of the velvet fur
like a mallard's tunic.

The fluff felt like whisked corduroy
against my coarse fingertips
that had been roughened and toughened by
the hot, torrid concrete from my evening
games of tag in the cul-de-sac.

Such softness I had never known
in unsullied wilderness.
Neither the matted fur of backyard mule deer
nor the knit wool hairs of the Tussock Moth Caterpillar
could compare to the leaves' plush touch.

Only once had I felt this softness—
on the frayed and washed
baby blue blanket, folded neatly
at the end of my childhood mattress.

Over a decade later,
I saw the plant again today.
I didn't know its name.
I just recognized the way the fleece looked like vanilla frosting:

my favorite.

Liam Mead Elegy

HARVEY CHILCOTT / POETRY

Grown side by side as a small child
Oh the fun mischief
Detentions together.
Adventure always around the corner
We dared to dream and live higher
It was exciting, it was forever
Oh why did you take yourself away from me

Sometimes on a blue moon I think 'bout you and sigh
Happiness is a hard thing to come by
I hope you have found a peaceful place to lie

Each and every weekend we'd
Drink and be merry
Talking 'bout girls and friendly banter
Camping with mates by the beach
Staying up all night, laughing like there's no tomorrow
But I knew not
Your deep pain
And our sweet tomorrow never came

Sometimes on a blue moon I think 'bout you and sigh
Happiness is a hard thing to come by
I hope you have found a peaceful place to lie

I treasure our time spent together
Your loving smile
I keep on my blank wall
Gold grass plains of Maria
Clash with blue sea
How I wish you were next to me
Your last photo, a cliff high
I stay awake at night and cry

Sometimes on a blue moon I think 'bout you and sigh

Happiness is a hard thing to come by
I hope you have found a peaceful place to lie

Ode to My Father

ELAHA HAMIDY / POETRY

You boast a stoic exterior with
Indignant grooves etched into a face
That demands obedience,
Oh! How hard it must have been
Dedicating your years to the specialized art
Of constant crossness.
Generous and just,
You never miss an opportunity to share
With unwilling participants
Your fiery displays,
Though rare,
Always amaze and dazzle
With the sheer force of their devastation,
Overlooked by
Someone of your status,
The mighty patriarch!
Your ephemeral charm
Once again manages
To make even the most decent
Turn a blind eye.
How proud you must be
Of the control, you seized from
The rest of us,
Left to deal with the messes
And tactful tantrums thrown
In response to the spilled milk
You so impressively perceived.