

OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters
EXPERIENCE/REFLECT/CELEBRATE



2021 Pamphlet Series

Writer's Portfolio

SLOAN ASAKURA

HOW TO LOVE
A HEADSTONE





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SLOAN ASAKURA

HOW TO LOVE A TOMBSTONE

Writer's Portfolio: Sloan Asakura

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SHE WEARS ME WHENEVER I WEAR HER JEANS

cut silver from flesh each morning.

mirrors are made only for ghosts.

rust in my hair shimmers back from daylight mistakes,
turn into nightmares where she is still living,
and i am still not doing enough.

i can smell her on my clothes

old wood accents on a
stucco spackled house
every bill she ever paid, stacked
held together by rubber bands
red spanish roof tiles
turning pink under hot sun and smog
whispers of pomegranates
staining fingernails and knuckles
chlorine and salt

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fill the air as if aflame from wax candles
crackling newspaper
half-filled crossword puzzles
bleeding ballpoint pens
on a split-wood dining table
detergent and downy
troubled only by two pairs of hands
peeling green wallpaper
lay quiet over the air vent
a million photos in half as many frames
my own face, a child, staring from most of them
might i have been loved by a body before the burning
might i have been loved by a mother without a daughter
might i have forgotten my body belonged in a picture frame

in a koa wood box
we could at least be together again
and i would not cry when i see
pennies in ring boxes.

sometimes i forget

ghost means to linger.

KAMIKAZE BUGS LOOK LIKE MY HANDS
WHEN I'M HOLDING ONTO HIM

my grandpa refuses to shower

a waste of precious time, he calls it
and his clothes collect the multitude of scents
of a man who cannot admit
it is now difficult to take care of himself

when does time become cavernous?
only kamikaze bugs in june
orange-fire glimmering bodies
calamity themselves into routine,
endless junes, endless Beatles

he rests in a lawn chair in the garage
and watches the people across the street
gives them dialogue, gives them secrets
his cane resting across his lap
a tattered copy of *Catcher in the Rye*

lay open on its belly to page 10

and the sun touches dry trees in the park
children running, tumbling over each other
and i remember him brushing sand from our jeans
remember collecting blooming pine cones
remember falling from the monkey bars
leaping from the swings
remember his wheezing laughter
our evening walks

and in my quiet, i watch him watching the people in the park
and i pour our coffee, each dark dream like a broken mind.

IN OUR HOUSE

i collect ghosts--

occupy fractions of their space in return for

warmth

any kind

incense burns each mourning

the air smells of black coffee mixed with jasmine ash

koa wood box and the photos watching me from the altar

stacked winter coats hung, never worn, crowd the hallway

impossible to avoid calamity with wool with

plastic market bags weighing white on your fingers

maybe those tombstone buildings never left my mind

their mouths agape lining the streets of Greece

ancient

still mortal

like bones cracking through fire

i fear the same fate for us-- dead amongst the living

i mourn before the burning

cry over bodies only sleeping

the fear shakes me awake like a poltergeist beneath the bed

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my bones rattle with “what if i’m not here?” and “who will i be then,
when he’s gone?”

but i wake each morning still

fill the coffee pot and know he will say “too strong”

hold the moment

like a secret

in my sun-weathered palms

and the ghosts drape about my shoulders

my ancestral beads, each stone a life before mine

and we cry together over the peeling floral wallpaper

over the emerald green carpet with the netting peering through

wipe the tears off the table before he descends the stairs and says, “coffee?”

OYSTER SHELLS CAN SING IF THEY ARE EMPTY

clams grip, lips tight with secrets
my father with a cleaver and mallet
would cut through the adductor of a pismo clam
i would press my hands to my ears
the sound of a door slamming could open one.

the pier knows crab traps better than anyone
the moss-wood with pretty ridges where the rope grinds
as we pull up the trap, dungeness crabs filling ice chests
i hold them from behind, their pincers
scramble to find me-- a ghost they can only feel.

on the boat, ocean mist makes your eyes water
og clouds the threshold between sea and sky and
you forget they are not the same, that far endless grey
you hook your fingers while unlipping the lingcod fish
its black marble eyes watching the reaper's red-water hands

they used to walk out the door early, five fishing poles

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dark against the blue street lights filtering through the window
and upon their return the sun had set, the gold lights on the patio
shimmered off the scales of the silver tuna, the blade running pretty
through the red belly, hand inside pulling those red strings tight, into the bowl

and i watched every tender gesture of the knife, the calluses on my father's hands
his crooked fingers, i could swear they were open, bloody against that ocean teardrop.

About the writer:

Sloan Asakura is a poet and memoirist originally from Los Angeles, now braving the Pacific Northwest. They have been previously published in Jeopardy Magazine, Rigorous, The Mantle, and Rogue Agent. Asakura is a founder and editor of MAWTH. In their free time, they can be found cooking comfort food, gardening, and contemplating persimmons.

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