MAL DE OJO
EMILY OTERO
CLASS OF 2020
POETRY
there was an arson at the swimming pool across the street from my house
a man struck matches between the legs of a little girl and she went up in flames
it still bubbles like blood in my veins

there is a fire under my skin and it rises up to meet your touch
progenitor, it calls you daddy
the smoke you have left in my lungs seeks you out
and finds you in every hand that finds its way to my flesh
flames licking at the junction, itching to find its way back into your restless fingers

it warps every unknown child into a mirror
I see the ashes in their eyes when there’s nothing there at all
who has hurt you? who will hurt you? will you bend or break or burn
will you rebuild?
my god, my god, you are so young
and I am sorry
the image of that fire has seared itself into the back of my eyelids,
and his breath still roars in my ears
it consumes me
it consumes me
he consumes me,

he
even though I’ve lived on an island all my life
I never learned how to swim
so when I go to the beach with my family,
or I’m on a stuffy little boat with my dad’s friends,
or when I sit in the backseat of my mom’s minivan driving home from my brother’s school,
I can’t help
but look into this huge expanse of water because I know
that all it takes is a slight tilt of the steering wheel to keep me from sinking in it

you know if you stare into the ocean long enough,
you can almost feel every creature under the surface staring right back at you
every fish, every clam, every krill, turns its eyes up to the light as if to say,
what are you looking at, asshole?

I’ve stared into the sea so long I think it knows me
and it hasn’t made it any friendlier.
if anything, it’s made it bolder
the thoughts it plants in my head become more and more graphic

like the pull of the riptide on my hips sweeping me away from shore,
salt in my eyes, in my mouth,
the sound of my sobs lost to the tide
my head goes under and he pries open my mouth with eager fingers, forces them down my throat
his face above me, reaching, I pull my arm back because I remember him, I remember him

I am still
and the thing that sleeps under the skin waits to pull me into its tender embrace
it knows me

I become the leviathan
I become the drowned ambition, the
green-eyed beast which stares up from the abyss
I am the creature without fear of sword or stone or spell,
spawning smoke in my belly for the day I make my return
I will take back what is mine
I don’t want anything on this earth to be my equal
I look down on all that are haughty,
I am king over the covetous, the greedy, the

these words were mine, but not anymore
AQUAPHOBIA

it’s like falling in love underwater

she is weightless, all hair and limbs and lips
half-parted and wild, teased gently by the tide
she is the sand under the sea, a mirage, a fever dream
she is the salt that remains on your skin after the sun kisses the water away

she squints against the bite of the ocean in her eyes
and grins at the fish as they brush past her ankles.
the light still dances off her teeth despite its journey to the sea
and she still enchants you through refracted lens

and your vision blurs as you give in
and you trade the air in your lungs for dead weight
her laugh is somewhere far away from you but her hands on the back of your neck, holding you down,
that’s real

and you are weightless
PET CEMETERY

take me out back with a shovel and a picnic basket full of severed fingers
and we’ll lay this towel down over the dew that settled over the grass that grew over the corpses
of the dogs we loved when we were kids.

we lie back on the blanket too short for our bodies and we lay our heads in the mud. we pretend
the rain beating on our faces are tiny belts scolding us for our sins, the hiss of the water in our
ears sounds a little like your old cat Smokey, don’t you think? your hand wanders, brushing my
knee, slithering up my thigh, fingerling the hem of my dress.

we weren’t ready then and we aren’t ready now. you drown me under your weight in the rain and
slide back, satisfied. I rise from the grave to beat you bloody with the spade.

it’s a shame we drove out all this way just to find out we forgot to pack dirt.
TULPA

I only feel you sometimes, and even then you’re always wearing a mask;
I gotta wonder if you even have a face at all.
you’ve got hands, thousands of hands, hands to spare,
and a hunger for god’s flesh.
I might have made you, but you really don’t have to settle for mine.
still, hands with countless teethlike fingers tear away at
skin, like clothes in the jaws of a rabid animal.
a tongue peeks out from the heart of every calloused palm.
blind, they guide themselves by taste and taste alone,
they gorge on sweat, fear, blood,
the unmistakable flavor of cherry
guides thousands and thousands of hands
into the dirt.
you were an accident
this was an accident.

with your fist still buried in my stomach
claw's wrapped around my guts
you thief, you liar,
you tell me this was love.