

# JOSHUA MERCHANT

Native of East Oakland. Black. Queer. Has had the privilege to be published as a Qnalist for the June Jordan Poetry Prize anthology 'In These Streets' as well as the literary journal Eleven Eleven.

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## *Distilled*

a boy walks home alone at night  
carrying a 12 pack of water.  
in the south, at this hour  
he is one of the few walking,  
and cars drive by, one of them honks  
who's to say it's not at him.

a girl drives home alone at night.  
blunt in hand, half a liter of water  
on the passenger side, who's  
to say what's healthier for her -  
sedation or hydration, and the boys  
wait at the bus stop, who's to say  
the wheels on her car aren't records  
she refuses to scratch.

a man is home alone at night  
a bottle of hawaiian punch  
in the fridge, he's praying  
to god, who's to say he isn't  
one on his knees in remembrance  
of his name, his tears aren't red  
nor sweet and the water  
from the tap is questionable.

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a woman is home at night.  
can only swallow if thickener  
is placed in her water, who's  
to say she should still be here  
swallowing what feels like syrup  
in a crowded hall of wheel chairs  
and dateline tv, a man is telling

a boy that his views on water  
are dated, that the government  
puts things we don't want into  
things we need, the boy tells  
the man the government can  
also make your water brown  
and charge you for the bill.

the boy then turns to the girl  
asking to hit the blunt, the  
girl replies *why are we always  
so thirsty*, the boy says  
*you right, lemme get a swig*,  
she says *that's not for you*  
and drives away to visit  
her mother, the woman

who's raising her hand  
to grab her cup is being  
told to slow down with  
the liquor cuz it's not  
going anywhere, noone  
wants to say that she might.

until a girl walks in  
with half a liter water  
and says *here ma, drink  
this instead*.

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