A Way with Water

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Abstract:

*A Way with Water*, a dual narrative, traces my mother’s journey from England to the United States and from California to Hawai‘i with three children in tow to escape a physically abusive relationship; and my stepfather’s journey from Black Bottom, Detroit, to the Air Force, and finally to Hawai‘i island, as one of the first black men and jazz musicians there. The narrative examines notions of identity within a counter-cultural lifestyle often interacting with Hawaiian and local cultures—a dynamic that requires not only respect for the host culture, but also an awareness of how my narrative is in dialogue with other Hawai‘i writers. *A Way with Water* explores non-fiction, poetry, and prose to create hybrid and evolving forms within the field of memoir and biography.
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There is always the very real notion that writing might cause harm to those I write about. These worries also exist with fiction, but they are disguised with the label of fiction and a name change or two. Memoir guilt rides on the back of the writer, pushing at the subjective and objective choices made when writing. The process of writing brings with it the knowledge that the protective cover of intimate knowledge guards the writer’s life and, at the same time, it also shelters other lives. There is a rush in the naked revelations that come with writing stories that connect with real life, with history, with memories. It is a flashing to the public of private selves, saying this happened; it was real. It reaffirms existence and somehow adds weight to the act of living for a writer—for me. Especially when the stories have abuse, epic narrative, heroic strength, human flaw, racial inequalities, music, love, and symbolic rebirth built naturally into their narrative arc. However, even in the exhilaration at the moment of revelation, there is also an exposed sense of disconnection that comes with writing about family and memories. The people I know, and I, become characters. Our lives become settings in the mind and scenes replayed over and over on a page—we are more and less ourselves.

When I began the navigation into memory and wrote of my mother and stepfather, I quickly realized that I wrote with contrition and guilt because the characters that I formed on the page created human characters with weakness and strength. I wanted to expose them and protect them simultaneously from the judgment that the revelation of writing brought. Even before the story of my mother and stepfather fully formed, I worried that I hadn’t written scenes the way one of my siblings would remember, or I had added details, depth, agency, and words to stimulate and create a coherent narrative. I had created my own angle of reality and cited memory as history and truth for all of our family because I am the only one in our family who writes. Carolyn Wells Kraus argues: “Undoubtedly, reducing a person’s story to words on a page robs it of complexity.” This has become more apparent as I write. The words do limit some aspects of the characters I know and magnify other aspects. Kraus goes on to point out that when a person becomes a story
on a page, “perhaps those characters bearing their names are people they cannot recognize, or people who come to stand—in the stories—for ideas they never thought about” (284). There is an effect that comes with writing that both reaffirms identity and resituates it, creating a different sense of character—perhaps characteristics that aren’t always welcome to the person they portray.

In creating these characterizations of my mom and dad, I asked myself: What motivates you to write stories and do you write with consideration? I came to the realization that there exists a limitation for a child to recognize every distinctive characteristic of a parents’ reality. The very nature of being a child in the parent-child relationship negates the understanding of how the parent existed outside the realm which the parent decided to define as “being” for the child, or the milieu the child perceived. Memoirs grow from memory, and work within the understanding of the relationship, but they also question it. My memory-work has the task of pushing at the boundaries of the wall of limitation brought on by the parent-child relationship. This is where my fascination began. I questioned whether my memories told the truth. I found that what is true for parent-child relationships is also generally true for all relationships – no one can truly "know" another person nor portray their “reality” completely. So I write what I know.

Recently, I wrote a creative nonfiction story. In the narrative, I remember my mother’s hands pushing an old red Kirby vacuum cleaner against the yellow carpet. I remember the boy who smelled of corn chips and old Iron Maiden posters. I remember my stepfather, who purchased the vacuum from a door to door salesman. The stepfather, whom my siblings and I thought, believed, and hoped might be a spy—someone strong and mysterious. My stepfather’s house became our home, and his vacuum cleaner sucked up pennies from the living room floor for years. His house had cool hiding places, little compartments to place small things in. We found out he was a jazz musician—not quite as thrilling as spy, but interesting. The word Kirby reminds me, still, over and over, of him, my stepfather, and of my mother’s hands that kneaded dough, that wore sapphire rings, and that eventually turned to dust and bone in the oven of the DoDo Mortuary funeral home in Kealakekua, Hawai‘i.

But do I remember it correctly or am I taking creative license and allowing my memory to
write the story as I want it? Does it matter? I write freely when I settle in front of the keyboard. I write before the words form, when they form, and I write over their formation. Rules are kept and broken. I forget a comma; I add an extra one. I write. Like the old poet in Eduardo Galeano’s “Celebration of Subjectivity” on the banks of the San Juan River, I want to say “Those who make objectivity a religion are liars” (120). What a great craft and unbelievable weight, what a responsibility of language it is to dig into mental archaeology and write of another, but it cannot all rely on a sense of objectivity. Perhaps, while writing, if I am lucky, I will realize the archaeology has gotten me close to my subjects—close with grace and ethical responsibility—but the proximity is still an appropriation. I think. I think this is true. I am working through this question as I write. I question this thought because appropriation, for me, forms narration and characters from my family members. In the act of writing, I always interrogate how close to reality I write. Do these stories understand form, character, and scene—do I take writerly freedoms? I continually search, with my archaeological digging, for further images of who the characters are in a relational and individual sense to me and to my memories.

Writing about parents from memory, family stories, diaries, documents, and interviews uncovers truth and nudges at the relational walls, ethical boundaries, and lines of intimacy. G. Thomas Couser claims “there is a paradox at the heart of memoir: the genre demands fidelity to the truth that may overtax its source and conflict with its aspirations as art.” He goes on to argue that memoirists need the room to create. They need some “leeway with the facts,” but at the same time, they must not overstep and “undermine the genre’s power” (80). The balancing act of leeway in art and respect for the genre is further complicated, in my case, because my mother died many years ago, and my stepfather lives. Not only is he alive, but he has a story that speaks of conflict, black Americans, struggle, and musical history. He wants me to tell his story. I will, but first this narrative—this act of honoring my mother and stepfather.

My stepfather and our relationship exists outside my mother’s life; this interesting detail adds to an already complicated and polygonal story. Stepparent-stepchild memoirs from the point of view of the child are not new on the biographical scene; however, most rely heavily on trauma
narratives or tell horror stories of fairytale proportion. One that stands out as especially horrific in the stepparent stepchild genre is Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard out of Carolina*, a semi-autobiographical story that focuses on sexual abuse done to the stepdaughter (Allison) by a violent stepfather. My story, on the contrary, has elements of an almost worshipful story of rescue from a fatherless state. My sister Soleiange, my mother and stepfather’s biological daughter, does not see him with the same “he’s a loveable guy” lens. Because he is her natural father, she feels privileged to criticize his shortcomings. I do not. My relationship with him resides in gratefulness. This differing view of him as a father presents an interesting angle—one that requires an examination of characteristics and motivation.

For years, biographers, as Leon Edel argues, have set out to “locate the figure under the carpet.” Leonard Cassuto puts this in simpler terms: “the biographer’s job is to infer what lies out of sight below, the ‘secret myth’ that’s causing that particular and individual pattern of bumps and lumps that’s presented to the world” (1250). My stepfather’s figure under the carpet (this is a strange image, but I am attempting to dig further into the psychological aspects of why I write), in a relational sense, presents different bumps to my sister than it does to me. It also does not carry the expansive weight of a trauma narrative (it does to a degree), as many do. However, it does evidence a changing family dynamic in America and on a larger global scale. Our family is multiracial, multi-parental, countercultural, and artistic. And on an individual level, my stepfather’s life, formed from roots of poverty, discrimination, tragedy, and success, is one that on a psychodynamic level has many intriguing narrative factors.

When Freud's work was adapted into life writing, psychoanalysis became the favorite tool of the biographer—a means of uncovering motivation and character. Casutto states that “the biographer’s work in the age of Freud has been governed by the general assumption, conveyed by psychoanalysis, that truth lies beyond the rational, proceeding from the subject’s distant past” (1250). If my stepfather has a figure under the carpet that I am attempting to locate through memoir, my mother’s figure under the carpet is the creator of many, many figures under the carpet that I question through narrative. I realized as I wrote of my stepfather, in an attempt to
write a fully balanced dual memoir of both him and my mother, that he was coming through as a connection to my mother—that everything I wrote centers in her. Who my mother was, beyond my childhood and early adult understanding of her, intrigued me. It spoke to me. I spoke to her through my writing (and I have to admit I still speak to her in my mind when I need guidance). My stepfather’s story, in this narrative, is a connection from her world to mine. But I found that it also carried a very different voice. The act of archaeological memory deconstruction is inherently unstable and shifting; I understand this now. I pulled memories apart, and I interviewed my siblings and my stepfather for hours, and yet, it was my mother who came through as the narrative strength in my memories and writing. I sat with my stepfather in my mother’s old art studio in Ocean View, Hawai‘i. He spoke about his life. He showed me the hambone. He told me a few times, “don’t write that,” about life details, which made me want to write them even more, and then he later recanted, saying he had to tell the whole truth of his story, giving me license to write his whole story. He wanted his story told, which speaks to the history of place, race, and identity in America. For me, his voice had to come through very differently in the narrative of A Way with Water (even if it connected or was brought through in relation to my mother). After hearing his story (beyond the childhood stories he told when I was a child), I knew he deserved to have it written. He was born in Detroit, Michigan and lived in Black Bottom, the poorest section—an all-black section. He learned music at school; they taught him how to be a singer. He worked up and down Route 66, playing music. His story almost requires its own telling. Because of this, I began to question if I was embarking on two different projects.

In an attempt to balance out my mother’s and my stepfather’s stories, I used the Venn diagram to find commonalities in the narrative of my mother’s and stepfather’s lives. The common bonds included love, a biracial marriage, and stepparent-child relationships for both my mother and my stepfather. While the Venn diagram outlined the commonalities, I noticed it also reinforced their own distinctive identities and individual narratives. My mother’s and stepfather’s stories are both worthy, but I could not make their narratives equal. Does it matter? Is this what dual memoir requires? Paired biographies and marriage narratives are ubiquitous, dotting the
biography genre. Biographers have turned memory into commodity by revealing private lives. Couser states that “Childhood Memoirs [...] and Parental Memoirs increased more than 400 percent between 2004 and 2008” (3). Personal narratives that explore childhood and the memories of parents by children have found a wide audience, but it is my mother’s death that haunts my writing. I write of her leaving. My stepfather still exists in relation to her, my mother. As I wrote, this became even more evident.

As a child, I did not see my mother’s beauty. Maybe this is why she haunts my work. I see her beauty in photographs, but I never told her. Did I? I do not remember telling my mother she was beautiful. She existed in relation to me. Her childhood stories of Leicester, the tales of playing in the hedgerow with green fairy cake, existed because I needed story, and I needed placement of roots in a seemingly drifting world. In Humboldt, California, she was the woman of large feet that somehow grew out of sturdy Welsh legs so that she could walk up the path ahead of me. In Captain Cook, Hawai‘i, she was the woman who stood near the brown dresser and combed her brown and grey hair one hundred times so that I could watch the reflection in the oval mirror. In the white one-room beach house at Ke‘ei, she was the woman who said I could not eat candy because she did not want my body filled with overly processed food—or she believed in candy deprivation torture. At the Seventh Day Adventist church, she was the woman who wore Birkenstocks when all the other mothers wore heels. I thought she did it to embarrass the insecure child in me, who wanted normalcy. She was the woman who painted, believed in Jesus, maybe a little in Buddha, and asked to have *Tibetan Book of the Dead* read at her funeral.

In life, she resisted conformity, valued privacy, and insisted on individualism. One of her favorite sayings was “chauvinist pig.” Before I knew what chauvinist or feminist was, I knew that those words spoke of a deplorable state of male existence. She fought for privacy and strong identity. So much so that she did not want an autopsy performed on her body (I am not sure why she thought an autopsy was common practice, but she did); somehow the thought of a knife into her body was an act of incursion. “No knives. No knives,” she said. She wrote in one of her journals, which I found after her death, that she wanted her body to remain undisturbed; only the
family was to stay near her body—not only stay near, but the request was for a vigil of seven days. Somehow the idea of my mother as a body was too much for her children and husband to bear. And now, years after her death, I have begun the work of uncovering her story. I have discovered that in writing of her that I am searching for what many biographies have long hunted—the secret-self—her secret-self and my own sense of self because of and in relation to her. I am uncovering her “distant past” reality as I write. That secret mother-self was taken when she died. I am weaving her shared memories with those of my stepfather’s, and mine, to write her story. My mother survives as memory-work. And because she died, her life and the details that create her story work as legend and commemoration of a unique human character for our family. Her life narrative acts as an essential formation for her children’s identity and their subsequent human connections. What synapomorphies exists within us, this family, this extension of her? The memories of who she was are embedded as our central cultural and familial suppositions. I have her diaries, her art journals, and her illness journals. They form a sort of philology.

Phillipe Lejuene refers to these forms of documents as *textual genetics* if they are used to understand the why and how that went into the creation of art. Why did my mother keep art journals and illness journals? Lejuene goes on to state that textual genetics “is detective work that you do out of love. You begin following the trail of a work of art that you love, hoping to discover its hidden secret” (163). The exploration of my mother’s documents has become a study into her life, and a study on love and furthering the mother-daughter relationship long after she left. It has become a study into where the “I” in the narrative fits.

The search for authentic-self pervades the memoir genre. The relational implications of autobiography, biography, and memoir are irreducible. In relational terms, my mother, my stepfather, and the environment I grew up in have influenced my identity. The inner-workings and dynamics of the hippie, musical, artistic, poverty-stricken, vegetarian, and Big Island dynamic formed some psychological and fundamental characteristics of who I am. Paul John Eakin wrote that “if identity is increasingly understood in relational terms, then it follows that the lives of
others are centrally implicated in the telling of any life story” (157). This implication, in my family story, carries additional burdens of mental illness and drug addiction among some family members, which complicates my understanding of the narrative and my parents’ decisions even further. It also questions where the lines of uncovering and telling should reside. I don’t want to leave my mother and stepparent in a world of remembered perfection. My parents did not drink, did not do hard drugs, and highly believed in ethical lives and religious principles, but they also smoked pakalolo extensively. There were five children in the family. Three did not follow in the pakalolo smoking footsteps of our parents; two did. What happened because of this drug culture, or maybe an offshoot gone wrong from the hippie culture, and how do I write about it when it relates to real individuals?

My sister struggles. She has locked herself away from family, friends, and the world—both mentally and physically. I have touched on her illness with poetry and creative nonfiction:

Sister taps against headlights on the memories of the dead horse
killed by the car on the thread of a highway
at night while she dipped and rocked against tide of dark in the rain
swift odor of the redwood built Hōnaunau house with wounded light
of shadow beneath
the mango and avocado hitting tin roof.

However, crossing the line into the realm of memoir and biography requires more extensive writing of her story, not only her story, but also my stepbrother’s. He is a heroin addict. I don’t believe I can live with inflicting any further hurt on two people who struggle with living. Kraus argues that “if you can live with hurting people’s feelings, maybe you shouldn’t be a writer—a writer, at least, of any published material that poses as nonfiction” (288). She goes on to state that writers have a forum for “crafting” a version of reality that non-writers lack. Writers see the world as a canvas of writable narrative—most people do not. This presents ethical boundaries and moral balancing by the writer—by me as the narrator of their and my stories. Writers should not
become numb to others’ misery, and I entered into this writing bargain with many concerns; but, my sister and brother are essential pieces of the family dynamic in the story. I have not found a way to leave them out, but I have balanced my writing by continual consideration of ethics.

Other memoirists have touched on family when writing, and some have maintained a dignified distance from their siblings. In Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, she writes of her relationship with her father. It is a circular and complex narrative that is layered with the art of memory. Bechdel nudges her father’s tragedy up against the lines of the comic with brilliant nuances into the human experience, which she examines with a macro lens. Each panel of her graphic memoir allows the reader to discover existence. She presents her father as the-man-who-would-not-be-a-hero by beginning with James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and ending with *Ulysses* (and the Icarus and Daedalus myth)—they are used as bookends of her graphic biography. What interests me about her depictions is her ability to allow for human flaws. She examines them with a fine lens but with an ironic and self-reflective acumen that requires consideration of all angles. What Bechdel does not do is infringe on her siblings’ life. At the end of the book, in her acknowledgements, she writes, “Thanks to Helen, Christian, and John Bechdel for not trying to stop me from writing this book” (233). There is both an acknowledgement of the relational intricacies of shared lives and respect for boundaries, and individual autonomy in this sentence. She is able to navigate and uncover the story while leaving the psychological digging into her siblings’ minds alone. I am interested to see where she goes with her family narratives in the future.

David Sedaris, on the other hand, uses his family stories as comic relief. He is a humorist and his stories are, as he states, “realish.” He began his career on National Public Radio reading his “realish” family vignettes. Not only are his stories autobiographical; they rely heavily on memories or events within his family. In his short story “Repeat after Me,” he touches on the ethics of writing about siblings. His sister tells him what he calls a “quintessential Lisa story.” What complicates this quintessential story is that Lisa says that if he ever repeats the story, “I’ll never talk to you again.” As she says this, he “instinctively reach[es] for the notebook,” and he
prods her by saying, “Oh, come on,” and “The story’s really funny, and I mean, it’s not like you’re going to do anything with it” (450-451). In the next paragraph he pokes fun at not only himself, but also the art of memoir by going on to indicate that her life, privacy, and sorrows have become his canvas for storytelling. Kylie Cardell and Victoria Kuttainen state that “Sedaris presents two distinct sides to his narrative perspective: the innocent ‘typist’ and the opportunistic author” (104). They point out that “Sedaris’s writings derive from his storytelling desire: to not just recount relational autobiographia, but to recount what is funny” (105). Sedaris writes as if he is caught between the wish to respect his sister’s privacy and his desire as a humorist to tell a really funny story. But is that the truth? Or is this his creative angle in the expansive view of memoir?

I do take notes from both these writers. Not only to tentatively come to terms with writing about my sister’s and brother’s intersecting narratives with my parents’ narrative, but also to define the narrative voices of my characters. Because, as Robyn Warhol argues, “Bechdel’s text breaks the dual structure of ‘story’ and ‘discourse‘ by using ‘the space between’ words and pictures to extend possibilities for the representation of consciousness” (2), this use of different spaces in dual narrative gratifies my own sense of storytelling. The dual memoir of my mother and stepfather, *A Way with Water*, uses short pieces of memoir, creative nonfiction, interviews, and poetry to expand the possibilities of representation. When I undertook this mode of representation, I worried that it wasn’t the best vehicle to carry their narrative; however, it was the natural progression of their story and brought the most creative weight and freedom.

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1 In the October 28, 2013 issue of *The New Yorker*, David Sedaris writes: “In late May of this year, a few weeks shy of her fiftieth birthday, my youngest sister, Tiffany, committed suicide.” This revelation is particularly relevant to my internal ethical negotiation as I write about my sister who struggles (I think of her as emotionally fragile). Sedaris has made a career writing about his family with humor and irony. His sister’s suicide struck a strong emotional chord within me as a sister and as a writer. In the article, he goes on to describe Tiffany’s will, in which “she decreed that we [Sedaris family], her family, could not have her body or attend her memorial service.” I know without a doubt my sister would leave a similar will. Sedaris, in what I read as mournful, realizes he knew little about his sister. I know my sister from our shared childhood—I mourn the relationship we most likely will never have as adults. She has locked me out of her life. When I write about the sister I know, I write carefully within the boundaries of our childhood.
Bechdel’s creative ingenuity with her narrative and Sedaris’s employment of humor continually remind me that humor exists, and freedom in art is essential in telling a good story. I must remember the humor and beauty of real living in my parents’ lives. My mother wasn’t a saint. She swore, threw things, took my brother to the doctor convinced he had a hearing problem because he did the typical ten-year-old boy not listening maneuver, she gave enemas instead of aspirin for headaches, and she was funny. My stepfather is similarly a character with flaws and humor, and wit. He was and still is filled with what my mother called “shuck and jive.” He tells stories and entertains, he spends money when he doesn’t have any; he is funny.

These aspects expand the opportunities of biography, or perhaps require more than one form of narrative, and they necessitate more than one ethical consideration. Thomas Carlyle wrote: “each individual is a mirror to us; a mirror both scientific and poetic; or, if you will, both natural and magical,” and when the veil is pulled aside, “[our] own natural face and supernatural secrets” are revealed (248). There is a truth claim being searched for, and memory is employed as history in the truth claim as I write. The details, including the imperfections and funny stories, make the story.

When I think of how I am piecing together the story of my parents, I look to others who have written dual narratives or stories that use similar creative devices. In Claudia Rankine’s, Don’t Let Me Be Lonely, she writes of death. Rankine mixes poetry, lyrical and TV imagery in what appears and reads like an expertly choreographed question, and then finally almost a revelation. She juxtaposes the conjunction “or” in her narrative as if saying life moves between states of existence—an existence that is not always easy to recognize. Rankine quotes Emmanuel Levinas in several areas of the work, Levinas said: “the interpersonal relationships I establish with the Other, I must also establish with other men.” Each life is unique, and according to Levinas “the face is signification, and signification without context.” The Other does not reside in outward appearance. Every means of identification does not give signification. The face “is meaning all to itself.” And the first words of the face, for Levinas, are “thou shalt not kill.” The idea of the Other and the self and death floats throughout Don’t Let Me Be Lonely. Interestingly, Levinas
argues that his “task does not consist in constructing ethics; […] only try[ing] to find its meaning” (95). Rankine attempts to find meaning in the ever-present face of death. The idea of the Other fascinates and resonates in my own work, because of notions of death and my mother, and my own sense of responsibility to others.

There are two other books that I use as a map to configure my parents’ story: Rita Dove’s *Thomas and Beulah* and C.D Wright’s *One with Others*. Dove’s story pulses from the history of her grandparents. It is felt as a visceral resonance—a beat, a movement on the mandolin. Color is used as a device, as symbolism. I’ve employed this narrative device in many of my stories, and like hers, I write a dual narrative. She writes: “These poems tell two sides of a story and are meant to be read in sequence” (5). Thomas’s section is quicker in movement. He rides the riverboat, he plucks on strings; he loses Lem, and longs for a son. Beulah’s section is thoughtful slipped-away moments grabbed while children sleep. Their stories are very much a marriage narrative. Dove utilizes imagery and thoughtfully constructed sections to guide the reader down the eye of memory, which for me acts as a director, of sorts, in the creation of my own dual narrative. If not a director, at least a thought in the back of my mind that tells me it is possible to write creatively of two people, and one narrative can outweigh the other. It does not signify importance, just progression of story.

C.D Wright’s *One with Others* weaves, settles, repeats, sticks in the throat, and it has characterization and plot that scuttle along, moving in and out of perception. Wright’s characterization of V, her friend, is a dancing or a marching sort of glimpsed characterization, but it is there in the lines, right alongside the ironing board, the cancer, the many children, and a bottle of bourbon. This formation of characterization through means other than straight linear narrative prompts me to understand that, in creating memoir, there are many forms. As I continue to work on my parents’ narrative, and I question if my mix of poetry and creative nonfiction works, I reread Wright’s book, and know it is possible, and beautifully done with insight and careful investigation into the process of telling the story. Wright says, “To begin with, I took the usual writerly liberties to make a go of it” (157). But this admission of writerly freedom does not
take away the weight of her words. She tells the story, reminding the reader of the power behind story.

These forms of creative memoir, creative nonfiction, and poetry are what I tap into to write of my parents. In the process of writing and citing memory as history, I am looking to locate the truth, the self and the overall narrative arc. I hope to find a voice that represents a worthy narrative with the voice Roland Barthes calls a “reality effect.” And I remind myself, continually, to navigate between the subjective, the objective, and relational lives that form as I write of family. Often writing does not require rationality, only belief in the story.

Go inside a stone
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger’s tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.

Charles Simic

The Grey House Didn’t Speak

No people remained to lift their hands. Home did not speak. It did not call out our names as we moved up the steps onto the plane. It did not call out as if to say, we have long history do not go. The redwood house, the one near the macadamia, the banana, and the mango trees, board by board had been taken down. It did not call to me. It did not remember me, the girl with the two white dogs, the same girl who knew the taste of the damp earth, who knew the sound of the mosquitoes near the field in Hōnaunau. It did not remind me of the birthdays, not even the birthday of gold-hoop earrings or the unicorn pendant necklace. It did not speak of my mother’s hands that had pushed the old red vacuum along the yellow carpet almost every morning, spitting out more dust than it took in. My mother’s hands had become dust and bone in the funeral home’s oven; bone by bone they had been spread over the koa tree in Ocean View. Her hands were gone. That house did not call our names. The grey house was gone now, as well. It did not remember our feet against its floorboards, my children’s feet along its floors. It did not remember the family pictures on the green painted walls. It did not remember.

The dark road that runs by Keāhole Airport along the coast, by the white coral rocks, near the Kona Nightingales, and near the mouflan sheep—with their curled horns and quick feet—did
not ask me to stay and look after memories of Sina, who loved Bob Marley. It did not worry that memories of my mother, who wanted a chocolate-colored poodle, would leave. It did not say, stay or Erika, who believed god lives in everything and everyone, even the trees, will leave again—taken by the car near Kamehameha III highway. It did tap against me as if to remind me of the night I rode in a black Toyota truck and closed my eyes. I closed them as Sina wore the bones of her face against the rough edge of the tar road—that dark road that took her—teeth, t-shirt, fingers, and face—it wanted all. I closed them and remembered that the same road had taken Erika.

No hands lifted and waved again and again. We had said goodbye to Nola near her silver car. She smiled a little and told me I had to leave. She had worn a green blouse and a small jade elephant necklace we gave her that Christmas. Her son had always looked a little like her, maybe the same nose or cheekbones. Years before, when I was still family, Nola said their people came from French and Ottawa stock, she had given me their roots—something about her great, great grandmother coming from a tribe and marrying a man in Sterling, Minnesota, who owned both a bar and a temper. They had nine children, and then she went insane. It was the Indian blood, Nola said.

We had said goodbye to everyone who came to the airport to send us off. We moved towards the plane.

The smell came first. It wasn’t covered in notions of longing for rescue. It didn’t wear the scent of begged forgiveness, not the way he had when he returned home after days away and showered using old bar soap. The smell of leaving and the heat of the airport coated my tongue. It spoke with thick records about memory and deceit. It said, you will leave this time. The movement of the engines pushed the wind just enough to carry the smell. It spoke of day-baked
tarmac and sweat. No rain came to remove any last need to remain and listen again, only late afternoon gusts of Kona heat, rising and descending over every direction.

The children stood silent. One wore pink; the others did not. They carried small toys in different colored backpacks. Impossibly beautiful, I thought. Impossibly small, I knew. The smell came again. The smell of planes, fuel, and departure—not the smell of words or of leaving, but the things we leave without knowing. The things my silent-self said I could need again, but my insistent-self swore I wouldn’t.

They had fear. My children remained soundless. Impossibly small, I thought.

My feet wore green ballet flats. I watched them lift and descend. I had worn them before. I wore them once as I held my eldest daughter’s hand, and we cried. I wore them when I took her up and placed her in my arms and watched the lights move—the lights that flowed out beyond the highway. The lights she didn’t see when she said she didn’t want to live. When she asked, how did you ever love him? Now I wore them again.

My children had fear. I sucked in their worry and placed it under my tongue. I’d heard that if you place a pebble in your mouth it will quench your thirst for a while.

My daughters’ faces had always been beautiful. Even in fear their skin covered their bones perfectly. Impossibly perfect. I sucked on the small pebble. I moved towards the plane.

When we were young, so young, very young, he called once. Just once as Gabrielle grew and kicked the walls of my stomach at the sound of his voice in my ear. The tan plastic receiver of the phone smelled of my young tongue, my young air, my young voice. I touched the edge of
the white shirt that covered Gabrielle as she moved and stretched in water. I sat on the yellow carpet under the stairs on my mother’s living room floor. My mother slept; my stepfather slept, my elder brother slept in the dome room under the mango tree; my younger brother slept in the room under the stairs, my sisters slept, and my two white dogs slept. I saw the waters of Nāpo‘opo‘o far below, down beyond the jacaranda tree that I knew bloomed purple in the day, down beyond the sloping hill. The waters lay under the moon. Gabrielle kicked and rolled against my stomach. He spoke.

Returning from a party, he said, and I breathed in the words and remembered kissing him. I remembered the smell of him—something like corn chips and faded Iron Maiden posters on a bedroom wall. A little or a lot drunk, he went on. Maybe he laughed. I knew the mixture of sweat and old beer that weaved in the cotton of his black t-shirts. I knew the blend of Old Mill Road and the End of the World where girls laughed and went into the woods to pee on black rocks. I knew those places where boys kissed on the necks of any girls that let them, or sucked on Marlboro cigarettes if they wouldn’t. I knew the voices he heard, the music he listened to, and the jokes he recited as he leaned up against his old brown car, breathing in on smoke and using his fingers to tear the rip of his old jeans further.

Missed me, I thought he whispered. Absence—months without his voice, I knew this. Many boys leave when the girl gets pregnant.

When we were still young, very young, he saw Gabrielle for the first time when she was one month old. So this is her, he might have said. He might have pretended or did pretend to like tea and drink it with my mother from her chipped Willow pattern blue and white teacup. He might have smiled at my stepfather as he saw only the color of his skin. Later, he asked if I minded having a black stepfather. Later, I told him he was my dad, that’s how I saw him. Later, I
closed my eyes and thought of my sister Solei’s beautiful dark eyes, and breathed in all that we were. We mingled—my sister and me. Not light, not dark, we are the same, we say. My stepfather, my father, my family. Later, he might have or did laugh as he told me, bullshit, and insisted no one wanted a black father.

When we weren’t quite as young, he rode in my white jeep with a fifteen-year old girl. Just a ride, he said. Just a little or a lot drunk, he told me. I knew all his words. I had heard them before. The same words remained—just a little or a lot drunk.

Men shouldn’t leave when a woman gets pregnant—not twice. The first time may be excused because he was so young, but not the second time. What does it say about the woman who takes back a man insisting children need a father?

When we were still not quite as young, he saw Analiese for the first time when she was two weeks old. So this is her, he might have said. I have come to get my tires from under the house, he might have said. And then he looked at Analiese in a pink dress. He joked she was bald and toothless. I believed he could love her. When he moved back home, he rocked Analiese a few times in the pink rocking chair.

When Elleana was born, the sky was purple. He watched reruns of Star Trek on the small hospital TV. Did you used to watch this? he asked. Oh, crap did you see that? he said, briefly turning his head, looking towards me. That was pretty awesome for an old show, he smiled. He turned away again, and I counted the rhythms of my stomach, and I breathed through the sound of Captain Kirk speaking. I listened to the monitors beep, the rhythm of Elleana’s heartbeat in fluids through the machine, and I watched the long sheet of thin white paper with every contraction marked on it as it came out of the machine. The nurse came and went, and came and
went, and I breathed and saw the flashing lights of green and yellow on the small TV in the hospital room. The doctor entered the room. *Star Trek* left, turned off by some nurse’s hand.

What’s that? he asked. Her head, I said, and he finally saw one of his daughters come out in a rush of fluid and blood. The sky was there, in the room, as purple against purple. He said maybe we should call her Purple Sky, you know, for her Indian name. He filled out the birth certificate, stating he was Native American, and signed his name.

The nurse asked for proof of blood. She asked for his genealogy. Where is your Native blood? You have no proof, I told him. You don’t know where your blood comes from. You must put down what you know. They don’t take your word or old stories, not for a certificate—not in this world. I filled it out; I nursed her, and I signed the paper.

Three children and he was still a little or a lot drunk. What does that say about the woman who loved him? What does it say, anyway?

He remained a little or a lot drunk. He became a crying man with a glass pipe in his hand. Always crying that he saw his dead grandmother Gladys as he smoked crack under a bush at Pine Trees, always crying, never home. A little or a lot high, he said. You’re just like a Puritan; it’s your problem, he insisted. You don’t drink, don’t smoke, and don’t understand, he laughed. Just stop a moment, he whispered. Just put your arms around me, he would say as he carried the smell of days and days away in his hair and against the rough feel of his unshaven face.
He said he spoke with the devil when he was away. He told me they talked. I knew it was true. He said maybe if he believed in something it would go away. I told him it might help. I believed in the darkness that ate against his insides. I saw it. I believed in his dark thing. I saw it live in the inside corners of his eyes. He always had beautiful eyes, long-lashed and blue with some green. For years we argued about the color. He insisted they were hazel. I said hazel eyes meant green with some brown—his had none of that. He disagreed. Hazel is green with blue, he said. And then he told me he should have been an actor because he was so good looking. But that thing he spoke of with fear moved in and lived in him, right next to his pupils that dilated when he pulled out the glass pipe, the steel wool, and baking soda on his days away. I saw him shake and sweat with it. I heard it rattle around in the middle of him.

Love me, he insisted. If you love me, he stated, I can beat this. Don’t give away our family. You’re doing this, he claimed. Not me, but you, he said. If you were a better kind of woman, I wouldn’t do this, he told me. He said all these words and then snuck out the front door as I slept, creeping away barefoot down Kuakini highway, beyond the bones of our dead pets. Away from the coffee trees that bloomed white, rows upon rows to make a field. Away from his black and white dog who hated children, away to find the thing that made him feel his best.

Days and days of no food in the small grey house—no money, and no him.

I took the girls. We sat in the small welfare office in Captain Cook—the office across the street from Greenwell Park, the park next to the Seventh Day Adventist School. I went to that school from third to eighth grade—the school with the teacher who said I was the fastest runner,
and told me I was special. I saw the school outside the welfare office. It sat perched on the hill.

We sat in the office. The pens on the counter had plastic flowers on them; some were yellow, but most were a deep pink. Elleana tried to grab the pen as I filled out the paper for Food Stamps.

Where is he? The social worker asked. I don’t know. He disappears, I said. I kept my face down and wrote out my name, my children’s names, and our need for emergency food.

He returned. Every four days, every five days, every six days, every seven days—longer and longer away—he returned. Sometimes it was a month, a month away.

Don’t leave me, he whispered when he returned, and he took out the gun Kolu had given him. The dark handled gun he kept in the outside shed with his tools. I never held the gun, but I imagined it would feel heavy. I imagined the handle would be smooth. I have never wrapped my finger against the trigger of a gun, but I imagined it would be warm somehow, not cold. This is what I will have to do if you leave. I will do it to you, he said. He didn’t point the gun. He held it flat in the palm of his hand.

He called. I tasted his fear through the receiver of the office phone. How does fear relive itself? He hadn’t been home. It was good when he was gone. I knew his voice, every human sound of his vocal cords, vibrating against the receiver. He was there at the house. He had gone home. He would joke sometimes, saying, “Honey, I’m home,” and push open the door like we expected him. I listened to his voice as he said he was going to take Gabrielle up to the emergency room. I thought of when she was born. She was mine. He hadn’t wanted her. She had always been mine.
He said that he had been playing around with Gabrielle. She had hit her head on the bar in the kitchen or had it been the windowsill, he said. He couldn’t remember, he was all shook up, he said, and let his voice change to that of a shaken-up man. You don’t breathe when you’re scared, and you don’t want to listen but you do.

I knew he could hurt our children, even when he said, I love my children, I love my children. I had warned them not to go with him—to call me if he came home, to warn me if he was near. I had to work for a few hours—just a few, I told them. I had to tell them about drugs. I had to tell them about him. I am just a few miles down the road, I said. I had to work.

He was taking her to the emergency room, he said again. Silence, silence. I wore a coral sweater and black pants. I left the office door open as I moved to my car. I can’t remember my car. I can’t remember the color. I close my eyes and need to see my foot pressed to the gas pedal. I need to know I made it to the hospital. In some world, I don’t. In some world, I remain forever there locked in that moving colorless car trying to reach my child. She was bleeding and overreacting, he said, but he would take her up to the hospital just in case. My car moved.

He didn’t look up as I walked by him in the emergency waiting room. Analiese and Elleana watched the TV, their faces bright in greens and yellows from its flashing lights. They are mine, I thought. I always took care of them; they are not children for emergency rooms. They are not. He looked down at a magazine. He wouldn’t talk. I knew this. Analiese pointed to the room. She told me where Gabrielle was. She said Gabrielle’s blood fell on school books. Gabrielle was doing her homework, Analiese said. I moved towards Gabrielle.

Everyone is smaller on a table under lights with curtains and doctors near. Mom, dad didn’t mean to, Gabrielle whispered. I saw it. It was there that thing, that terrible bit of darkness was there in her, right in the center of her eyes. It was growing. Maybe I threaded it there, in
from me right to her, maybe squeezed it in through her small warm pale umbilical cord before she could object. That darkness in her eyes, it told me to protect him and wait until the doctor was gone to ask questions.

I looked at the metal instruments and thought about the bodies that had been on the table before my daughter. I looked at her. I wouldn’t look away from her. I watched the doctor as he ran the needle in and out of Gabrielle’s skin. She was small as he sewed in seven stitches. He didn’t mean to, mom. He didn’t mean to, she cried just loud enough for me to hear, but not loud enough to reach the doctor’s ears. Oh, my daughter. Oh, my daughter. Oh, my daughter. You are me crying out for him to be good, to be kind, to be someone different. You are me lying on that table taking away his blame and tying it around your own neck. Oh, my daughter.

Wee Beastie, the cat, was lost in the move. We left him. My mind followed him through the coffee field that bloomed white, row upon row; past the thin spider webs laced from branch to branch—the same web from which I lifted the orange butterfly. Or had it been two butterflies? The butterflies multiply in memory until they cover the small grey house. Until they cover the star fruit tree. Until they cover the roses. Until they cover the night blooming jasmine that I planted outside the bedroom window. Until they cover the dirt-layered remains of every cat that was killed crossing Kuakini highway. Until they cover little Millie-dog’s white bones. Until they cover the lychee tree. The tree that my children called the family tree and wrote their names on in pointed tall letters with blue paint. They multiply until I move with them on some strange but brilliant orange cloud that resembles the taste of Tang. The same Tang my mother allowed us to
eat when we first moved to Hawai‘i and lived in a small tent at Kolekole state beach park. When we lived homeless under the tent roof, protected by tent walls. The same taste we swallowed when my mother told us that astronauts drank it on the moon. The moon is some strange uninhabited place that we lived under. The moon, the moon, that same grey shade as the small house my children learned to walk in, to run in, to fear in.

I did not jump over the rock wall and follow Wee Beastie when he was frightened away. I did not go past the spider webs. I did not call his name loudly enough. I did not find him. Elleana cried for him. He was my cat, she whispered. I loved him.

I took her words and placed them beneath my tongue. We had to leave.

The noise came second, the feel of it. The wind did not carry it. The sound of the engines overtook the wind, the heat, and the movement of people—deafening the voices. I made my children walk in front. I counted them as they moved up towards the plane. I watched them take each step up into the plane. The plane moved silent on thick black wheels, removing sound from our hollowed ears that heard nothing but every missing word of the grey house. The world quieted and still. I rolled the pebble beneath my tongue. I watched my children as Kona left—away through the round plane window.
Where we come

from three children
from new brother
    from little sister
from old fathers
from new father
    from mother, always mother
        from covered wagon on a Texas trail
        from bloody axe on an English country
            from Cherokee
from California from Maui from Detroit from Arizona
    from jazz
    from blues
    from classical
        from fists
    from honey
    from tofu
from brown rice
from lomi lomi
    from Kolekole
    from Kainaliu
from Captain Cook
    from Miloliʻi
from Keʻei
from Hōnaunau
from Kainaliu
from Kailua-Kona
  from avocado from mango from lychee
  from Christian from pagan from airplanes
  from pakalolo from art from music
from staying
  from leaving
leaving
From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.

Charles Simic

A Way with Water

There is a memory I know. The water comes. It lifts and covers. I remember the silence of drowning—the silence and darkness. I remember the smell of drowning. I am tired when I think of the well in California. It comes with smells and tastes. I have drowned twice in my life.

He comes back with the smell of the well. He is the well and the yellow truck.

My father had a yellow truck. I watched his eyes and his truck. I sat on the edge of the seat in his truck. Years later, on a piece of yellow legal sized paper from a pad, Damon wrote from Gainesville, Florida, saying I used to call him papa—not daddy. He asked if I remembered that I called myself Fluffy Roo. I did. I had never seen his handwriting. I traced my fingers against the curve of letters on the yellow paper. He wrote of karma. He wrote of my mother, calling her bitch, saying maybe it was an Irish hating the English kind of thing. He said he didn’t owe us for child support; my cunt of a mother would never see it. She had never asked for support. She had hidden us away. He wrote of the letters I should have written him over the years. I don’t remember letters I should have written. I remember his feet were long, thin and white.
Years later, after the letter on yellow pad paper, I heard his voice over the phone. He said he still lived in Florida, but was vague, not giving information in case I wanted to see him. He said Deborah left. He said she killed the neighbors’ dogs, read *Madame Bovary*, and left.

My mother watched the yellow truck, as well. I know she must have watched it. She must have seen it pull away down the long dirt road when he left to visit his girlfriend, Deborah. Deborah of the long brown hair. Deborah. My mother watched.

Before he left in his yellow truck to visit Deborah, his girlfriend of the long brown hair, he threw a green blanket at my mother. She said he had never given her a gift. That was the first, a blanket woven by Indians. She wrapped it around her shoulders. She watched as his yellow truck pulled away. And then, she placed the chalk in my hand, saying I had to learn to write the letter w. My last name, like his, begins with w. Worry, water, and well begin with w. Write w, she said, and sat on the floor against the wall with the green woven blanket around her shoulders. Write w, she said, and sat on the floor holding her jaw—always the jaw, she said. He always hits me on the jaw.

There is a memory I know. My mother has some sun against her face. My brother crouches, looking, always watching the ground. My sister sits near my mother. Her hand touches my mother’s leg. They are a taste on my tongue, something like deer blood and redwood, a grit and bone taste I hold in the indentions of my teeth. I grind and hold on—these do not leave. They sit in the garden where my sister strangled the small black chick. My mother said it was too much love. Lita hadn’t meant to love it too much. Some people love too much. It was love. They sit with the running colors of peacock feathers, the sounds of pigs, and the remembered feel of old baby buggies, and plastic half-dressed baby dolls with matted hair and dirtied faces. My
mother, my brother, and my sister sit always in that small place of sun in the rows of the garden on a small farm in Humboldt County, California.

He moves again, Damon, he moves. No sound, just movement in my memory. He is something slow, as if he knows Debussy or Schubert and *Ava Maria*. As if his feet understand something about sunlight, old remembered banjo notes, nights near the drums in smoke filled rooms, and piano keys. His feet are pale and too thin, again too thin. I see only them and dust.

There is no sound in the small house in Humboldt, California silence rolls over the floor. His feet move along the floorboards of the house and stand near the potbelly stove. The stove he roasted chestnuts on one Christmas as I stole chocolates candies shaped like Santa off the Christmas tree. His feet shift. I curl against the ground in my small dress and dark tights. I pull the dress over my knees, making a tent. Lita learned to walk near this potbelly stove. When she was born, her hair was so dark my father called her an Indian. The memory shifts. I look for his records. My brother and I used them as sleds to slide across the floor. He beat my brother; he loved me despite the scratches across the blues and jazz—despite the indignity to BB King. The records are gone. The floorboards are dark. I shift in my dress. My fingers touch a patch of stickiness on my cheek. I reach. I reach. I touch and feel the skin over the arch of his cold feet. There is softness, like clean white paper.

Below the small house, his white feet, and the potbelly stove are the yellow truck and old black car. My father loved old cars. *His father, Belmer Sr., had one of the first new cars off the assembly line after WWII. His father could fix anything—worked for Chrysler, was an angry man.* Below these—below is the well Damon dug. This is the memory I know. I have spoken of this memory before. Imprinted the well on my mind. I know I ate a peanut butter sandwich on white bread and sat near the well. I wore my black and white shoes and blue button up sweater. It
was cold in the well. The well was something of redwood tree roots, of old black and brown bears, of rocks, and dark earth, of words spit down, drooled down, thrown around and buried beneath every moving sound of water, the absence of sound—the nothing and everything. I remember drowning. I remember the silence of drowning. I remember my brother’s hands as he pulled me up screaming from the well.

I have drowned twice—the well and the ocean. The second time I drowned, the Pacific Ocean pulled at me. This water lay warm against the insides of my thighs and spoke of everything on earth. It took me through the black pebbles, playing with rich old words like music. It said, Miloli‘i is older than you’ll ever know. Miloli‘i that grows with ‘a‘ā knows and remembers every foot that stepped against it. What do you know? Who are you? Where are your people? It took me as my sister and brother lay naked on the black rocks, eating brown bread with peanut butter and honey. It took me past my mother’s wet Birkenstocks. It took me. My mother called me back. My mother bargained with the Pacific, telling it who I was, calling me her child. Telling me who I was.
Raindrop and Damon
Lovin’ Away the Bones
Or Teddy Sings History

So, I said, he skips a beat, you see, speaks in eighth notes,
speaks of Charles Percy, see here, a father’s soul
a home in music notes—gets a beat, up and down, you see,
a home in two eighth notes, divide of beat, home,
downbeat and upbeat, speaks of father dyin’ TB, jazz skips in
eighth beats, you know, lovin’ away his bones, you hear

So, I said, he skips a beat, you see, speaks in eighth notes,
speaks of Velma mother, see here, a fox of a woman
a lady in music notes—gets a beat, up and down, you see,
a woman in two eighth notes, divide of beat, home,
downbeat and upbeat, speaks of mother dyin’ a preacher’s poison,
drop down dead, you know, lovin’ away her bones, you hear

So, I said, he skips a beat, you see, first half more than second half,
speaks of hope in Detroit, see here, close to the border,
a home in the poorest ghetto—gets a beat, up and down, you see,
a home to black folk livin’, divide of side, home,
downbeat and upbeat, speaks of police station, other side, big gate
downbeat and upbeat, speaks of battle in Michigan, a home, rest of bones
of wars, you know, lovin’ away their bones, you hear
So, I said, he skips a beat, 24-nautical-miles-long,
speaks of River of the Strait, see here, poor and poorest,
a home in Black Bottom—gets a beat, up and down, you see,
a home growing-up on streets, divide of music to the dusted sun, home
downbeat and upbeat, speaks of middle son of three boys, and dead sister
downbeat and upbeat, speaks a beat of Sonny and Leon, his dead
laid out to rest, you know, lovin’ away their bones, you hear

In the ghetto, that's what he told me
In the ghetto, and when he told me
In the ghetto, playing hambone, how he told me
In the ghetto, singing, who he told me

a home in music notes—get a beat, up and down,
a home in two eighth notes, divide of beat, home, you see,
downbeat and upbeat, speaks in jazz, skips in eighth beats,

So, I said, he skips a beat, in elementary rules,
speaks of in the school, see here, in Detroit
a home in Black Bottom—gets a beat, up and down, you see
a home was thin, divide of bone so thin, a home
downbeat and upbeat, speaks of hambone on the stoop, the forty souls
downbeat and upbeat, speaks of got nothing but more bones, gets a beat,
of hands playing hambone, you know, lovin' away the bones, you hear

In the ghetto, that's what he told me
In the ghetto, and when he told me
In the ghetto, playing hambone, how he told me
In the ghetto, singing, who he told me

a home in music notes—get a beat, up and down,
a home in two eighth notes, divide of beat, home, you see,
downbeat and upbeat, speaks in jazz, skips in eighth beats
Teddy singing and holding baby Soleiane
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,
Even though a child throws it in a river

Charles Simic

Shrines

Elizabeth drove from Hōnaunau to Hilo to find new art, to make shrines of feathers and paper. She needed something to fill a space left empty. Art bled into the place that still talked to her of England and her mother. Lenny came while she was gone. He came for the tree near the redwood Hōnaunau house she lived in with her children, her husband, and her two white dogs. The house was built on Lenny’s land. He didn’t know the life in Hōnaunau house. He didn’t know that Elizabeth ran the Kirby vacuum against the yellow carpet, a remnant given to the family by an old friend, almost every morning while the children rushed to get ready for the two-room Seventh Day Adventist School house above Greenwell Park. Lenny didn’t know the garden where Elizabeth grew comfrey, mint, beats, radishes, turnips, and long rows of lettuce and tangled vines of tomatoes. He didn’t know that Elizabeth had taken to grinding her own flour in a hand grinder that hung off the purple-painted front steps of the house. He didn’t know that she baked thin sliced tofu covered with Braggs and nutritional yeast. He didn’t know she made grits and collard greens. He didn’t know the old dog bowls that sat outside the front door. He didn’t know the stream that ran fast past the house during the winter when the rains came. Lenny didn’t know that Elizabeth had begun to paint—that she painted on stretched silk, using deep blues, dark greens, and luscious purples while listening to Rachmaninoff and smoking pakalolo. He didn’t know that Elizabeth wanted new art.
Lenny came while she was gone, driving up the thin dirt road near mile marker 108, across from the old barn that some neighbor’s daughter had been born in, that led from Māmalahoa Highway up to the mango tree and the redwood house. The road went past the redwood house up to the thick dark wood of Lenny’s house. Lenny had a tree, as well. Not a mango tree like the one that sat in Elizabeth’s yard, but an old twisty thing pushed to the edge of the road—lost in the tangle of overgrown vines. A moss covered ship’s rope and anchor wrapped around the tree near the curve of the road where Lenny’s house sat. Elizabeth’s children climbed on the rope, sat on the anchor, and looked past the tree into the dark smell of the woods. And, often they snuck up the road into Lenny’s house when he was gone—gone way on the cruise ship where he worked. They hunted when he was gone, searching in the spaces of the stillness of his house for pickles, for candy, for anything that exposed the quiet interior of the man who owned the land they lived on. They found: a sunbathing lamp in a back empty bedroom, a thick leather belt hung over the door of the bedroom that had a bed, two leather slippers pushed under the large bed, and a sauna room filled with the smells of salt and old sweat. But they couldn’t find enough. They wanted a reason for the old rope and anchor that tangled around the tree in Lenny’s yard.

He came while Elizabeth built shrines in the art class in Hilo. She sat with Anabel, Sharona, Penelope and Gale—with the women of her art. She worked with the memories of her mother, from the thoughts that never quite left, and from the words of a letter that came in the mail. She worked with these as she shaped the shrine, as she molded, and a woman’s need filled, covered and sang in the room. When she glued the feathers against the sides of the shrines, she did not know that Lenny came for the mango tree. Instead, Elizabeth moved her mother’s lost voice into the spaces of the shrine. She placed the words for keeping into each movement of the
feathers. One thousand white birds, she thought, and imagined them all taking flight with her mother’s voice as they left earth silently. No sounds, she thought, it had to silent when her mother left. Adornment, she added, but didn’t hear as the chainsaw came against the bark of the tree that grew over the house she lived in with her family.

Death was there with Elizabeth, and she needed the idea of shrines to take away the cover of death that drifted in the windows of Hōnaunau house. Elizabeth’s mother Constance Sarah Axe—née, born, once-the-young-girl, once-the-beauty, Castle before Axe—had dropped down dead. Elizabeth couldn’t think of anything else but dead. She sat still for a moment in her art class and let this word settle in and run on repeat until it held no meaning, until she, the woman she knew as herself, held no meaning. She breathed deeply and closed her eyes to hear everything from a world she had known years before—a world that lived in the joints of her body, held onto the sound of trains, held onto the accent of her brother’s young voice, held onto the smell of their house in Dronfield—a world that came out on cold nights and in the presence of death. Dead, she thought, again. Dead mother. Dead, she said just loud enough to hear, dead. Her mother’s death was years after her father, Douglas Axe, who was born in Leicester, worked as a house painter, moved his family to Dronfield, owned a shoe store, lived in a house with his wife and two children, spent vacations in Cornwall, and died from arteries waxed in grease from heavy meats and sauce, died. Elizabeth knew that Constance Sarah never loved anyone after Douglas. Elizabeth knew a widower down the street had visited Constance Sarah a few times, maybe for tea, but Douglas was it—that love thing for Constance. Elizabeth placed this word—love—into the glue that held the shrine in place. There are other deaths. Elizabeth placed these in the grain of the fabric she ran against the edge of the paper and feather shrine, as well. But, but she did not know Lenny had come for the mango tree that grew against the old sky in Hōnaunau.
Elizabeth wished she had slipped the ring on her finger before driving to art class. She was losing memories. She needed every small sign of her past. She knew this. She could not remember how her Grandmother Lydia Martha died, but she had. Elizabeth had one photo of Lydia Martha, a studio type black and white of an unsmiling large-eyed woman wearing black. She let her children look over the photograph on quiet days—days when the silence filled them all, and she knew they could hear the past with her. She let them see the photograph, hoping they would wonder about history. Hoping maybe they would hold the thick-papered photograph a little longer. Hoping maybe her children would lift the old photograph—lift and breathe—and press it against their nostrils for its smell. Hoping, maybe her children would silently wish for the scent of Lydia Martha’s fingers against young Constance Sarah’s cheek as they breathed in the photograph, the memories, and the lost words of Lydia Martha Castle.

Elizabeth hadn’t seen her mother in years. She left England at nineteen, lived in Greece below the Acropolis for a few years, got raped, traveled to Israel, and traveled to Turkey. In Turkey, she bought a multi-colored ring on the long stone steps from a chauvinist Turkish salesman, who leered at her bare legs. In Turkey, she wore the ring and learned of whirling dervishes, a sight of spiritual ecstasy she chased. She chased ecstasy, always. She thought of all this as she built shrines.

Elizabeth thought of her maiden aunt. The aunt named Crystabel. Crystabel who was listed among the women of her dead. Elizabeth thought on the word maiden. She imagined every hand that ever ran against her body. She thought of the hands of young boys in England, the hands of boys in Greece, and the hands of men in New York. The hands of men in California. The hands of a husband in California. The hands of the men in-between, after the divorce—before happiness. She thought of the hands of her husband, Teddy. Elizabeth erased the
fingermarks from her skin of every man, one breath, one touch, one caress at a time, so that she could stand with Crystabel in her maiden woman’s single-bed room. She stood as a shadow—transparent—near Crystabel as she undressed slowly, watching her aging body. Crystabel looked away quickly, slipping away from the image of age—of an old woman’s breasts, greyed pubic hair, blue light veins as they interact with blood in her legs, excrescence of thighs, and rounded stomach. Crystabel slipped into her comfortable nightgown, and Elizabeth watched as Crystabel lay down in-between tight white sheets, never having known sex. Never knowing the turned-on-belly-deep-pant-of-breath-on-neck-not-caring-of-anything-but-passion of sex that touch brought.

Elizabeth sat in the art class in Hilo and closed her eyes with Crystabel as she dreamt in her single bed. But Crystabel had died. Was it years before?

Constance Sarah had died. Elizabeth did not know the exact moment, feel, or looks of death. She left England years, millions of ages before. Why did she leave? The cold? The cold of another nature? Her own desires? The cold? The gray? She can’t remember. She left. They died. She built. She built a life away from her women, these women of death. A life these women could not know. They did not know the Elizabeth of Hōnaunau. Elizabeth thought of her mother’s voice and pressed more feathers into the shrine. Hold the words in place, hold, hold, she thought, because she knew the sound of a mother’s voice is something children miss when a mother dies. Children think of a mother’s hands as well, but the voice is missed most. Elizabeth searched for her mother’s sounds.

She heard the memory of her mother’s voice over the long phone wires as they stretched to England and the people she once knew. She thought of the words she spoke when she told her mother she was marrying Teddy, a black jazz musician from Detroit, who sang at the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, who was distantly related to Aretha Franklin. Elizabeth believed she needed this
relation, some resemblance of pedigree and history that the English still believed necessary.

When Elizabeth spoke to her mother over those thin phone wires, she stopped and let the silence say something as her mother’s words failed to fill the gap between her ear pressed against the phone and her heart that still remembered the family of Dronfield. Elizabeth had waited on the phone line with her mother’s silence before telling her that she was eight months pregnant with Teddy’s daughter, who was to be born on May 15th, by planned cesarean section. The cesarean had to be planned because she was forty. The baby had refused to turn head down. She hadn’t told her mother that her new daughter was to be named after the sun, a million ideas of suns and angels—Soleiange. She heard her mother tell her she was no spring chicken and took it enough like love, enough like a mother’s voice saying, be happy, love. She took it like love. She sat in art class and remembered Teddy’s voice on moon covered evenings when his song reached across the sand and rocked and dipped the rich who visited the coast of the Big Island, but really sang only for her.

Elizabeth thought of her women, these women as she drove home along Hawai‘i Belt road, Māmalahoa Highway, route 11. The tree was killed when Elizabeth built shrines, before she reached home to Hōnaunau house. Lenny cut down the tree that grew above the tin roof, near the avocado tree and the papaya tree. Lenny cut the mango tree to save the tires of the white Cadillac he drove. He said the tree dropped too much fruit, and Teddy couldn’t say much. Lenny owned the land. When Lenny came for the tree, when Elizabeth was away, Teddy told his children to come away, come away from the tree. He couldn’t say much. That is what he said. Said again and again when Elizabeth came home weeping for her tree, for the exposed flesh of the land that sat bare without the overhanging branches. And, her children, those children she
knew held quiet places that knew about death, hadn’t known the language that would have saved
the mango. They said nothing when Lenny came for the tree.

Lydia Martha Castle
Trying to get to Hawai‘i Fast

Teddy was sent to a place overseas, which was Stevensville—Stevensville, Newfoundland. All the time, the music scene was the Air Force. Mostly what he did in the Air Force was sing. He knew all the time he wanted to be a singer. They sent him to a place called Clovis, New Mexico, an Air Force base. That’s where he got his discharge. He met a beautiful young lady. They got to be friends. They both went back to Detroit after that and stayed for a while. He met and married Oli Beckham. Teddy didn’t like Detroit—he couldn’t handle it. He went back out west to Clovis. That’s when he really got into music—super-ly into music. There were bands and stuff like that. After coming back to Clovis, he went up and down Highway 66, which ran from Chicago to L.A. That’s where he played most of his music, in nightclubs and hotels and stuff like that, you know. He thought that would be good. He went to work at a ski lift lodge in Flagstaff.

He was trying to get to Hawai‘i fast.

Teddy

Oli

Terria

Leon

Gwendolyn

Hawai‘i
I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed,
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill

Charles Simic

Invisible Children

Lita made a sound as she breathed and sucked on the mucus that pooled and bubbled from her nose, and never smiled, and still she was beautiful. She was two. Dirt covered her left cheek. The dirt moved in and out of sight as she shifted her face to look for mom. Lita was not a talker. She was a watcher. She breathed, again and again, through her open mouth. Her mouth was used for air. Zain had lost his slippers on the way. I watched him move away from them, leaving them like two bodies beneath a chair at the last stop. Zain was not a talker. He was a thinker. He stood near us, barefoot and deep-eyed. He wore his shirt inside out. He was seven. He faced the man who spoke to mom about shoes. It was night. We waited in line to climb on the plane from Maui to Hilo. We were trying to get to Hawai‘i fast. The air was old jet fuel and leftover sun lotions. We remained on the side and watched as men and women, as families, walked over the black tarmac under the yellow lights and climbed the stairs and went through the doors of the plane.

The man could not see that my sister was beautiful. He could not see that she was a watcher. The man could not see my brother with his turned over shirt and protective arms. He could not see that my brother was a thinker. Mom had made us invisible. She had taken us away.
She had hidden us from eyes that knew us. My father’s eyes. The man at the gate could not see us.

He did not know that mom had fed us mouthfuls of blackstrap molasses and cod liver oil when we lived in the trailer by the stream with the mint and foxgloves. Damon had come once. He’d taken Lita in his yellow truck away from the trailer. The man at the gate did not know about Damon who shot at airplanes with his .22, hit cows over the head with shovels, and killed cats. He did not know Damon was my father. He did not know mom fed us to make us strong and invisible against Damon. Against him, and against blue ink words that came on airmail paper, carrying red stamp pictures of the Queen of England. He did not know that when mom held the airmail blue ink words, reading that her father had died, she told us her father’s name had been Douglas. I scratched lines into an old piece of wood near the trailer and the mint and foxgloves, listened to her words, and watched the paper with the stamp as mom cried. His name—Douglas. They had gone on vacation to Cornwall each summer, she said again, and then again. The man at the gate could not see.

The man stood at the gate, looking away. My sister breathed out and sucked in, eating mucus. My brother brushed away the long hair from his eyes and stood with his feet apart. I wore my button dress; I was dust-covered and jagged boned. We all stood watching. I licked at the outer edge of my mouth, tasting something like tahini and old wet fear in the air, and watched the man. He did not know that mom had taken us away and hidden us once before, after we had gotten Lita back from Damon. I threw stones and sticks at Damon’s truck, telling him I hated him, demanding my sister. My sister who didn’t know I loved her. The man did not know we had been on a plane from California to Maui, and had eaten roast beef sandwiches that stuck in our
mouts. He did not know we had drunk 7-Up for the first time. Once before we left a place we knew. We knew about flight. We were invisible.

The man knew about shoes. No shoes, he said, looking at my brother’s feet that remained bare and motionless, standing on part of the black-night tarmac near the gate that held us away from the plane. No shoes, no plane. Stand to the side, the man motioned, looking away into the darkness beyond the sound of plane engines. The man at the gate did not know that mom had heard about planes and flight before. Years and years before, she had heard about things smashing all about. She had heard about planes from Grandma Constance. She had heard about fear and war. Grandma Constance had carried poison in her pocket to feed her family if German planes came over the house at night. And, Granddad Douglas, he had carried a wooden rifle to keep watch. Mom had heard about Frank, her brother, who died. She heard he had been placed in someone else’s grave because there were too many bodies and, maybe, too many planes. Grandma Constance wandered the graveyard looking for her lost baby Frank. She didn’t know his grave. He was placed in someone else’s coffin. She couldn’t find her baby. He was lost in some coffin. Invisible. Mom knew about planes and invisible children. We stood invisible, watching mom speak to the man at the gate.

The man at the gate looked away, stamping the tickets of other people as they walked up the steps and climbed onto the plane. He did not know mom baked wheat bread so hard it nearly bent the knife, but was best right out of the oven covered with butter, yeast, and avocado. He did not know we had lived on Maui, in Kula, with Mama John for six months in a tree covered place where multi-colored flowers grew near a gate where the horse lived. The man at the gate did not know that Mama John’s house had a ghost that sent everyone jumping and running out of the room, knocking down chairs and speaking fast with fright about things that could not be seen. He
did not know about the pin my brother stuck in an electrical outlet. He did not know about mom
dancing to music, waving her arms and talking about freedom. He did not know about her
touching the red-hole chicken pocks with a cool cloth as we lay on the cots in Mama John’s
house. He knew only about shoes.

The man turned and looked at mom. She stood watching the open door of the plane. The
engines turned, and the last of the people in line moved through the door. She held two loaves of
rock-hard bread in brown paper bags under her arm. The light shining down to the tarmac caught
her in some shade of yellow. She turned and looked at my brother’s feet again. She said, Fuck,
loud enough for everyone to hear. The man did not know about making children invisible or
about what planes could do—about flying and safety. Mom did. Mom pulled the bread out of the
paper bags and placed the loaves in her dark-smell leather purse. Mom’s hair covered her face as
she bent, as she moved, as she kneeled to place the brown paper bags over my brother’s bare
feet. Mom knew about Jesus and washing people’s feet on Sabbath. She knew about crying, but
she also knew about stopping the crying. Mom knew about kneeling and talking, about fear and
paper bag shoes, and about walking. She knew the good and the bad of planes and flight. Mom
straightened. She stood near my brother and looked ahead. She knew about making invisible
children seen. Walk on that plane, she said, handing the man at the gate our four tickets.
Fine Lookin’ Vivian

Vivian, she was very much a holy roller. She left right from her mother and father; she hadn’t had very much experience being out. She was English. That explained it, I am pretty sure. I came home to the house. I lived on up on Doc McCoy’s land in Captain Cook. The land I’ve spoken of before. Before. The land I came up to when I dropped acid and couldn’t stay down in Kona town ’cause of all the things that was happening at that time with the people hating the hippies—these were the people keeping the hippies out. They were Hawaiians, some heavy, heavy meaning intense, Hawaiians. They were beating up hippies. They were just really doin’ em bad. Not sure why. Maybe ’cause the rich haoles had vigilantes out for hippies, and stuff like that. I quit the Steakhouse ’cause they kept people out like Richard Green. He taught Latin and Greek language at the university over on O’ahu; he was a brilliant man. I invited him over to the Steakhouse. I had been working there, singing there, for a while. He had long hair. When he got to the door, I saw Helen Watt—who was Len’s wife—run to the door. And you could see by her shoulders she was givin’ this guy a bad time, you know.

So, I said, “Richard!” and waved him in, but they wouldn’t let him in ’cause he had long hair. Man, everybody in the place almost had longer hair ’cause there were Hawaiians—a few Hawaiians, mostly haole, but everybody sort of had long hair. Nobody had really anything to show that they were hippies, you know, but they told the guy he couldn’t come in. So I quit. I said, “He can’t come in here then I can’t come in here.” And I dropped acid and went up to Captain Cook.

So anytime I went to see one, a hippie, I tell, ’em, “Hey, if you don’t mind working, you can go up on the land up there at Doc McCoy’s land. I can give you a house.” ’Cause I had found
fourteen houses up there on Doc McCoy’s land. I said, “You can have a house like that, all you’ve got to do is keep it clean.”

So the police saw that. Saw I was taking care of the hippies—some kind of way ’cause the Primo Warriors were beating them, and the rich haoles didn’t like them.

So the police said, “Teddy, you think you can put these guys up. ’Cause, man, they’ve been beat up.”

So, I said, “Sure…” I had about twelve hippies up there by then. After I quit the Steakhouse, I went up there, lived up there, and got all the hippies, and I painted them some signs. They had never had no demonstration before in the Big Island. And I painted the signs. I had one that says, “Could Jesus Eat Here?” Because of the Steakhouse not letting Richard Green in. You know what I mean—Jesus had long hair. We had all these different signs. And, man, all the people in the Steakhouse, all the haoles who were my friends, they were out there, angry, they were out there, saying, “I’m gonna get your ass, Teddy! Get your ass!”

I said, “You ain’t going to do nothin’ to me.” ‘Cause I knew all the right people. I knew all the right people to keep me from being bothered. Some really tough, I mean really tough people. The Hawaiians really liked me, and I actually knew the syndicate, actually syndicate.

But I had an outdoor shower and indoor shower at my place on Doc McCoy’s land, Vivian was bathing in my outdoor shower. I didn’t mind none. People was always coming and going. But I looked and thought, “Who’s this? Who’s this fine lookin’ chick in my shower?” We got together. Stayed together for several years. Vivian was fine lookin’. Beautiful back then.

She got pregnant. That’s when we married, see. Then she said, “I’m not going to a hospital. I am not going to a hospital to have this baby. You’re going to have to deliver this baby.”
So I went to my cop friends and asked what you do in an emergency when a baby come. They told me. Told me how to bring a baby out. Also, I went to—Delfredo. I don’t know if you remember that name. See when Elizabeth moved to Hawai‘i, she moved to the most Hawai‘i place in all Hawai‘i, see, which was Miloli‘i. She knew Delfredo, and she knew Nelson and all of them down there, ’cause, man, she got…she got respected really quickly. I mean she knew Diane Aki, Auntie Margaret. Everybody loved her. But…anyhow, Delfredo’s mother—or was it his grandmother? Mother! Her name was Mrs. Llanes, but everybody called her Mrs. Leilanes, because there was two Ls to start the name, because they were Filipino or spoke Spanish, but when you see two Ls, it’s pronounced Y.

So, Mrs. Llanes was a midwife. She told me, “Look, you don’t have to deliver your baby. I’ll deliver your baby.” So, I found out with my old lady, Vivian, if it was cool. Then come the day for the baby and Mrs. Leilanes was in Miloli‘i without a telephone. I’m going, man. *What the heck am I going to do?* It was like God was in my head saying, “You goin’ deliver that baby. That’s what you goin’ do.” So at two twenty-one that night the baby started coming. It was the night of the full moon, the full moon shone through the window that night. Shone right on Tim—who wasn’t called Tim from the beginning—his name was Moonie. I delivered the baby. One thing that both the police and Mrs. Llanes told me don’t let the baby’s head come out too quick. Let the baby’s head come out and then look around the baby’s neck to see if the umbilical cord had got wrapped around his neck. So, I didn’t think no more about it. Not until I looked down and saw it wrapped around his neck. I just took it, took it loose—there were all these rituals that you had to do for a Hawaiian birth. You had to bite the cord, you know. I had to do the rituals. Tim had a very nice birth. Then after that ’cause Vivian was a holy roller, she didn’t want Tim to be called Moonie anymore. There was a guy named Subramanya that had all these followers. I
think he was from Korea. He had all of these people, followers. All the people who always wore
the red around Kona, they were his followers. They were called the Moonies. Vivian wasn’t
going to let that go. No moonie name was going to be on him. So, she went—later—Tim was
already grown up enough, four or five years old, something like that. She changed his name.

He said, “No, you aren’t going to change my name.”

She said, “Well, look. If I give you the name Tim, you’ll have the same initials as your
dad, and all of these things.” So, she convinced him. She changed his name. We had to separate
because she wanted me to go to the people who put the college downtown, YWAM. They got a
college downtown still. YWAM was Youth with a Mission. She said that she wanted to go down
and live with them ‘cause they were farmers, and all of these things and they prayed mucho. So,
she took Tim and moved out. I didn’t know she wasn’t going to go straight to them, but they
moved out. Once I saw her again—because we remained friends—she said, “Yeah, I moved
outta there and I had to sleep under a tree all night.” They slept under a tree. Tim remembered
sleeping under that tree. He kind of wanted to blame me for them moving out. It wasn’t me. I just
wasn’t going to YWAM. That’s when she moved out. Church, church, church, church…she
watched 700 Club, everything. She was really religious.
Teddy and Moonie
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star-charts
On the inner walls.

Charles Simic

Dinuguan in Captain Cook

Raymundo cooked dinuguan in a tall tin pot on the stove that sent aromas out into the fields of coffee trees that knew the feel of the thick rain of Captain Cook. Mom had scrubbed that kitchen where Raymundo cooked his pig in blood. She watched the kidneys, lungs, intestines, ears, heart, snout, and what she believed looked like hooves, roll in broth. Tiny hooves. Tiny floating things in the dark gravy of blood. Blood, she said, and got out her bucket and sponge. She cleaned the kitchen. Her hands moving forward and back on old wood walls, rust coated screens, green painted cabinets, wood floors, tin roof, bare rafters, white stove. She scrubbed until a hundred years of dirt came up with the sponge she held in her ringless fingers. The fingertip sized eggs, those almost translucent thin shelled eggs, mom scrubbed them too—deciding they were cockroach eggs—and scrubbed and scrubbed until their thin shells gave up the quiet life. They gave up their home from between the hundred year old coffee shack boards that had seen the faces of single men, silent children, old fathers, young bride-mothers, bent-back families—the coffee pickers—the people who came to the dark volcano soil to weave in and out of the thin bodied, long and delicate trees. The Portuguese, Japanese, and Filipino workers who ran their fingers against the branches of the coffee trees tossed the red cherry over, over, and over into the baskets until the sound became a unit of time, a music—a rhythm that traced its notes against the sky, against the thin twist of smoke that came from the low fires that burned
unwanted brush. The sound ran itself against the moving fermentation that rose from beans separated from pulp twelve hours before. *The mensural level.* The pulse, pulse of music, of the coffee beans falling from the fingers of pickers into the basket joined to the sound of mosquitoes that moved near and away and near and away from the ears of pickers who wore wide brimmed hats to protect their heads from the Kona sun. The hats spoke to the corrugated tin roof of the coffee shack that watched and the black earth that carried the roots of the trees as the music of picking and dropping coffee beans climbed and fell with the smell of the spiral of dried pyrethrum powder that coiled smoke out and into the air that lifted over Mauna Loa.

Mom cried when she realized the babies in those eggs she scrubbed from the kitchen where Raymundo cooked his dinuguan didn’t belong to those winged cockroaches that crawled out of almost every space of the house. She cried when she saw the fragile half-formed geckos leak out of their shells. “I didn’t know. I didn’t know,” she said, placing the eggs on the windowsill under father sky, near mother earth, under the sun, half-expecting them to come to life again, to finish forming the geckos that she said sang at night to us while we slept. She cried and cleaned and said slowly, “we shouldn’t eat meat. We shouldn’t go near the smell of the cooking hooves in the tin pot. Tin pot. Tin pot. Maybe it’s an aluminum pot. It doesn’t matter,” she said, moving the hair away from her face. “It really doesn’t matter—tin or aluminum will kill you. It isn’t good to cook in tin, not tin. I read something. I heard something about tin. Cancer and tin,” mom said and cried a little longer for the geckos, repentance for their deaths.

Raymundo lived in the house before us. Raymundo lived in the house with us. Raymundo still lives in the house, most likely. Some part of the house always. “He lived in the house for a hundred years and grew from the walls,” I said, looking at the ceiling of the house, looking at the walls of the house, looking at the doors of the house. Mom told us his last name, and we heard it
as *Sucsuc*. Raymundo Sucsuc, we said, jumping, jumping and singing his name as his food cooked on the white stove. The blue and yellow and orange of the propane fire circled around the tin pot, and Zain said “Sucsuc” loud enough for Raymundo to hear. Sucsuc, Sucsuc, Sucsuc, the walls took the words as their own. Lita watched us sing. She sat silent; her eyes absorbing the words, and we sang his beautiful name and ran through the coffee shack, in and out of doors.

The young jewelry maker lived in the room across the hall from Raymundo. Four bedrooms under the low corrugated roof of the home in Captain Cook—four rooms, one Raymundo, one Elizabeth, three children, one woman who crocheted, moving her twining fingers, had moved out—I had watched her twist and turn the ebony wood crochet hook over and over forming flowered hats—and one jewelry maker had moved in. Mom said the man who was nineteen and made jewelry didn’t read. I watched the man. At times, he shifted in his green shorts. I saw the man. He was Jewish from some rich family in New York and couldn’t read, mom said. New York was where mom had moved after she lived in Israel and Greece. Mom was raped in Greece when she was nineteen. She told us before. She told us again. *Be careful.* Mom won a Best Legs contest when she was nineteen and still smoked cigarettes in an apartment she lived in below the acropolis in Greece. We knew this. She had moved with an actor named Sevrin to New York, had fallen in love with a married dentist—I will tell you more about love and this story later, later when you are older, it’s a little too much about sex—lived in the village and met an artist called de kooning. I will tell you later, love, later. I will tell you about the boy named Anthony and more about sex later, love. Sex isn’t shameful. My mother never spoke of sex, but I will tell you. England doesn’t speak of sex.

“How? Why can’t he read?” I asked. *Why can’t the man who is nineteen, who makes jewelry, who lives in the house read.* I touched the things on mom’s brown dresser, looking at my
lips move to ask her—she was caught in the edge of the frame behind me—in the oval mirror that sat on top of the dresser. I touched my hair. I moved it from my face. I turned to the side and back to look at my own reflection.

“Vanity,” mom said, holding my eyes in the mirror, “beauty is as beauty does. Beauty is a dime a dozen.”

“But the man?” I asked, continuing my fingers’ journey over each item on her brown dresser.

“He doesn’t read, but he creates jewelry. He doesn’t need to read. Doesn’t need money. His family has money for him. It isn’t good for him though. Might be a bit daft to think this way, but some do. He should need something. We should all need something—not good for anyone to stand around with their thumb up their ass.”

The man who couldn’t read who was nineteen and made jewelry placed a wood bench on the lanai of the tin roofed house. He worked there afternoons. I came home from Konaweana elementary school with the low sounds of gears of the yellow school bus shifting up the hill. I came home through the smells of Raymundo’s cooking and watched the jewelry maker. I watched wordless, irregularly with my eyes, looking at him, looking at the rain that fell heavy over the trees, so heavy it took all the sound from the house. He sat wordless, forming silver rings with a torch, with a leather mallet, with a c-block, with a firebrick. “Why can’t you read?” I asked, as the rain let me have my voice. I looked at his face as he worked. I wanted the rings he twisted from silver.

“Do you read?” he said, not looking at me, keeping his face to the ring, ring, silver twisting thing, as the leaving sound of the rain moved out over the field. The rings formed from his fingers.
“Why can’t you read?” I touched the leather mallets. I lifted it to my face. I breathed in the odor.

“Do you read?”

“I am small.” I placed the mallet near the firebrick. “I am not big.” I touched a ring that sat against the black velvet of the case that held all of his rings.

Mom read. Mom read books and picked out names from the pages of the books she read.

“I should have given you the middle name Sophia. I should have given you the middle name Lydia. I should have given you my mother’s name—maybe Constance. Maybe her middle name. I should have given you Sarah. I should have given you Sabastian. I should have given you other names to add to your names. Your names mean something. Names mean something. Maybe Lydia Martha,” she said as she finished books, as she thought about family.

“What do names mean?” I asked.

Zain said, “Raymundo. You know names. Raymundo,” and smiled as the word left his mouth. Smiled and pushed away the hair from his face. Smiled and watched the door to Raymundo’s room. Lita watched mom and didn’t smile.

“Zain came from the Bible,” mom said. “I opened the Bible. His grandmom, Mim, said he needed a strong name. The Bible is good for some things, guidance at times. I opened the pages at random. The name was there, in the Bible. It sounded strong. It is a sword, I believe. Something along those lines. It is also the seventh letter of the Hebrew and Aramaic alphabet. Many believe seven to be lucky.” Zain watched mom. He didn’t question. He knew the story. “Ruffin didn’t care what I called the baby. A good guy, but not a namer of babies. Zain was a good name.” Mom looked at Zain as she spoke.

“Zooba,” Lita said, pointing to Zain, calling him the name mom used at times.
“Where’s my name?”

“Before you were born, I walked up a small hill near the white house in Big Sur where you were born. I walked up the hill and sat alone. I wanted to see the stars, maybe to feel them. Sometimes I thought I could. I believed they were closer than any person. Damon had given me clap.”

“What’s the clap?”

“A VD—venereal disease. You get it from sex. Maybe bad sex,” she laughed. “Maybe not. Damon went down to visit the woman who gave it to him. I had to get away from him for a while—from all of them, all the people around. There were a bunch of hippies in Big Sur at that time. So I walked up this hill near the house. The stars pulsed; moved—really pulsed something lovely. I could almost hear them. I believed they sang. They were brighter than I had seen previously. The last time I had connected completely with nature was when an old Indian woman had given me peyote. Then, when I took the peyote, I moved a wind chime with my mind—with my mind, I changed its direction…over and over.” Mom touched her forehead as she spoke. She twirled her finger in the air—the wind chime. “The night before you were born, I had a dream. If you were a boy, I was to call you Stormy. I told Damon. He threw three coins on the I Ching. It came up on rain. He said we should call you Raindrop. When I was giving birth, before you came out fully, only the top of your head—curls, everywhere. A woman in the room said, ‘it’s a girl’ before you were born, just from seeing the top of your head. Damon delivered you. A neighbor took Zain for a ride in a sports car so he wouldn’t see you born.”

“Where’d Lita get her name?” I knew the story. I asked anyway. I wanted the story again. I remembered again that I wanted a sister.
“Damon read *Aeneid* before Lita was born. He wanted a son named Virgil. I wanted a daughter named Lita. I was afraid of Damon having a son—*I will tell you more on this later, later when you are older*. I had so much hate for Damon then. *I worry*. When Lita was born, we named her Virgalita. It was both names together. It is beautiful.” *Damon made coleslaw with raisins. Damon ate red spuds. Damon built the house in Humboldt. Damon hunted deer and the children ran after the blood trail. Damon liked mayonnaise mixed with catsup. Damon Floyd Wright was from Texas. Hazel Alma Wright was his mother. Her father, Will Porter, lost his arm in a cotton gin. The gin ate Will’s right hand all the way up, caught in the saws. Waist deep in, he reversed his body out slow. Refused the doctor, walked home to wife Alma. Half a nose, right hand mangled, three long gashes from the saws down his chest, around the ribcage, a circling monster—could see his heart beating. They amputated the arm on his front porch, sewed on his nose, but left the gash near his heart alone. The heart beat.*

The jewelry maker couldn’t read. Mom read books and gave us names. Mom said she would teach him and began going into his room in the afternoons. I traced my fingers against mom’s brush and looked into her hand mirror; the mirror made from yellowed elephant’s tusk, as mom taught the jewelry maker how to read. Mom kept the mirror because the elephant died giving up its tusk. Someone killed the elephant. Elephants have long memories. Someone gave mom the mirror. The elephants hadn’t forgotten. I ran my fingers against the memories of the elephant and looked in the mirror. Zain moved towards the door of the room of the jewelry maker. He sat still near the door. He breathed quietly. He placed his hand against the door. He pressed his face to the crack of space that came out from under the door. I moved forward, crouching, crawling to the space, to the line of dark that came out from under the space of the door. I breathed in the smell of the jewelry maker’s room. I breathed in the dark from the line of
the space that came from under the door, smelling mom, smelling bed sheets, smelling incense, smelling the heat from a torch that softened and softened the silver until it twisted and bent from the space under the door. I leaned in and listened to the pull of the saw that cut and cut until the silver formed from the jewelry maker’s hands. I listened to the sound of voices as they touched, moved, and crawled across the bedroom ceiling of the jewelry maker who could not read.

“Get Lita,” Zain said. “Make her cry for mom. Call for mom, Lita, call for her,” he whispered.

I held Lita’s hand. She wore her flowered corduroy pants and her yellow cotton shirt. She smelled of mom. I leaned in and placed my nose against her hair, saying, “Where’s mom?” “Don’t you want mom?” I said this again and again. I remembered the smell of mom. I remembered the day I held Lita in her yellow night gown when she was two days old.

“Tell her mom has a lollipop for her. Tell her.”

“Lolly? Don’t you want a lolly?”

Lita stood silent. She watched us. Lita crouched down low, breathing hard against the wood of the door, but she wouldn’t cry for mom. We moved our faces to the space under the door. Mom’s face, her hair, her arms. Mom’s eyes. Mom spread against the mattress on the floor. Mom’s eyes looking up to the tin roof, as sounds chased the voices across the indents of the corrugated tin roof:

Raymundo’s door was closed. Raymundo had five kittens. We moved away from the door of the jewelry maker. We walked slowly towards Raymundo’s door. Zain moved his ear to the old wood of the door.

“Kittens,” he said. “I hear the kittens. Come. Be quiet. Don’t make any noise.” He walked slowly towards our room. The room we shared. The room that shared a wall with
Raymundo’s room. Zain closed our door. “Quiet,” he said again, and looked at Lita, who stood still, lifting her big, big, big eyes to the ceiling to find mom’s voice. “Go get a knife from the kitchen. Hold it down so it doesn’t cut you. Point it to the floor like mom taught you. Walk slow.”

I brought the knife from the kitchen that held the smells of the pig kidneys, lungs, intestines, ears, heart, snout, and what mom believed looked like hooves. I held the knife pointed down towards the long boards of the floor. I said Raymundo, Raymundo, Raymundo, Raymundo in a voice only the spaces in the floor could hear. Zain took the knife. The wood wall, the farthest corner of the wood wall that saw our room and Raymundo Sucsuc’s room, was covered with pieces cut from a cardboard box and held with grey tape. The cardboard covered a hole that had eaten away the hundred year old boards of the wall that saw our room and Raymundo’s room. Zain took the knife.

“Quiet. Quiet,” he said to the knife, and maybe to himself, as he sawed away the cardboard from the hole that ate the wall. “Come. Come. Call the kittens.” He waved me forward. I crouched low as he spoke. I watched the black come out from the small hole he had cut in the cardboard wall. I leaned in and breathed the smell of Raymundo, who was hundreds of years old, who had grown from the walls of the house, who had wrapped his fingers in the music of coffee beans. I whispered to the kittens.

“Kitties. Kitties. Come to us.” I kissed them through the walls. Their small velvet paws and claws reached out and touched my fingers, playing and hitting. The fingers that I wiggled through the hole touched the ears, the faces, the legs of the kittens. I pulled them through the hole. I held them to my face and breathed in the smell of Raymundo’s room. I passed one, two, three to Zain.
“Put the cardboard back,” he said. I leaned it up against the wall. The wall dipped a little low but held. The wall with the hole held Raymundo on the other side.

I took the kitten. I pressed it against my shoulder. Zain lifted Lita onto the bed. We held the kittens in our arms. Closer, tight, closer. I breathed and lifted my fingers to touch the pointed teeth, and we began to jump on the bed and sing Raymundo Sucsuc, laughing and singing.


“Raymundo, Raymundo, Raymundo Sucsuc,” Zain said the name like music, laughing.

We heard mom’s voice. We heard it. I looked to the roof and chased the sound of her voice that ran across the ceiling calling our names.
Zain, Lita, Raindrop at Captain Cook house
She said her mum was a Catholic, her mum changed to Church of England. The nuns pulled Elizabeth’s hair, told her they saw her open eyes during prayer. “How would you know unless your eyes were open?” The nuns pulled her hair.

“Why, Sister, why would I believe in your god who allows you to bully children?”

This is my body, these are my thoughts. You bitch, I am a child.

You are a woman. Glory!

O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!

God! O God is love!

God of equality, that’s my savior Jesus Christ, my lord.

O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!

She looked for a man but lived in a tent at Kolekole state park with three children.

A Jehovah’s Witness asked if she believed in god’s promise, was she saved by his birth?

“Why the fuck would I believe in your patriarchal god who teaches the glories of men, the hatred of women?”
These, these are my breasts. You cunt, I am a woman.

You are a woman. Glory!

O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!

God! O God is love!

God of equality, that’s my savior Jesus Christ, my lord.

O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!

She looked for a home and found the premises

of Kainaliu. An Indian guru, object of devotion. Maharaja said

he is the manifestation of god, identical to god,

evil is of the mind, the ego, the will, and asked her to bow

to kiss his feet. Kiss my feet and build my mansion on earth.

“Why the fuck would I kiss your feet and believe in total

surrender to your will?”

These are my rejections, this is my will. You chauvinist pig, I am a woman.

You are not a god. Glory!

O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!

God! O God is love!

God of equality, that’s my savior Jesus Christ, my lord.

O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!
She looked for a city; a warmth of community
a place for her children and belief—the Seventh Day
Adventists took a day off to remember a connection to god.
We are vessels our lamps may never die. Jesus
fill us up. Teddy filled her up with their child.
she removed the jewelry from around her neck so the umbilical wouldn’t
strangle the child, and said, “The body is beautiful.
Why should I be ashamed of sex? Fuck.”

These are my belief, this is my desire. Pastor of god’s love, I am a woman.

You are not connected by love. Glory!

O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!

God! O God is love!

God of equality, that’s my savior Jesus Christ, my lord.

O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!
Keʻei Wall

the stonewall near Keʻei,
along the edge of the beach
near the three children

who held wana, drank salted waves,
and listened to the daybreak ocean
with fevers reaching for the ceiling of

the one-roomed rented home
that smelled of sewing machine oil,
of kerosene lanterns, of burnt wicks as
Masterpiece filled the room

with music and voices
on the small black and white
mother cooked vegetarian in the
open-air kitchen, facing the seawall and

Keʻei hummed of flying cockroaches,
as the silver king’s coin from the ash and glass
of a burned building,
was lost in the rock wall that eluded waves,

and took in words between the spaces of
the stones that held the echoing sounds,
that lead to the rusted tin and wood outhouse
with the cries of myna birds that still come
as tones from the young ones near
the brackish well of pipipi and hermit crabs

against the walls of Keʻei where the boy,
the girl, the girl, and the woman slept
in the one-room house against and near
and in the sound of Keʻei waves
Keʻei
Go inside a stone
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger's tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.

Charles Simic

Something about Death

Before my father broke the handle of the .22 shotgun over the cow’s head, before we packed our clothes in black plastic bags and hid them at the bottom of the dirt road, before we walked barefoot away from the small house in Northern California, before we met my brother’s father, before Hawai’i, my mother spoke of houseboats and my brother stood in the yard almost every evening pointing towards the lights. He pointed towards Sausalito.

He didn’t say his dad lived down there. He told us, “That’s where Grandma Mim lives. She’s Cherokee. I am a Cherokee like her,” brushing the long pale hair away from his eyes, and wiping his nose with the back of his hand. He looked at me with his eyes that knew about lights and grandmothers. I believed them. His eyes saw orange glowing lights at night when my father locked him out of the house. Locked him out, leaving him screaming and banging against the wood door. Locked him out, leaving my mother begging to have him let back in. I believed them, his eyes, and him. He believed me when I spoke of the ghost bear that stood at the edge of the loft—the bear that watched me as I fell asleep. The bear that, like mist, vanished down the ladder of the loft as sleep came. I saw the bear and my brother saw his grandmother in Sausalito.

After we walked away from the dark wood house and my father, after we lived in the trailer near the stream that smelled of mint, after we lived near the woods filled with drying animal bones, after my mother bathed us daily in stream water heated in the 11 gallon galvanized steel tub, after the Christmas of toys from the toy store in Redway, California, after my brother
and I killed the rattlesnake on the dirt path, and after my father tried to steal my sister, we went to see my brother’s father on a houseboat.

His father’s name was David. He sailed a boat in the harbor, lived with Mim, and everyone called him Ruffin. I don’t know why. I knew that he half-loved my brother. I knew he tried to love him with a Batman cake because it was my brother’s sixth birthday. I knew my brother wanted a monkey for his birthday, and half-believed Ruffin had hid one somewhere on the houseboat. And, I knew Ruffin’s girlfriend was trying to drown herself in the claw foot bathtub while we ate my brother’s cake with small spoons.

I watched my mother’s feet as she talked about leaving and the death of her father with Ruffin. We ate the cake of black frosting, and the woman behind the door cried and occasionally screamed louder about doing it. Really doing it. Really killing herself this time.

“He liked meat and spuds,” my mother said. And, with death, I remembered the taste of the cod liver oil she had fed us by the spoonful to protect our arteries from her father’s death after she read the letter from England. She had fed us as if wiping away death, cleansing death. As she spoke to Ruffin, I felt my mother’s memories. I felt them and moved into her skin as she sat near her daddy on the beach in Cornwall. I felt her mother holding her hand along the edge of the water. I felt her brother’s breath as they dug into Cornwall’s beaches. I felt my mother.

Ruffin listened and occasionally smiled and looked towards the bathroom door.

I remembered death on my mother’s tongue and tasted her loss. “He called my hair beautiful,” she had told me when Douglas died. “He said it was like ‘waves on wadder.’ He said it was something beautiful, everyone always said my brother was beautiful. He was the beautiful boy, but my father said I had lovely hair.” Only the word had not sounded like “lovely” when my
mother spoke of her father’s voice. The sound was “luvly,” and she held the blue airmail letter in her hand, crying harder and turning to face the trailer wall.

She smoked with Ruffin as they sat at a small table on the houseboat. She wore a long skirt and Birkenstocks. Her black leather purse sat half open near her feet. Her feet remained still under the table. The frosting was bitter against the edges of my tongue. I pressed the spoon into the cake as Ruffin passed my mom the joint. She inhaled, inhaled, and inhaled, holding it in, and then exhaled, exhaled, sending smoke towards the ceiling of the houseboat. Ruffin reached in his pocket and passed out three silver dollars—one to my brother, one to me, and one to my sister. He told us to ignore the woman in the bathroom. She wouldn’t really drown herself. She was just a sad girl. He said these words, tugging at my braid, smiling a little. I held the silver dollar in my hand, flipping to see one side and then the other, over and over.

“Maybe we should go so things will settle down a bit. It might be best,” my mother said, as the crying grew louder from behind the door.

Ruffin stood and placed his hand against the white paint of the small door. He whispered something. The crying stopped, started, stopped and started again.

His mother had told fortunes on the houseboat at Gate 5 the day before. I watched as my brother stood near me and whispered in my ear that Mim loved him. Mim told the man he’d have three wives. He said he was on wife number two, waiting for the third. I saw her hands moving, ring covered, as she spoke. Her dark hair fell forward. She looked at me. Her eyes said they knew something. I moved forward and touched the brown spots against the skin of her hand, and watched the turquoise and silver rings on her fingers.

She was not there to hear the woman crying behind the door. She was not there as mom said Ruffin always had loved beautiful women, beautiful and neurotic. Mom didn’t laugh. She
pulled in smoke and exhaled and smiled at Ruffin, and then turned to smile at us. She told Ruffin about leaving, again. She pushed her brown hair behind her ear.

Ruffin asked us to stay. “Mim walked up into the mountain with two friends. Stay. She’ll be back soon and beat herself up if she can’t say goodbye. Mim will want to say goodbye. Maybe we can take a ride on the boat. Maybe.”

Mom told us to take our cake and sit outside on the deck of the houseboat. “But not near the water. And watch your sister.”

I looked at my sister. She followed. She wore a white sweater. I touched the front of my dress. I wore my favorite dress with the buttons up the front. I had worn it when we went to take passport photos when mom thought about taking us back to England. When I had smiled crooked at the man with the camera, hoping maybe he thought I was beautiful.

“We were friends more than anything, really,” I heard mom say, as my sister used her fingers to lick black frosting and my brother flipped the silver coin in his hand. “That’s about all there was to it. He’s a good sort,” she added. When I heard her voice, I wanted to see her face. I watched my sister and brother. “He wasn’t my cup of tea. I preferred musicians, drummers like the son-of-a-bitch I just left. And besides, love, I am not beautiful enough for Ruffin. Truly, now don’t be a silly girl. Come out and let’s have a look at you. He likes leggy blonds. We were merely friends. Truly.”
Douglas and Elizabeth Cornwall Constance Sarah and Elizabeth
THE DREAM THAT OPENED TO THE MOUNTAIN

I was so happy, I loved Him, and in my heart I felt He would kiss me today. How wonderful that would be: to be kissed by Him. . . . to be hugged by Him.

Then . . . I met a girl who He had just kissed. They were to be together. She was lovely, kind and natural. This changed not my love but changed my feelings of relating to Him and left me with a lonely space within, a void that somewhat missed.

Together (for we are all-friends) the three of us were climbing a mountain. This mountain wore roofs jutting out into space. The roofs looked almost like pagodas.

As the three of us approached the top together, a guide joined us and walked not too far from my side.

When we drew nearer and nearer to the top, we suddenly were stopped by a closed door with a small roof over it. I stood there longing to go all the way and almost . . . at the moment of my longing . . . the guide opened the door for.

As we passed through the door to the other side, I looked up and there were steps leading up the mountain almost to the sky, up as far as my eyes could see. Some sadness still lingered in my heart, but as I walked beyond the door, my perspective changed. Something happened.

Like a song, those words came to my Being.

"The Harvest is tied with the sinews of spring; Winter's Blossoms are not far away. Answer you, with the visions of summer. Awake, with the morning sunrise. Life is the romance of love. Love is the eternal romance of life."

The dream realized, as I had passed the portal of the door, my heart became a poet.
From the outside, the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,
Even though a child throws it in a river;
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed
To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.

Charles Simic

Stones

The bag—dirty, see-through and plastic—hid under the mattress in the loft I shared with my brother. The same loft we looked down from one night and saw the thing with the flat face and green eyes. Later, my brother said that mom got the thing out of the house using pieces of bacon. I don’t remember. It’s possible. We had pigs, the runt was Leroy. He slept in a box near the potbelly stove before my father butchered him and mom fed us liver and onions. I remember the thing’s eyes. It sat in my father’s black leather chair, the chair near the banjo, and the black and white TV. It turned and looked up, felt us watching. Its eyes said it knew something about us. It watched us. I felt its eyes, a movement, against our faces and thoughts.

When I walked in our yard with my brother, the same yard with the peacock that ran up my brother’s back and pecked him near his eye, I took the bag with me and searched for stones. Small, old and bumpy—I wanted the voices I knew the stones used when I was not there. The voices that I heard say my name as I ran to the edge of the yard and looked down into the redwood forest. I carried the bag carefully, never letting my brother look inside. I held the bag of stones against my chest, keeping the voices close.
Along the edge of a dark-wood embankment, I found a small blue stone. I held it tight in my hand, watching my nails press into my palm. I opened my fingers, letting light near the stone. I touched the smooth surface of the blue stone with my fingertip.

“Turquoise,” my father said, as he looked over my shoulder. “From the French for Turkish. It’s a mineral.” The smell of him was near—old jeans, BB King Records, red potatoes and ketchup, and earth.

I asked what French was and wanted all the words.

My mother always said my father was one of the most intelligent men she had ever met. He could build anything, knew everything, but he was dark and mean. Something hid in him against his chest. “His mother, your Grandma Hazel, was the best thing in Texas,” my mom said, years later when I asked her for my grandmother’s address. When we were hidden far away from Damon. She said, “1610 Elmwood Blvd, Dallas, Texas. We will have to look up the zip code. The postman should know, they’ve lived there for years. Your father, he couldn’t be nice. It’s that Wright blood; they all fight like they hate each other. One aunt lives in a shack with ten dogs and will shoot anyone who comes near. The others say their father was mean and ruined Damon. When your grandma wouldn’t leave the house for a whole year, your grandfather took Damon with him everywhere. Your aunts insist it ruined him. They say it was either that or when he caught scarlet fever and everyone thought he would die, ruined his eyesight and spoiled his nature. But your Grandma Hazel is the best thing in Texas.”

The last stone I found, and placed in the bag, was round. It didn’t look like much. I liked the shape; I liked that I could almost feel it speaking. It was a sound near me. I touched it to my lips and tasted the dark, the old water, the sweet, the new, the dying of it, the dead who had
touched it, the leaves that had covered it, the tall grass, the salt in it, the deer who jumped and ran near it, and the fine grit of it. My tongue felt the curve of the stone. I breathed in and held it. My father took the stone from my hand and placed it on a bigger rock. He picked up a small hammer. I had seen him gut a deer and cut off the heads of chickens. I knew he had killed my black rabbit, BB King, and fed it to us fried, telling us to be careful of the bones. He lifted the hammer and slowly brought it towards the stone. I didn’t breath. I tasted. I heard as the voice left.

“Crystal,” he said and handed me the two jagged halves.
Humboldt, California. Elizabeth coming out of the door to feed the geese.
Amphidromy of Tents

In the isolation of the archipelago,
homeless—mother as brightest star,
our roof, a shelter draped over, attached to a frame
hoku-lei, ‘a‘ā burning brightly,
living beneath the steel truss bridge—a strength
—old sugarcane carrier, the road to Hilo,
we ate sugared powder by finger-full, pulled gum from the
sidewalks, and breathed the cycle of air from Mauka to Makai
—walls

In the isolation of the archipelago,
secluded in our alteration to ‘o’opu, we fish,
to ‘ōpae kuahiwi, we crustaceans,
to ‘ōpae oeha’a, we prawns of mountain
streams, growing gills, growing exoskeleton
free-living—swimming in the fall of water
of Kolekole, raw or scarred children hiding
from fists under nylon roof and aluminum poles—
homeless—tent walls

In the culture of the archipelago,
the tempo of the engine carried us down
to the way of ‘a‘ā to the coast of Pāhoehoe—
to sleep in the open air dwelling near
—Iwikuamo‘o, the vertebrae of our new bones,
we napped below the kiawe of catholic roots,
eavesdropping on the hum of the
stars new father sang out to her, mother—
—new tent walls

In the society of the archipelago,
the beat of the motor lifted us to the road
of Mauna Loa to the place of Pele and old
hunting cabins and wind, anuhea, and the white dog—
a herald came to our dreams under a branch
of the ‘ōhia lehua tree, the sacred shelter
anchored by sounds of mother breathing
and father singing
—walls, home
Groupie

Mom said Betty Fire had been a groupie, followed bands around in her day. Did whatever they said. Mom said she didn’t like the chauvinist pig of a band, but she’d go watch a movie about the band with Betty Fire—the movie played out in an old theater in Na‘alehu.

In the back of the Toyota station wagon, Kimberly asked me where my dad was as mom and Betty watched the movie in the old theater in Na‘alehu.

Kimberly’s father gave her money, watched Miss America with her while eating dinner on trays near the TV, and told her she was beautiful. Kimberly had a bed with flowered sheets. Her brother had sheets with footballs all over their clean whiteness.

“Where’s your dad? Did he love you?”

“He told me he’d lick it if I didn’t put panties on.”

*Mom said she got us outta there. Mom hid us. Don’t talk about it with people. Don’t. We left. We got out.*
Rainbow Hair

The last night I played at the Kona Surf Poi Pounder, Elizabeth came in. Elizabeth saw me there, but I didn’t see her. Not yet. This is what makes our meeting interesting, so far out. I didn’t see her. She saw me; she did, but I didn’t see her until the next day. She saw me that last night at Kona Surf playing music. And, the next day after, I was driving down in Kainaliu—Kainaliu near Honalo, and I seen this foxy lady, man. What she did—what she did, I was close enough to her, I could see her. She turned her head and looked over her shoulder at me. She looked over there at me. Right straight at me, and I saw them. I saw rainbows come off her hair. I saw rainbows, man. I don’t know if you realize it, you might not have known it, but Elizabeth had every color hair on her head that I had ever seen, you know. On her head, there was every color that ever was—every color on the planet was there, right on her head.

She had her three kids with her there, standing on the side of the road near her blue car. I thought, “She’s probably married,” and I kept driving. She went in the health food store. It was in the Aloha Theater back then. I passed all the way down. I got all the way to Teshima’s Restaurant, which is near Honalo, just going around the corner about to hit the highway and head straight down into Kona town. Kona only had but one or two stoplights back then, but we all still called it a town. But anyway, I says, “I am going to go back and check her out. Man, I gotta go back.” So, I turned around and went back towards her. I flipped around quick. I couldn’t stay away. It was some rhythm beating right up in me, like I could hear music when I saw her. It was a far out beat, you know, crazy. I knew I had to see her. I walked in to the Aloha Theatre Café, that’s where they were, and I says, “Hi,” as her three children watched and ate on their cookies.
They had these big eyes. They looked at me like they knew something or something. Maybe they were watching out for their mother. All of them always had so much respect and love for Elizabeth. But anyway, they ate their cookies. But these cookies were healthy, ’cause that was Elizabeth. She didn’t mess around with junk food, not with her kids.

But she says, “Hi.” She says, “Hi, Teddy.”

I says, “How do you know me?” And I look over at this face. This beautiful face looking up at me like she has seen me before. And, and this is far out, she has this English voice, man. I am thinking, “How does this English person know me?” I says, “How do you know me?” And all the time I can’t keep from smiling at her and watching her face. It was incredible.

She says, “Well, I saw you last night at the Kona Surf. I watched you play music last night,” and she kind of gives me this smile.

Man, it was a smile that knocked my socks off. I couldn’t believe it. Here’s this lady, and she’s looking at me like I can’t even explain. So, I says, “Look, I am starting at the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel tonight. Can you come out to see me play out there?” I almost melted. I am thinking, this fine lady is checking me out, you know what I mean. To make a long story short, I just went home, and I—I couldn’t even contain myself. I was thinking, she’s going to come out to see me. So, the next night I am playing bass in the band—acoustic bass. We got an acoustic piano, an acoustic drummer, and a saxophone player. See Glenn Willis, my music partner, the coolest, most intelligent man I ever met—he was brilliant—he could play almost every instrument, but he only wanted to play saxophone. So he’d bring three—alto, tenor, soprano, and he’d play whenever we had a gig. So, I was on the bandstand playing when she walked in. But something happened when she walked in that has never happened before—never happened
before at the Mauna Kea. All the lights went out. All the lights went out at the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel when Elizabeth walked in.

The lights went out, so I could go sit with her while the band played. It was something. The band could keep playing because they had acoustic instruments, and I sat with her at her table. Before the night was over we knew—I knew, man. She said she knew, but I was thinking, she’s too fine for me. Everybody’s goin’ to be hitting on her. When I say hittin’ on, I mean guys are always going to be tryin’ to rip her off from me. So, that night we went out and we had a dinner. We stayed that night—all that night—just rapping and talking at the house. Her kids were all asleep, but we just rapped. But we just never had a night apart after we got together. It changed my life. She never asked me for anything—nothing. I would go get her something, little things to show her, you know, that I was thinking about her. But, she was the most accommodating friend that I ever had.

Teddy and Elizabeth, Hōnaunau
Three Children

We pale-skinned children crawled
on knees into the narrow cave
of Hōnaunau shoreline breathing dust

and grain of ancestors’ unknowable
—their bones lay hallowed
on the rock littered

floor, under the low cave ceiling
missing teeth and tongue, and yet
they still spoke the old language,

rootless among the deep volcanic
openings, we took on our tongues
the word: Fatherless

and then he stood
near the salted cave mouth,
his dark back against the sky, calling

to us—voice filled with hash smoke,
words carved into the boards
of the redwood house
words carried on
the musical feet of rats
along the rafters, saying
the lyrics of father and
tangled up origins, saying
we were his
Lita and Teddy (Dad).
Teddy speaks. He uses a small knife to pick at the hard edges of his feet. He says he has some Egyptian in him somewhere, some ancestor, or another. He might even have a little Chinese. He has kids out there. Tells us he has twins sons out there—not sure where. Their mother has them, he adds. They like football—good kids, really good boys, you know.

There’s a picture of one of his sons, I don’t know which, in a brown album on the shelf. In the photo, the boy is crouched down, holding a football, wearing blue and white, smiling. Teddy tapped his finger against the picture when I pulled out the album to know family. Smiled and tapped it again. Near the photo, there’s a picture of a man. Teddy ran his finger from the photo of his boy to the photo of the man. He said, my friend. This cat—this is one cool cat. He had a beautiful boat. Teddy drew out the word beautiful when he spoke. This cat had a yacht, Teddy said, and looked long at the photo as he spoke. He stretched out his arm, pointing down to the water near Nāpo’opo’o. The water, dark blue and still at the end of Teddy’s long hand—the water waited for some boat to return. Some boat he knew.

Teddy has other children. More than the twins who like football. There’s a daughter Terria, who has a baby of her own, a son Leon, and a daughter Gwendolyn—all living in Flagstaff with their mother. Teddy says their mother’s name, stretches it, gives it weight—Oli. Talks about Gwendolyn again. Says, she wants to know us, maybe come live with us. Then there’s Moonie, he says. Timothy now, doesn’t go by Moonie anymore. I named him Moonie because the moon was so big—so, so big. I mean bigger than I had ever seen it when Tim was born. I delivered him myself—up in an old house at the top of Doc McCoy’s land in Captain Cook, Teddy says, smiling on memories of his son. Moonie is the youngest son, Teddy adds. His mother is Vivian. She was from England like your beautiful mother, but she turned Holy Roller,
went down to YWAM. You know, Youth with a Mission. She wanted to live with them. She left and went and slept under a tree the first night. Tim remembers that tree, blames me, but I told him I never asked her to leave. I just wasn’t going to go to YWAM, he says.

There’s an old Quonset hut below the redwood house we live in with Teddy. It’s burned out, and vine covered. Covered with a blooming blue and lavender vine that Teddy calls Morning Glory. Teddy says he lived in the Quonset hut with Moonie and Vivian before he knew us. He found out his house burnt from a man in line at the post office. This was when the post office was down at Old Kona Airport, Teddy tells us. My brother says there’s an old bullet hole in one of the burnt walls of the Quonset hut. He whispers this when Teddy isn’t close enough to hear. My brother says Teddy is a spy. My sister isn’t interested in spies, she talks the language of animals, likes them better than people. But the three of us look for spy things when Teddy isn’t home. Spy things like old notebooks, secret compartments, binoculars, and magnifying glasses.

Teddy rubs his jaw as he picks at his feet, saying his teeth are sore. Take care of your teeth. You don’t ever want to feel this, he says. He has a gold tooth. The gold caught the light. His eyes don’t see as well as they could, he tells us as he leans in to look at the edge of his feet. He sits on the platform bed, near the stuffed cobra, under the red painting, besides the rows and rows of vinyl records. He sings a little,

*I see the crystal raindrops fall*

*And the beauty of it all*

*Is when the sun comes shinin’ through*

*To make those rainbows in my mind*

*When I think of you some time*

*And I want to spend some time with...*
Mom sits near. She listens to Teddy sing to her.

I hold up my child’s feet, showing Teddy my toes. I tell him they look like his long curved toes. He smiles and pulls at my toes. Laughs. They do, my daughter, he tells me.

Teddy talks boxing, asks us if we know what a TKO is. He likes to watch boxing and Jeopardy. Jeopardy plays on the TV as he works on his feet and listens as we make up TKO words. He answers, finally—technical knockout. What is scree, he asks. Scree, he answers our watching faces, is a bunch of broken rock fragments at the base of cliffs, or volcanoes. I don’t speak. I listen. I want to tell him that rocks have voices. They like stillness. They like to stay where they are. They don’t like being moved unless you ask them first. Rocks listen and speak.

Teddy says, it’s good to know things. Teddy says, let me tell you a riddle. Let’s see if you can get this, my smart kids. He speaks slow:

This king has three sons.

He tells them, whoever figures out

The answer to the riddle will inherit his kingdom

He has five hats: three white hats and two black hats.

He throws two hats away. He blindfolds the three sons and puts a hat on each of his three sons heads.

He tells son number one to remove his blindfold from his head, look at his brother’s hats and guess what hat is on his own head.

Son number one looks over at his two brothers and says, I don’t know father, and leaves the room. Son number two looks at son number three and says, I don’t know father and leaves the room.
Son number three didn’t take his blindfold off.

He tells his dad he knows what color hat he has on his head. He tells his father how he knows.

Teddy says, solve the riddle. Take as long as you need. It’s good to think and know things.

Teddy goofing around for the kids.
Elizabeth, Teddy (after a run) and Soleiange.
Sun and Angels

When Solei was born, mom left a note for her friend Bea pinned to a banana leaf at the end of the driveway at Hōnaunau house.

Gone to have the baby…

It said.

Solei was born at 1:14 p.m.
Ran in My Life

when I got here, Kona,
like I said, there was no black
people, I was the first, I played
the band kept playing
acoustic bass, acoustic drums,
acoustic voice, acoustic and,

she walks in,
and, man, all the lights
went out at Mauna Kea
beach hotel—the band kept
playing, and we stayed that night—

all that night
rapping and talking
It changed my life
most accommodating
friend that I ever had

so much energy when we met,
never ran in my life—my
brother was the best runner in
Detroit for a while there—I
sang up and down mainland

roads moving out and
in notes of jazz and
jazz but never ran,
but her, but she—
the energy of my

life—started running with
her dynamic words near
never out of love,
she blew me away,

against the movement
on the hill from Sure Save,
Captain Cook to Hōnaunau,
and the hill to our house,
our hill, in Hōnaunau

I went running, running,
up our hill, up to our house,
man taps me on the
shoulder, says,
dedication, he says—
I thought nothing
harder, harder than,
but no, not her
so dynamic, so filled—
her words, passion,

you see, it’s like
I said, man
passion, not dedication,
passion blew me away
Pakalolo

We sat on laps,

in between folded legs, on the outskirts of the circle,

around the half-stoked fire, as someone played on music and

the night held stars lightly over our un-brushed, always

washed with rosemary shampoo, long-long-long hair covering

everywhere over our

child’s ears,

over child’s wild sorrel

and rosemary and lavender

and honey and jasmine

and patchouli and mint

and molasses and non-dairy and

brown rice and brown bread and kefir and goat’s milk and natural raised

and unspoiled and never spanked and non-fluoride toothpaste and

tofu and no doctors and incense burning

home raised heads

We sat always listening as the spit-rolled joint,
rolled by some thick-bearded man

or long breasted woman who talked sex in braided

body parts and knew

how to play the tambourine and African drum—doing too much kwaito music—

and said that

they

knew us before we were even born—

and the joint became the sucked on doobie,

the passed around growing smaller roach,

and then the barely-there resin thin pieces of ZigZag rolling

papers

It went around, around, and around, sending pakalolo smoke

up against the sky—thick, thick

and

we children floated up just a little with the smoke

we children of the circle, lulled by the smoke and the words of our

parents as they spoke
we listened as someone, minutes into

the passing of the joint, the doobie, the roach, the resin filled papers, always asked,

“Where’d that joint get to?”

We listened as the joint was found, a joke was made,

and the talk moved from politics, art, religion, gossip, to brief explosions of laughter and

someone always singing or playing music or talking abandon or war

or

we passed the joint, the doobie, the roach down when

someone mistakenly handed it to us,

and some of us joined in, breathing into the deep

sky an exhale of breath, of smoke as the doobie, the roach, the barely

there thin pieces of rolling paper brought us into the conversation.

No alcohol, mom said,

alcohol makes people more and less themselves, but,

but pakalolo is fine herb,

and dad smiled and sang

and brother said,

just be careful when they’re out
of pakalolo

the house, the friends, the circle

will sit on edge waiting, searching, blaming,

don’t do me wrong,

don’t rip me off,

just want what’s mine

the joint, the doobie, the roach, and the barely there thin ZigZag papers filled with resin from

words around the circle
But this is one thing—I am going to tell you the truth. But, I was making tons of money. Because I brought the first marijuana to the islands.

So I went back to go see my family in Arizona, as soon as got into town—about three days—the police came up to me. Said, “Teddy, we hate to do this but we have a warrant for your arrest.”

I said, “You gotta a warrant? For what?”

They says, “For selling pot.”

“You couldn’t have no warrant for me.”

Says, “Yes, we do.” Sure enough they took me down, booked me, and then released me on my own...What do you call it? Recognizance. Yeah, recognizance, and I went and tried to find out who did I sell this stuff to. Well, during these days, you had to be a certain height to be a policeman, see. They didn’t take short people. I was on my job playing at the Monte Vista one night and these two guys came in. One was really tall and one really was short. So the short guy came up to me and said, “Teddy, do you know where I can get a couple jays?”

I say, “Probably.”

So he said, “See you can fix it up for me.”

I said, “Give me what you—how much you want to get and I’ll go over to Southside to buy it and get it, and you can come after I get off.”
So, honey, this is really far-out, man. I went over and I scored the guy a few joints. When I see this little short guy coming towards me, he got the tall guy with him. I didn’t pay that no attention, I still didn’t. And they came towards me, and there’s a screen, a spring—the old screen doors used to have a little spring, you know. And, they had a little latch on it and a little handle—just like that—to open it, you know. The real door was what kept the people at night. The screen door…and the screen door. I looked up and saw that handle, and I saw them coming towards me. I said, “Wow! Why’d he bring the tall guy?” So I took the few joints that I had and I stuck it in the handle of that door. I just stuck it in. They didn’t see me, I stuck it in.

He said, “Did you get it? Did you get it?”

I went, “Yeah, it’s in that door back there.” I said, “This friend of mine told me he left it in that door.” ’Cause I got paranoid, you know.
I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed,
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill—

Charles Simic

Myth and Friends

Erika’s mom called her Pearl and brushed her hair. Erika’s mom had a velvet-edged quilt with a black velvet spider sewn on a patch in the middle. She made stir fry with green noodles but cried when she came back from Japan. Erika said her mom fell in love with someone else. She cried all the time. Erika’s dad called her Tripla, said he was taking acid, on a trip, when Erika was born. Erika was born early, born on Kauai in a valley. He was on a trip when Erika Tripla was born, he laughs. They had an antique flag they were trying to sell that belonged to an old relative who had died. They had a samurai sword that was worth a lot of money, Erika said, as we looked in the window, watching her mom crying on the bed. Come on. Don’t watch her. We will sleep in the car. In the back of the old Rambler, we pulled at the blanket, turned and moved and caught the sound of our brothers out near the fire. They leaned over the flame, and we kept still and spoke of story. Did you hear the one about the girl and the guy who are kissing in a car? They are kissing and they hear a tapping noise on the roof of the car. Like drip, drip, drip, she says. She pulls at the blanket covering her feet, shuddering, then speaking again. She coughs and says, the guy gets out of the car. The girls screams “No! Come back. Don’t leave me.” But he goes anyway. She sits in the car, but he doesn’t come back. He’s just gone. The next day the girl hears that a murderer with a hook for a hand was spotted near where they were. Bloody, she says, pulling the cover up around her even closer. She laughs.
Did you hear about the menehune, I say. Teddy told me. He said he knows some old, old Hawaiians who have seen menehune. They are like elves—little people who make things. They eat bananas and come out at night when everyone is sleeping. They’re not bad, I add. Or Pele and her white dog. Teddy told me about Pele. If you drive over Saddle Road at night and see a woman—old woman with white hair and a dog—you have to stop. If you don’t stop the volcano will come to your house.

Erika Kirn (in middle near yellow balloon).
On the Third Day My Mother Was a Myna Bird

On the third day, my mother was a myna bird. She sat outside the louver windows on the tin roof, watching with her yellow-rimmed eyes as I took a long knife and sliced the flesh of the mango against the wooden chopping block. *No knives into my flesh.* I listened. I slowly pushed each knife from the kitchen drawer out through a hole in the salt and dust covered screen. *No knives against flesh.* I heard them against the tin roof. A clang. A clang. A clang. The knives fell. My mother, the myna bird, did not move as the knives tumbled through the hole. She watched me with her dark bird’s eyes. I spoke with my heart to her, the watching bird, saying her body remained sacred. No knives.

My mother was a myna bird. She held in her beaked mouth the seeds from the Koa haole bush and the words from memories of Miloli‘i where we lived as children with the body of the dead owl. *No knives into my flesh.* I heard, I told my watching mother with words that only birds can know. Your body remains undisturbed, I promised. My mother was a myna bird. She held the words of Miloli‘i in her beak. She spoke of the owl. My mother found the owl in the ‘a‘ā near our house when I was seven. We lived in the house in Miloli‘i. In Miloli‘i, I wanted to keep its soft body, the body, dead owl. Ants crawled across its closed eyelids—tiny black ant bodies against the pale wise flesh protecting the eyes of the owl. I wanted the owl to see me. I ran my fingers against the blackened feathers, dancers near the closed eyes. I wanted the owl to speak to me. I ran my finger, just the tip of my first finger, against its dark hooked beak. I wanted the owl
to know my voice. I pressed my fingers to feathers, looking for ears. I held the stiff body against my chest. I wanted the owl. A baby, my mother said. A young pueo. We must bury it. She took the body and covered it—layered it with rock, rock, and rock. We must protect its body from the mongoose. Now you say, ashes to ashes dust to dust, my mother said. I repeated the words. Zain repeated the words. Lita stood silent, living the words. That’s all we really are. Just dust. We return to dust just like this owl, my mother said.

My mother was a myna bird. On the third day, she watched me with her memory-covered bird’s eyes. She revisited Miloli’i. I saw the curve of the world tilt with her memory. When I was seven, we lived in the lava subdivision before the village. It had only a few houses scattered throughout the ropey pāhoehoe and the ‘a’ā. Not many, just a few. We lived there. On Sunday, the pastor from Seventh Day Adventist Church visited to teach us to read from the bible. In the beginning, the world was formless, but God hovered. He hovered, and I read, the words were formless, but I read. There was a light. In the beginning, we lived there with the dog, Kolohe, but he slipped through the cracks of railing that ran around the lanai, breaking his neck against the rope as he fell towards earth from the high, high lanai where Lita and I played. We played, we children laughing in the soap bubbles, sliding against the wood, singing into each other’s ears. We silent children. We silent as mother cut the dog down from the high, high place. No more dogs, for now, she said. *No knives into my flesh.* I heard. Lita cried for Kolohe, for his soft dog scented brown fur. Zain helped my mother lift rocks to cover to his body. We had to protect his body from the mongoose. And now you say, and we said, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

On the third day, my mother was a myna bird. She held in her yellow-rimmed eyes the thoughts of the family that lived in Miloli’i before the village. The thoughts of the children that listened as their mother spoke to the man who visited with the mountain of chocolate chip
cookies on the yellow rimmed plate. She sat and laughed with the man who brought the pakalolo cookies. The children crawled along the edge of the wooden floor to the small kitchen, reaching, reaching for the cookies. Eating, eating, eating, as my mother did not watch, but laughed with the man. I ate. Zain ate. Lita disappeared into my mother’s skirt. She became part of the print, a moving twist of arms reaching for my mother. My mind said, I am seven, seven, seven, and I did not know seven, and I sat on my tricycle on the empty road in Miloli’i, and I saw my brother smiling as he endlessly tried to ride his tricycle down the long road. I heard his words, but he did not speak. We rode to the wooden shed under the pine trees, near the tractor in the field of layered black glass pāhoehoe and pointed brown sharp ‘a‘ā. The dirt around the shed smelled of old sunburned motor oil. The leaves from the pine trees fell. I watched them descend for years and years—over and over they fell against my face. My brother dug for the marbles in the dirt around the shed. He dug. He dug. We didn’t know why there were marbles there, but there were. We had hunted them before. My brother dug, and dug for the bombucha marble. The bombucha, he wanted it. I heard his mind digging, pacing, racing. I heard the words from the ponds near the shore. I am seven, I said, and watched the words march down to the manini, the sea cucumber, the opihī. I am seven. The opihī took my words under their shell and imprinted it into the ridges. My brother took my hand. Go home, go home, we must go home. His hands were covered in the oiled dirt. He hadn’t found his bombucha marble. I pedaled. He pedaled. My mother placed us in our beds. So sorry, need to watch kids around cookies, she said. My mind talked to the lines on the roof as I fell.

On the third day, my mother was a myna bird. She asked with her yellow-rimmed eyes of Diane Aki. Diane Aki lived in the village. We went to the village and watched the children jumping over and over into the water. We went to the village and listened to the voices singing
in the yellow church. Outside the yellow church, in the green rubbish bin, under the pile of pine needles, I heard the voice of a bird. I reached in and found the small body of the bird. It was warm in my hand. My mother placed it in the tree for its mother to find. I wanted to hold the tiny bird against my chest. We went to Diane Aki’s house at night, at night after the children had finished jumping over and over into the ocean. At night, after my mother had walked us down to Honomolino beach and read David and Goliath to us under the short coconut tree. At night, after I had rolled naked in the black sand. At night, after I had drunk from the broken half of a coconut. At night, after I had finished my candy bar bought from the small store in the village.

That night, we sat on the floor in a row watching television in Diane Aki’s house. The Aki boys in a row. The three of us in a row. Small children. My mother near Diane, they spoke. Centipede, I thought. I crouched lower and looked for tiny moving legs. Centipede, I felt it coming. I spoke to it with words that only centipedes know. Centipede! Someone cried out. I had known it was coming. I hadn’t been afraid, but now, but then I knew the fear. I jumped away from the tiny moving feet and twisting body. Centipede!

On the third day, my mother was a myna bird. She watched me through the louver windows. She jumped in her bird body, hopping three steps closer to my eyes that watched her from between the horizontal slats. No knives in my flesh, she said. Your body is sacred, I answered. I thought of Pele. I believed Pele would visit me when we lived in Miloli‘i. I slept with my clothes on, waiting for her visit. Waiting for her red hair to wind down the five miles to our house in Miloli‘i. I slept, dreaming of Pele and her white dog. Your body is sacred.
Raindrop and Lita, Miloli‘i

Kolohe the dog, Elizabeth, Lita, and Zain.
Where Does the Soul Go

Life is dark. I felt the darkness before it ever came. I closed my eyes as my mother spoke on the phone of cancer and asked if she had died in my dream. I had dreamt of her illness three years before it came, dreamed and then gone to the edge of her bed early in the morning, telling her to go to the doctor. There was no health insurance, she said. On the phone when she asked if she lived, I lied and spoke of recovery, not the thing that grew in her left breast. I didn’t speak of death. I pressed my breath to her new cancer, knowing she would die.

Mom didn’t have to die up on the hill in her house that runs on a generator. She loves her generator-run house up on the hill on Mahi Mahi Street. It looks out towards the ‘ōhia trees. The mongoose named Ratilda has gone missing. Perhaps she weaves her way through the lava and bones of old trees down past the house. Does my mother know she will never see her house again?

I knew she would die.

I seek her insides, see them like bats and spider webs, no, as different form, as something gliding along her insides, touching, bouncing off, a centered darkness surrounding light—cancer.
Entertainment

June 17 event a benefit for cancer victim

The Glen family and friends are joining together to raise funds for Elizabeth Glen's medical expenses to combat cancer.

Solei Glen, 14-year-old daughter of Teddy and Elizabeth Glen, will present a ballet and modern dance performance to highlight the June 17 event. Teddy Glen, a well-known jazz vocalist, will add his voice to the benefit, backed by the popular "Brothers and Brothers," with Chris Link on keys, David Link on sax and "Bruz" Freeman on drums.

Businesses, musicians, artists and entertainers are contributing gift certificates, art work, goods and talent to generate funds.

The multi-faceted event is scheduled to begin at 2 p.m. and last all afternoon. Elizabeth Glen, a respected watercolor artist, will display her collection of hand-painted silks, T-shirts and paintings — all of which will be for sale in the Shojo warehouse in Kaka'ako.

In addition to entertainment and art displays, Glen's three older children request people make donations to the auction and rummage sale starting at noon in the Shojo parking lot. Friends of the family are also planning a car wash and bake sale.

Hawaiian singer Dizzi Abi will add her special magic to the concert at 2 p.m. Among others scheduled to perform are: The Rainbow Band (reggae), The Singing Quarter (classical), Jonti and Solomon (hula); and Van Rosey (singer/songwriter).

A variety of dancing is scheduled between musical events. Deborah (DeVona) Savvy, a teacher of Middle Eastern dance, has volunteered to perform belly dancing.

Solei Glen, trained in ballet for eight years, is currently studying interpretive dancing and ballet at the Performing Arts and Cultural Exchange Studio (PACES) and will perform with PACES' dance director, Joanie Doane, along with Namaste.

In her career, Solei won an original choreography-dance contest and performed key roles in ballet productions at the Alaka'i Theatre.

"The whole afternoon should be a lot of fun for everyone," Solei said. "I just hope that this will be a big hit." The fundraising benefit, sponsored by the Hawaii Jazz Club, a non-profit organization, and a minimum contribution of $5 is requested.

Anyone wishing to make a tax-deductible contribution, can mail it to: The Hawaii Jazz Club — Elizabeth Glen Benefit Fund, c/o Bruz Freeman (president), 77-6460 Waiola Road, Kailua, Hawaii 96740.

Volunteers are needed to help with the car wash, rummage sale and auction item collection. For more information, call the Glen family at 959-9612.
Tangles in Organ

This is no cancer, but as inked heʻe
with arms floating free, comes to her
dancer in water, in fluid form—eight fingers
indent in breast, in arm, against curve and back,
against the ingrain of organs, moving form,
and heʻe paints ache near the sounds of
Rachmaninoff, a violence, a beauty

This is no cancer, but as dim heʻe loops
the mind, forgets the mango that grew
against the old sky in Hōnaunau, sings the pattern
of shadows formed by kukui, papaya, coconut—
weeps for the mango, leaving—cries for
exposed flesh, its rings, its brutal end—
withers against the ancient bark,
and heʻe moves, the resonance of
blood flow, a draining, a mass

This is no cancer, but a darkness as heʻe slides,
dancer in salt against the paths of body,
against the shape of woman—against the life of woman, dances
with eight arms, arrives in the ways of body,
and heʻe brings sleep, chants the measure and time,
with blood, in bone, honoring
This is no cancer, but form as he’s, from the heart, tangles in organ

She wants us to let her body remain untouched for seven days and we are to read the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

*Fifty-five years.* We are lucky. Her skin is lined. I move to the top of the bed. She smiles with a dry mouth. *Water?* Do you still want water when you are dying? Does water make dying easier? I hold up the glass, she closes her eyes as if she sleeps. I reach for her hand. It is dry and soft. The bones will remain behind. She will die. I squeeze her hand remembering it, pushing it against my palm.

“We can’t just let her die,” Lita is yelling, crying.

Mom doesn’t open her eyes. She is leaving soon. I see her soul. I know it is changing color, looking for a place to leave the body. Mom opens her eyes. I watch my brother, Zain, talking softly up against her ear. His son will be born soon. Not soon enough. She will be gone.

“She is my best friend,” Lita says. “You can’t let her die. You don’t understand.” I take her hand and move her outside. I touch her arm. “You don’t understand. You don’t. I can’t live without her. She is my best friend.”

“We need to do this,” I say. I see our sister standing alone. She is the youngest. When she was a baby, she fell asleep in her green nightgown against my chest. When she was a baby, our dad, Teddy, would hold her on his shoulder when he sang on stage. She hasn’t spoken in hours. Teddy is looking for a way to save mom. He can’t sit still. He paces.
“You don’t know how this feels. I can’t lose my mom,” Lita says. I keep my eyes on our sister. She is alone.
Last Conversation

“I was so filled with hate when I was pregnant with Lita. I hated your father. I was so angry. I think I passed it on to her. I don’t know how to help her. I just want her to find someone to spend her life with—someone who makes her happy. She doesn’t know about happiness. I worry about her when I am gone. She is so angry,” Mom says, as she sits in the chair with her hair cut short.
Sister

Sister taps against headlights on the memories of the dead
horse killed by the car on the thread of a highway
at night while she dipped and rocked against dark tides
in the rain swift odor of the redwood built Hōnaunau
house with wounded light of shadow beneath
the mango and avocado hitting tin roof

some who lived down on the roadbed of the old rail line, the Hawaii Belt road, under huge heights of hāpuʻu, a recovery, used to bury their dead on their own property, backhoeing through the bluerock of the glass island, basalt liquid, wind and sun dried lava

old headstones titled by movement of ground or wave
sat up as old bones in ʻōhia edged houses. Some
bury the carcass of the horse in lava tubes on Mauna Loa.
The shield, the slopped grace of a falling

She wants to edge up on the lost one, the changeling,

wants removal of footprints in Styrofoam, cathode tubes, things lodged in

the snout, and dying albatross, we are an island, division

away from the Ōō tucked as the spirit in sacred

feathers beneath the wings,

warm scented underbelly, pieces of the soul, the history

the ‘a‘ahu ali‘i and ‘ahu ‘ula

of the glass island

where she blooms bright red when plucked it rains

sucking from the lehua for life

as we read of whale falls, of cubed bones, of endless

ocean bottoms. Some bury their dead in the fall. We push

up against the tilt of the black poly tarps she uses to keep

us out.
Solei asks if I remember Lita’s horse getting hit by the car. Says she was little and woke up alone, in the dark, afraid of the sounds that came against the tin roof of our redwood house—the house Teddy built in Hōnaunau before he met our mother. She was afraid of the sound of rain, afraid of the rats that crawled across rafters to get to the avocado and mac nuts. We were down with the horse, with the headlights of the cars, with the dying sounds. She was alone.

My mother stood with her daughter’s pain, holding Lita as she took and gave away blame for the horse. Who left the gate open? Why did the horse leave at night? The cars moved by the curve of the road, Hawai‘i Belt road, which held the body. The road ran down the history of our moving lives. Down past Miloli‘i where we lived before Teddy, down past Ke‘ei before Teddy, down past Captain Cook, down past Kainaliu, before little sister Solei, down past Opiohia near the first and second lava flows, down past the gravestones that sat up against the pier the tsunami took. Down past the old graves in yards against the moving black tar road.

Where did they bury the horse, Solei wonders. I tell her I don’t know, but I remember the talk of lava tubes. The island is glass, basalt, cooled in shapes of pāhoehoe and ‘a‘ā that knew the undersides of our bare feet as children, hollowed with caves and secrets. People place objects in the land, things they want to keep near, things they want to forget.

Why doesn’t Lita love us, Solei asks. Solei speaks of her own children, says she can’t understand Lita’s pain, wouldn’t understand if her children didn’t love each other. She can’t understand Lita’s refusal to know us, her sisters. Solei speaks and I take the memory and push it against the black poly tarps Lita has placed around her house in Ocean View. The black of the tarp runs around the small farm she shares with thirteen dogs. The small farm that she lets no one into. She has placed signs against the poly tarp. They are warnings. She fears the world. She
knows people watch. I say some familiar words to Solei, some words of Lita’s illness and our fear of her pain. I run with her fear against the thought of whales who visit the bones in their graveyards, the fall. The fall, big cubed bones against the ocean floor. Whales visit their dead. I run Lita’s pain against destruction, the destruction of land that has destroyed the ‘Ō‘ō, the bird and spirit, the history. I run it against my words as a child—the hurting words of an older sister. My words to a sister. I run with it against Lita’s pain. I place the fear of Lita’s loss to her illness against the lehua and pluck the flower so it will rain.
Soleiange riding Lita’s horse

Lita and Saturday Sunrise
Silk Pieces

When we were young,
when she read *East of the Sun*, when she read *West of the Moon*,
that very old book (similar copy now listed on eBay $425.00).
we lost ours in a move from Ke‘ei). When she read, and didn’t speak of loneliness, but read of
the North Wind’s house and the South Wind’s house. When we sprawled across
the continent of her. The expanse of mother to child. The home of her. They came,
carrying things away. I heard them asking if we were
all someone else’s dream as we lay on the blanket in Miloli‘i When we lay near the
village. Near Honomalino. And she read.

*Loss of contact inhibition—cancer*. She will die and years later the question asked over
the phone:

**RW:** What do you remember about her as an artist?

**CC:** Her work was sensuous [laughs]. It was soft and watery. Very sensual.

**SL:** She didn’t mind if the paint bled beyond the gutta [Sharona is from Israel. Her voice
remembers Israel]. In silk painting, there is a very particular process that uses black, or green, or
some other color gutta that is applied to keep the colors from bleeding.

*Another Layer of Gesso or Pre Sized Canvas: A Note*

Before death, she wants higher in the bed. A different bed. We’ve moved her to a
house with water and electric. Down below the house on Mahi Mahi St. in Ocean View.
Down below the wind and ‘ōhia she speaks of as children. The bird feeder. The rose. The
art room. The stretched silk. The outhouse. The old potbelly stove. First, she went to
Sam’s, the red-headed accountant, but dreamt of sex every night. Asked what he did in
that bed, what strange things.

Wants a different bed. A bed she could die in.

About children. Mostly about Lita. Her dressing gown opens. Pubic hair. I have seen her bare
bodied before. Long breast, large nipples, nursing babies. We look away and move her—all
pulling.

Hospice is there. They speak into her ear. The wave their hands over the leaving body.

_horrifying, plane crashes 230 killed._ And yet she is dying.

Cancer cells break away. She wants to heal herself. Mustard packs and enemas.

A note: _Reiki we sat in a circle and told of ourselves._ Reiki and lomi lomi. Auntie Margaret
Machado taught her lomi lomi down Ke’ei while we played in the tide
pool with Hoku and then sat in the sauna drinking salt water and lemon. Auntie Margaret
taught the praying work of massage, the prayer to God first massage.

_The Reiki blew on the solar plexus_

A note: _Don’t do Reiki to broken bones. Introduce yourself to Ayala Museum._

She went to Ayala Museum. Makati Ave 8121191 Contemporary Art Museum

When she went for psychic surgery in the Philippines. They pulled out stuff
(thought it was the tumor). They pressed and kneaded. Cancer has complete _disregard for the
needs and limitations of the body_

The obituary was wrong. Said she died on the 10th. She died on the 9th. When she was
young she went down to the rookery to watch the trains pass with David.
RW: What do you remember about her as an artist?

PC: Her use of the translucence of the silk with colors created a powerful, emotionally free art.

AS: Probably at SKEA. You know SKEA in Hōnaunau.

I think her trademark art was really her silk pieces.

SL: She did not complain. She never complained. I respected her. She had self-respect.

Miranda was her friend. Lived on Pitcairn Island. Sent postcards with Pitcairn stamps.

U.S. stamps were .32 cents.

_The fighting between Tutsis and Hutus._ And yet she dies.

The daughter with the blue truck and the thirteen dogs speaks: Are we really going to let her die. Wants some amazing grace. Coughs up black dirt earth (A Note: _Many thanks to Lita [draws a heart] for my care._) The dust off boots shakes the floor.

She remembers

Peter Wolf, the-boy-who-cried-wolf and the Little and Big of All men.

Lived in a teepee once, briefly. Ate icing off the gingerbread house.

It can spread around the body, faster, faster—lymphatic system.

A note: 2yrs change fundamental external picture in touch with deep philosophy internal beyond

The silence of fifteen stands out against the hanging laundry, her back turned. She thinks about needs, loss, and silence. She wears orange or pink and holds some animal. Years later, she wants more memories.

metastasis.
Cancer cells break away from the original primary tumor

and spread through the bloodstream. Bev will write a poem about Tea with the Queen and read it at her funeral. She moved from Humboldt to Kona, followed mom. Speaks of rugrats and rain. Speaks of chipped teacups. Speaks of truly loving.

The son, the brother, swallowed acid when he was two. Found it under a plate. His father owns a boat in Sausalito.

Sits against the backdrop of a dying mother. Do we ask where it came from? Do we remember the peyote? Do we speak of when she lived in Greece? Israel? Does he remember her art?

RW: What do you remember about her as an artist?

ZA: She only really painted for about ten years. It is incredible to think of the amazing work she produced in such a short time.

RW: Do you remember when her mother died and she found out she had a brother who had died in infancy? They buried him in a coffin with another body. It was during the war.

ZA: Her dad had a wooden rifle. He had guard duty. Didn’t he? Duty with a wooden gun.

Blame or give way. Do we speak of smoke? or the lymphatic system

The mother, ours, removed her hair. No baggies of hair in drawers. We looked.

forming new—doesn’t think of blame—

as secondary tumors in organs grew

The man lies down on the floor. He doesn’t sing jazz or speak of Louie Armstrong’s wonderful world. A Note: My Teddy Bear that is right here for me
She spoke of runny eggs and boiled red potatoes.

The things in the hedge in England—fairy cakes—in green such as the lungs, liver or brain. This process metastasis.

A note: please be tolerant of each other.

A note: left undisturbed except by family and read the Tibetan Book of living +dying +Bible  
Jesus being my savior. Burn incense.

He held her as she left. He felt her go. The son said:

God. Now I know.

The clock. Yellow in the dark 11:15.

He says: She is gone. a few minutes ago.

A note: I am fighting this thing called cancer. I hope to win. I am responsible for my life

RW: What do you remember about her as an artist?

SL: Hip. It was hip—you know. But Kona is unique. It is not executive, more into the earth and not being closed in. It is all about acceptance. Elizabeth was part of that scene.

A note: Cad Red light Cad yellow Light Yellow Ochre Thalo Blue- rembrant blue Any washes. Don’t use [illegible] if you want bright color. Just to cover large area zinc white white burnt umber burnt sienna Algerian crimson. Towards purple
Elizabeth and her artist friends.
Garden of Hōnaunau

The garden lay in bloom,
in the morning shadow of
avocado trees that hung branches
and dropped fruit bombs
on tin roof on dark nights

The garden lay in bloom
near the macadamia nut trees
that left leaves as traps—
little sharp razor edges catch
against bare feet—running

The garden lay in bloom,
held some of night’s rain
and sun on spider webs
lace nets cast out and out
The garden lay in bloom,

children around the edges

chasing beetles, caterpillars—

hands digging in volcanic earth

Mom lay in bloom

Rich in words

Not one to mince

words

get your thumb out of your ass

practice makes perfect

shit in one hand and wish in the other

and see which fills up first

rabbit, rabbit, rabbit on the first of the month

for luck and wealth

never enough wealth
mom and her garden of words plants lives children love
My brother has asked me if I remember Damon—if I remember my father. He says that Damon killed our cat. He swung it by the tail over his head until its tail almost broke. Do I remember, he asks? I remember. There’s something that comes with the memory—something about sunbaked seats, flannel shirts, old jeans, the hard under skin of the banjo, and the dog. The dog was Fish. Damon shot him because he bit the neighbor’s sheep.

I remember my dad.
My musical background? The first thing I can ever remember doing was a thing called the hambone. Well there was forty kids on the block where I was born and all of them—we’d find a place in the evening and we’d sit around doing the hambone. Maybe, I should show you what the hambone was, see. [Moves forward in chair. Proceeds to demonstrate hambone]. But anyhow, my first experience was all sitting down an’ playing like in this group.

Singing Transcription

Singing of black rock and Black Bottom, the tree grows in dark and rust
Singing of outlasts lonely in a place of pāhoehoe, ‘a‘ā and a blackman’s soul
Singing of evenings remembered, forty on the block, slapping to that rhythm in Detroit dust.

Singing of rolling in the air, the three sons, the hambone and the mother’s toll
Singing of father was a good man, labored for Renfro with the horse and shotgun
Singing of McComb, Mississippi—plantation. Fifteen and sipping off some comfort

Singing of whiskey, rode the horse, a black, Renfro and shotgun—run, run, and run.
Singing of .61 cents in a pocket, lost in Detroit, assembly, blues, TB—death trade
Singing of the armchair near ‘ōhia, ashes, cabins, of old Wonder doing that thing—a drum

Singing of that African ghost. Kwaito music, regime. Talking of Kona—a paradise made
Singing of musicians, Glenn Willis the other one called Bruz Freeman. Rooted jazz he sings
Singing of Air Force, Detroit, Chicago and Route 66—to Hawai‘i singing and getting paid
Singing of brother sent to Korea, lying in the bed, beatings with combination lock stings
Singing of this gun and a brother in the barracks, messed with by a man, doing crime
Singing of a field jacket, a gun—blew him away. Two fingers hidden in a sock and rings

Singing of time and sentence, gave him ten years at Leavenworth—a paid up time
Singing of the woman of spectral hair—every color possible, in hues
Singing of Moonie and Vivian and sleeping under that old coffee tree lying rhymes

Singing of night and cold a woman alone and YWAM too much bible blues
Singing of Holy rolling and thumping and Quonset hut burning in degrees
Singing of death and that preacher seducing a mother to suicide, he calls

Singing of dead baby and mother poisoned on the street, feels the breeze
Singing of children, of Hōnaunau, of loving, of losing, of giving, and grieving
Singing of old Bud barks in the yard, of music, wiliwili and ‘ōhia trees

Singing of stars upon stars and a life worth believing
Singing of music, of longing, of loss, of cancer, of leaving

All the time—the other part of the music scene—is the Air Force that is mostly what I did is sing in the Air Force. I knew all the time, which is what I wanted to be is a singer. [On] Highway 66, which ran from Chicago to L.A., that’s where I played most of my music. In nightclubs, and hotels, and stuff like that, you know.
I went to work for the Smothers Brothers, which was a television comedy team, because they had that ski lift lodge just outside Flagstaff. I played there about three of four years or something like that. They bought what was supposed to have been the original Don the Beachcomber and they—the manager, whose name was Bill Bretz—he sent me over to open this place, which had been closed for a long time, it had been shut down, and I came over to Hawai`i.

From there, I played every club in Kona. But the highlight of all that playing was that Richard Boone of Have Gun Will Travel. He lived in Kona, and we got together. Richard Boone was vying for a spot for a television show that [was] going to be made, and whoever made the best movie would get the spot on television. We made The Kona Coast and the people in Honolulu made a movie called Hawaii 5-0, which you can tell who won [laughs].

There was a place, a bar called Akamai Barnes that was in the movie, and he [Richard Boone] just came into Kona and opened the place. I mean he kept the place open, and I worked for five years [there] after the Marlin Room.

Down in—right across the street from the sea wall. When I first worked there it was actually just called the Cove. And then a guy named Matty Robert came in and he opened it again and he hired me to play. From there I went to the Kona Steakhouse. Then from the Kona Steakhouse, I went to Jerome’s, which was a bar, and from there I went to the Kona Surf. I opened the Kona Surf at a place called the—inside the Kona Surf—called The Poi Pounder, which was one of the biggest night clubs in town, and I played there for, oh, three or four years. And after that, these people from actually the number one super hotel in the world, at that time, came in and hired me. Well, Rockefeller had come over, who I found out then, he was an environmentalist, and he put up this beautiful building and he hired me to play in the main dining room.
Teddy Ginn in Ocean View, Hawaiʻi 2013
Along the Way

She wears a pareo and stands at the edge of the kitchen in Hōnaunau house. Her hair is grey edged with blond. This is her blond phase. If I walk, letting my feet step carefully on the lavender painted floor, I come to her door. Old plain wood, maybe a phone cord running under the edge. In her room on her brown dresser, the dresser with the mirror, sits l’air du temps with its yellow fragrance of gardenia and jasmine. In her top drawer lies folded lacy panties and see-through bras. She rarely wears bras, but now in marriage with Teddy, she finds beauty. Daughters ask if they are their mother. Daughters want to know if they repeat, repeat, repetition, revisit the ideas of loss and abuse of the mother.
We come from Elizabeth
and
we come from Teddy
Murky Lasses

My daughters’ View-Masters are nothing like bright nova.

The burning of the small house—Kilohana—is hotter than

Their crumpled mouths. If the dog’s underbelly is

White, why their buds are ten day old powdered doughnuts.

If ragamuffin-head is stickin’ out every-which-way, their heads grow

Rats’ nests. I have seen lipstick smeared kisses on cast-off paper napkins,

Red and white, but no such ruby stains do I see on

their faces, and in some chocolate misted mouthfuls

there is more sweetness than in the morning covered

gusts my neophytes exhale. I love to hear them sing off key,

yet I am aware that clichéd auto-tune is pulling at harmony’s ear.

I give it to you; I don’t know perfection on any living feature;

My loves’ feet are stuck in muddied ruts and walk hard

On long toed probers. And yet, oh my lord, my sweet lovin’ bunch

has more wiggle and swank than any cat-walking misguided idea

splashes of anorexia and bulimia on glossed sheets of pubescent beauty.
Charles Simic

Go inside a stone

That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger's tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.

From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,
Even though a child throws it in a river;
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed
To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.

I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed,
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill—
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star-charts
On the inner walls.

--Charles Simic
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