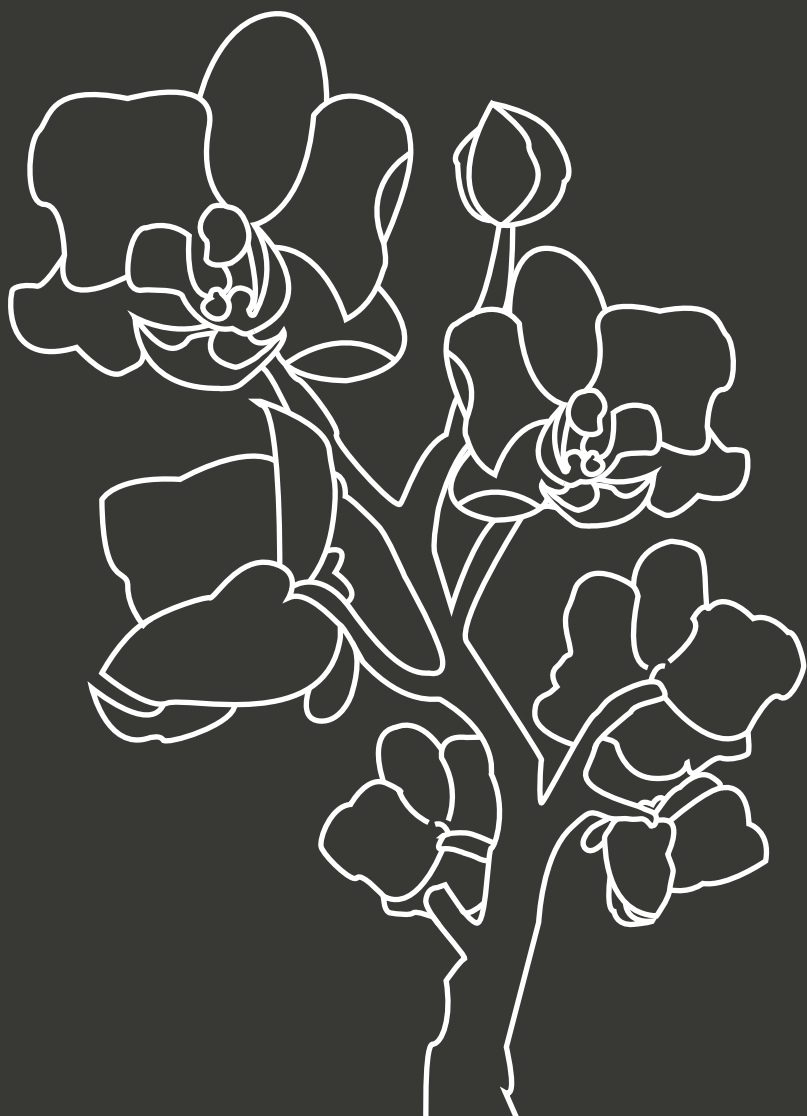


hawai'i review | THE IAN MACMILLAN
WRITING AWARDS



The
Ian
MacMillan
Writing
Awards



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Mahalo nui loa to Jay Hartwell for his guidance!

Hawai‘i Review is a publication of the Student Media Board of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. A bold, student-run journal, *Hawai‘i Review* reflects the views of its editors and contributors, who are solely responsible for its content. *Hawai‘i Review* is a member of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines and is indexed by the Humanities International Index, the Index of American Periodical Verse, Writer’s Market, and Poet’s Market.

Cover Art: “Seven Orchids” by Avree Ito-Fujita.

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University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. ISSN: 0093-9625
Printed in the USA

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

During my year as Editor-in-Chief of *Hawai'i Review*, I have been told again and again by former students, professional writers, and UH and visiting professors how incredible a person and how profound an influence Ian McMillan was in their lives. While I regret never having the opportunity to meet or study with Ian, I, along with my fellow editors, have been honored and humbled to carry on this small piece of his giant legacy. Thank you, Ian, for continuing to provide us with opportunities for growth.

Special thanks to our judges this year—Paul Lyons, Emelihter Kihleng, and ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawainui—for dedicating so much of their time, and for placing so care into the what was an extremely competitive and accomplished slate of entries.

Most of all, I send my deepest gratitude to our contributors for pushing forward, staring down the demons, doing the work, and then trusting us with it. I can comfortably speak for the entire HR editorial staff when I say, you are our heroes.

Mahalo nui loa,
Abbey

IAN MACMILLAN

Established in 2010, the Ian MacMillan Writing Awards honor Prof. Ian MacMillan, a long-term and much admired and respected faculty member, who taught in the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa English Department’s Creative Writing Program starting in 1966. MacMillan inspired countless students and writers during his 43 years of teaching.

MacMillan authored seven novels and four short story collections, made over a hundred appearances in literary and commercial magazines, and won major awards for his short fiction including The Associated Writing Programs Award, The O. Henry Award, Pushcart Prize, and a Best American Short Stories Award. He received the 1992 Hawai‘i Award for Literature, and his novel *Village of a Million Spirits* won the 2000 PEN-USA-West Award for Fiction. Other novels include *The Braid* and *The Seven Orchids*. Both books are set in Hawai‘i. He won an excellence-in-teaching award in 2005 and the University’s Distinguished Mentoring Award in 2006.

Hawai‘i Review is proud to present works from the 6th annual Ian MacMillan Writing Awards.

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CREATIVE NON-FICTION

JUDGE'S NOTES: CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Judge: ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui

E aloha mai! I am a Kanaka Maoli scholar, poet, artist, and mālama ‘āina advocate. I am also an Associate Professor of Hawaiian literature, specializing in traditional Hawaiian literature (including folklore and mythology), Oceanic(Pacific) literature, and indigenous perspectives on literacy. My research interests focus on place-based literature, literacy and learning. I am also interested in developing Digital Indigenous Humanities projects. I am a founding and current Chief Editor of *‘Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*. I have published critical essays and creative writing in Hawai‘i and abroad (the U.S., the Pacific, and Europe). I am a former Ford Foundation Fellow (2001-2005) and Mellon Hawai‘i Post-Doctoral Fellow (2009-2010). My first book, *Voices of Fire--Reweaving the Lei of Pele and Hi‘iaka Literature* was published by the University of Minnesota Press in May 2014.

~

First Place: Amy D’Amico

“prostitution is slavery even if”

It goes without saying that all the winners are well written. What set this piece apart is the raw, introspective view comparing two devastating and—at the surface—completely different human experiences. The analysis of agency and complicity in prostitution from a personal, introspective view is brutally honest and revealing, and allows the reader into a world few of us know enough about.

JUDGE'S NOTES: CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Second Place: J. Jacqueline McLean

“Daddy’s Front Porch”

I was struck by the resonance of a somewhat simple, everyday object—a front porch—and how the writer lovingly weaves generational family experiences on the porch with larger social issues and the conversations on the porch, rendering it an important symbol in the piece, and in the lives of the family.

The use of dialogue draws the reader in, as if we, too, are part of the conversations on the porch. At times, the porch itself is personified and participates in the conversation, which heightens its importance and symbolic presence.

Third Place: Anjali Roy

“Love Letter to Kurseong”

Everyone has some kind of attachment to the places we are born and live, and we often fall in love with places we visit, even if we have no personal attachment to these to these places. This piece is intriguing in how it answers an unasked question—can you fall in love with a place you have never been, but is a significant place where someone else in the family called home? This piece weaves together the experiences of a parent and child visiting the parent’s childhood home, viewing it from the perspective of time and distance, an opportunity to revisit experiences passed down through memory of one and stories of the other in a way that does not overly romanticize or vilify the past.

FIRST PLACE: AMY D'AMICO

prostitution is slavery even if

Prostitution is slavery even if she says she hasn't got a pimp. Even when she says it is her choice. She's not free. She's run by need too keen to let her have any extravagant concepts like *love for one person*, or like *sex as an expression of (her) vulnerable desire*.

So maybe prostitution is consumerism at the top of the ugliest ladder, the one made of birdcage wire and skin. Slavery? How could that be? She gets paid, sometimes she gets paid a lot, sometimes she does it for fun or fetish or free. Right?

A slave is driven from her home, battened in the cellar of a ship, forced by whip, naked humiliation, brutal treatment and comparison to cattle or bitch, common humiliation, all under a strange sky in a strange land to work for someone else's comfort, someone else's ease, someone else's pleasure and domination. A slave does not have her own desire anywhere on the surface of her body. Therefore it is gravely insulting to compare them.

Maybe it is closer to boxing. Pros and boxers inhabit their bodies, mostly, but have an ability to use that body ruthlessly dismissive of its call for help.

Both, I think, are true, even if I'm being dramatic (I can be, I haven't been a whore in more than a decade and I've grown dramatic as well as other emotional rides that come and go,

radically untethered to a schedule, which I could never afford back then).

A prostitute and a boxer are both driven from their bodies. The hooker's spirit leaves, wanders to the ceiling and observes callously, in order to get the nerve and the stamina to sleep with strangers— the boxer in order to be beaten by gloved fists and stay on his feet.

But there is a kind of slavery to it too. The ship is that look in our eyes. Have you seen? If you have paid for a prostitute or beaten your fists in someone's face, you have seen a ship sailing far away. You did not see her soul in her eyes, but the setting sun or the ocean may have dazzled you. Maybe you even thought she was Right There. Your fist, your dick, did the sailing to America. I didn't decide that part. The boxer didn't either. The whip, humiliation, brutal treatment, comes from two distinct entities: first, the stranger involved in the act of copulation or public fistfight. That part is not easy, but it is more whip than brutal or humiliating. The second entity lives in the world, and seeps inside you. You aren't immune to this. We build it together, you and I and people we don't know, writing on the web and in stories and on walls and in ads on the billboards and on the TV. We read it everywhere. It is the world we didn't invent. We hear things there like "sex worker" (brutal) "consumer-driven" (brutal) "two consenting adults" (humiliating).

How can we admit we did not consent, we do not consider this sex, we do not consider this work?

Work is hard. This? This is easy. Take off clothes, he is already

hard. Unless he isn't, in that case he just wants a nice companion for twenty minutes, and maybe he wants someone to take turns sniffing the powder and he doesn't know anyone else because he is a forty-five-year-old baker and quite fat— nice bakers don't do blow. This is not sex, it is easy, an avenue for money. Or crack. What would it mean if these sentences came to my mind, "This is difficult; I will never be real again; and I will always work to be gentle. Even my voice will not instinctively be soft"?

Sometimes as object-toy I was there, standing in my tan and orange striped boyshorts and tanktop, walking into the bathroom to get ready (take my dress off) in my bare feet, holding the money tightly folded in my hand like it wasn't there—like a barker at an amusement park—trying to make a man forget it was emptiness to do this, and him focused on his plan to have a fuck, not even a good fuck, not even with kissing, not even with a caress of some kind of my arms. None of that was included. Sometimes as object-marionette I was there, making sure I measured up, that I knew what I was doing.

Others have more experience than me. They have learned to enjoy the thrill, the excitement, they love being treated to the guttural sound escaping from his mouth, the stony slick eyes, of a man who adores their bodies, even if they have no idea who he is. Maybe they run the escort business via online pictures and appointments or livecams. Maybe they lived in a halfway house and found a population of girls to whisper their grossest stories alongside, and they all laughed and laughed and grew bold with what they could do. Maybe they can't believe how much money they are making (or could, if they could do this just two or three times as often as now. In theory, a lot is there to be made.

Right?) and they think they have the last laugh, that this is a market, that they are the baby oil barons.

They ignore, with such a point of view, how careful they must be on the street, how conscious they are of the eyes on their tits and asses. How when they get dressed it is with several lenses: how normal appears; how sexy appears.; and how a lady on the street but a freak in the bed appears. They ignore how veneer their relationships have to be now. Maybe it is the same for everyone who even watches porn that has a layer of prostitution built in, even if that part is also a funhouse mirror. Porn can bring me the same superficial consciousness.

Even this typing feels risky, but I wonder if I let myself say enough for it to matter. I've always edited all the essays down to gruel to impress a particular man I hope will read it.

I did it only for a few months.

Shame, I have found, can grow in the midst of the spirit-filled present, and sometimes I can even attach it to the past, but when I was living as an escort ready to do anything to feel sweet relief from sickness and the back-and-forth cold and sweltering days, I didn't have much shame. I remember someone feeling it near me and for me and inviting me too as well, at a methadone group. We sat in a circle of chairs, and the counselor asked what we'd lost for drugs, what we'd done that we were ashamed of. We all talked about things like stealing and borrowing badly, repeatedly, without ever paying it back. He asked us to feel it about prostitution. "Many if not all of you have sold your bodies for money or drugs. None of you brought it up. Doesn't that count as a loss?" he asked us gently. We chewed gum and

smiled widely at his gentleness. It was as if he were a child, too, like the ones we had listed as harmed, and we loved him for it, but we would all still take advantage of him if we had the opportunity, even if it was just to tell him something we thought he wanted us to say and keep it moving.

Anyway, I was a feminist. It seemed a no-brainer to become one, having trained myself to respect all women in all walks of life without judging. It was foolish to shame prostitutes since they were the weakest on the totem. What, you gonna hack away at the one at the bottom of the tree? Everybody falls then. And she gets it the worst, of course, your judgment on top of every other crime against her. So I just— I was more willing to sell my skin and the spaces into me than to steal. And I had to do one or the other, I was driven and I did not believe I could stop shooting up every day at dawn, and again at about 1pm. And again at about 8pm, if I was lucky. An 8pm lucky night, though, meant at dawn I was shooting up wax I'd scraped from an empty bag hoping it had heroin mixed in.

So when you say things like, it's *her choice*, I think you have no idea what it means to be driven. Oh, not everyone is driven by drugs (I think most are). Some also are driven by need for shelter and food, or because they are in love and he asked her too and she wants real bad to own him and thinks that is the key to it. I think that is a more complicated drive. Like writing an essay like this at 12:37am and wondering if you will try and get others to read it, and if so, are you still the most dunce of feminists, confusing confession for art when you are really just taking off your clothes again in front of anyone, this time not even for a dollar, or a drug, but just because you are hungry in a way you can't even comprehend. Fuck. What *is* this?

Slavery bends a woman— as if she were an object— to the will and in the service of strangers. What she wants is discounted once she is broken of the will to leave, her wants are privately her concern; they have nothing to do with what she has become. She is not in her home, during her enslavement, or even years later. Even when she is free, she is not home. She has no history here!

The home equals the body; the house of spirit. My back hurts, writing this late. It brings me to the door, and I know I'll rest a little, even if I feel most at ease here on the porch, with the lights out, waiting for raccoons and field mice to forage and the dawn to wake the skyline in a few hours.

~

This is the risk: that it sounds like a tract. That my pamphlet is in your hand and you just want to scurry past the tacky earnest hazel eyes I have. Or I've settled down the fire so much I've started a new layer of soggy deception. Besides, I have a family, a law degree, a reputation as an advocate for the homeless. Will I hurt it, with this artful (and brittle) rejoinder at the happy liberals who love respecting sex workers? Shall we find out together? Amy D'Amico

Daddy's Front Porch

Bill was on the steps with the kids. Their Mama sat on the swing fanning herself with the newspaper. Across the street a girl in the neighborhood skated up and down the sidewalk on one roller skate. The lights on the block were just beginning to be turned on... ~ **Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter***

Porches are as synonymous with American culture as apple pie. While not unknown in colonial times, they rose to nationwide popularity in the decades before the Civil War, and remained in fashion for almost one hundred years. Ironically, the very social and technological forces that made them both popular and possible were eventually responsible for their decline. ~ **Renee Kahn, *Preserving Porches***

On lazy, boring, humid Chicago summer nights, the porch embraced us. With nowhere else to go, nowhere else to be, we lingered in happiness. Two, sometimes three, generations.

Daddy: Y'all kids need to bring the fan on the porch. Get a long extension cord. Plug it inside the socket by the door. Blow some kind of breeze on you.

Cousin Tammy: Uncle Julius, that don't make any sense. We need air conditioning.

Daddy: Give me some air conditioning cash, Miss Money Bags!

Cousin Beverly: It is hot, hot, Uncle Julius.

Me: Maybe it's too hot to be sitting on the porch.

Daddy: It's too hot to be inside, Jackie. That's heat stroke weather in the house.

All summer, every summer, every step covered. Full to capacity. Cousin after cousin after cousin baking on Daddy's front porch. No tan lines. The sun smiled on the back of the house. Only hot air blew our way. Mornings and afternoons, we sipped cherry Kool-Aid and coated our tongues with grape popsicles from the fridge. When the musical sound of the ice cream truck arrived, we rushed to the curb, stood in line, and emptied the pennies from our pockets. In the evenings, we slapped off mosquitoes and flies, licking orange dreamsicles, creamy chocolate fudgesicles, and ice cream sandwiches. We talked about everything. We talked about nothing. What I remember most is how we giggled. How kids do when they are having fun. A gut wrenching smile. A natural state of being. Summers on the porch on Clyde Avenue on the city's South Side. Full of laughter. Daddy made it so. He grinned so radiantly, neighbors chatted "that Julius is a good looking man. Always working in the yard. Taking care of his home."

Sitting on the porch at my father's house, we absorbed it all. Unscripted, raw entertainment. A juke joint, after-hours comedy club, go-to-spot for a laugh, controversy. Daddy commented on any subject sitting on the tip of his tongue and everyone passing by.

Daddy: That's why she got eight kids. Woman got no business wearing pants that tight.

Brother Tyrone: And you ain't got no business looking.

Brother Robert: He ain't the only one looking. Eight kids. Eight Mama's daddies.

Sister Suzanne: Y'all need to stop it.

Me: Let's go inside and watch TV.

Daddy: Girl, this is reality TV. Right here on the front porch. Three girls with nappy heads skip by.

Daddy: They Mama ain't about nothing. Them girls be out here all day and night. Clothes raggedy. Hair uncombed. Pitiful!

On both sides of this declining South Shore neighborhood street are elderly brick, single-family homes. Clyde Avenue was once crime free. Kids could roam the block all day and night safely in my high school days. Gradually, that comfort disappeared. For years Daddy has kept a "pistol" ...just in case.

A high school friend stops over to say goodbye.

Daddy: That girl ain't going to find no husband in college that's for sure.

Me: Why you say that?

Daddy: Hell, as ugly as she is.

Me: You need to stop talking about people. My friend is not ugly. She's nice.

Daddy: She may be nice, but she still ugly.

"Magical" is how the authors of the book, *On the Porch: Creating Your Place to Watch the World Go by*, described the front porch.

It slows you down, tells you to take some time, to read the paper, to sip a glass of iced tea, to watch the weather roll in.

We did it all! On rainy, stormy days, we dried out under the porch roof as Mother Nature cleaned the steps. On brisk fall and spring days, too. Leaves changed colors, flowers burst out of their winter beds; we grasped at snowflakes, munched on them and ran to the side of the porch to make yellow flakes.

I guess every home has one magnetic gathering spot. The place holding memories of days of lost youth, stolen teenage kisses and childhood secrets. The front porch: A special universe

for mothers and fathers, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, visiting grandparents, and neighbors. A slice of American pie while we mingled and talked story.

In many ways, the front porch represented the American ideal of family. The porch, in essence, was an outdoor living room, where the family could retire after the activities of a long day.

Conversations with Daddy created the magical presence of home sweet home. The porch became one of us. Another character. An old friend on the block.

A cartoon story book is how the view from the porch looked on days when nothing but dozens of kids played outside. Often porch seating would be limited. First come, first seated. Everyone knew this. On jump rope weekends, the “L” girls, who lived four porches down on the left, got their pigtails braided early. By noon, the Double Dutch marathon started.

Girl #1: Just jump in whenever you ready.

Girl #2: I can’t run in. I need to get inside the rope first. Then you can turn.

Daddy: Oh, girl, you can’t jump no rope. Stop being a scary cat and run in. You can do it.

Cousin Erica: Be quiet, Uncle Julius. You can’t jump at all.

Daddy: Leave me alone, little girl. I’m just trying to help.

From one porch to the next, hopscotch drawings covered the sidewalks. Kids roller bladed, flying high in the air on curb jumps. Boys played street basketball with an imaginary net, keeping score with loud cheers and applause from porch spectators. I always screamed at the top of my lungs to let my brothers win.

On Daddy’s turf, anything went. The porch invited everyone

to sit and chat. Despite my father's candid remarks—no politically correct toes to step over.

Whenever this “sissy fellow,” the name Daddy gave him, would leave Mr. X's house, one of the Clyde Avenue originals, Daddy told whoever would listen, his theory about the block's new guest seen visiting the recently widowed Mr. X.

Daddy: Shame that man lived all that time with that woman and is as gay as the day is long.

Mother: Stop it, Julius! Let you tell it, every man is gay but you.

Daddy: Hush, woman. Mr. X is gay. That man done moved in with him. Think he was coming around before Mrs. X died.

At Mr. X's funeral, his boyfriend, as Daddy called him, leaned in Mr. X's coffin and kissed him smack dead in the middle of his lips. Mr. X's son went *Leroy Bad* on him.

“Man, what the hell you kissing my daddy on the lips for?” is what the block regulars quoted the son as saying.

When the story made its way to Daddy's front porch, he let everyone know, “I told you so.”

We porch talked during five of the twenty years when one man ruled the country's second largest city at the time.

Me: Daddy, Is Mayor Daley always going to be the mayor?

Daddy: Sho looks that way. White folks keep voting him in office.

Richard Daley was mayor of Chicago for six terms. From 1953 until 1976 when he died from a heart attack. Daddy got it all wrong though about white folks keeping him in office. Blacks rallied strong behind Daley. Enough to push him to the top in his two closest elections. But black Democratic politicians turned on Daley just hours after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

Daley issued a shoot-to-kill order in the wake of riots and looting on the city's West Side.

Seldom did we sidestep the sights walking up and down the block. People, noises (screeching tires, sirens, horns, screaming mothers, soul music) and gossip usually dictated our conversations. We also couldn't ignore the political history we witnessed in those idle, watching years spent on Clyde Avenue.

Daddy: These streets be a lot cleaner if Harold Washington hadn't died.

Me: You went to his funeral didn't you, Daddy?

Daddy: Yeah, I stood in line to say goodbye. Chicago ain't gonna get another black mayor. Washington was it.

Harold Washington was mayor from 1983 to 1987. His time was cut short by a massive heart attack. Washington collapsed at his desk in City Hall on November 25, 1987. He was sixty-five years old. His honesty on race and politics reminded me of my father.

A newspaper quote from Washington on the day he was reelected brought his significance to the front porch for me.

"Ain't it a bitch to be a black man in the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Daddy: Harold should have laid off some of that pork. All that greasy food will send you to your grave in a heartbeat.

Washington's bio made good front porch chatter for Daddy. A black man who struggled like him, but made it. When Daddy talked about Washington, he spoke like a proud brother.

Imagine: Daddy picking up the paper off the porch on the morning after Washington won the Democratic primary in 1983.

The headline read like a victory for all southern black men with memories of the Jim Crow days. I can see him smiling from the inside-out. This is a portion of what Chicago Sun-Times columnist Mike Royko wrote:

So I told Uncle Chester: Don't worry, Harold Washington doesn't want to marry your sister. That might seem like a strange thing to have to tell somebody about the man who will be the next mayor of Chicago. I never had to tell Uncle Chester that Mayor Daley or Mayor Bilandic wouldn't marry his sister.

My dad and Washington shared a lot of facts. The paper pointed out the most glaring and I suspect the most endearing to my father.

Washington was born in an era when they still lynched people in some parts of the United States. By "lynched," I mean they took a black man out of his home, put a rope around his neck and murdered him by hanging. Then they went home to bed knowing they were untouchable because the sheriff helped pull the rope.

Washington was a politician who climbed the ladder of success one slippery step at a time. He got a GED, then went on to law school. A former Congressman who spent 36 days in jail in 1972 for tax evasion. Black folks loved him. He was about making neighborhoods better. While Washington made an impression on Daddy with his works, Barack Obama made an impression with his words.

Daddy: You won't believe who came by here today and shook my hand? That young guy running for Senate sat on the porch and talked to me for 15 minutes.

Brother Robert: Who—Barack Obama?

Daddy: Yeah. We had a good lil chat.

Brother Robert: What y'all talk about, Daddy?

Daddy: I told that boy he should run for president.

My father took enormous pride in his block. His refuge. His hard earned piece of white America. He was a Baton Rouge, Louisiana street kid who longed to be free. Sitting on the porch signified freedom for colored people back in his day. Daddy could spend hours looking at the grass. Never a yellow, brown or burnt spot. Royal green, always, until snow covered its face. An in-depth report on porches, and yes, there is one, said this:

The most striking cultural significance of the front porch is its connection to nature and the land surrounding it.

For many, the American dream is the home with the white picket fence. The evolution of the front porch proves it was an American cultural object as well. It fell victim, however, to changing times. After World War II, the American front porch and apple pie no longer mattered.

The primary technological change that spurred this developing abandonment of the front porch was the proliferation of the American automobile.

The technological development of air conditioning further aided in the decline of the front porch.

Daddy's front porch dates back to 1915. Walking distance of several city beaches. Downtown is only a half hour drive. Prime real estate. Fifty years ago, neighbors in this formerly predominantly white neighborhood huddled as friends. Front yards stayed manicured; no missing chunks of concrete or broken windows; kids used the alley as a short cut to the next block; no

nightly crime tape to tear down. Those days drifted by without any fanfare.

On a cool spring day, crime walked right up to Daddy's front porch. Two "teenage punks," as Daddy labeled them, came from behind him and demanded his car keys.

"Them niggers better be glad I didn't have my pistol on me," he said.

Pistol? Who uses that word anymore? Only my half-city-half-country dad, who lives alone in a neighborhood where semiautomatic guns are common household tools. On his side of town, pistols are probably sold on the same shelves as BB guns.

"Did they hit you, Daddy?" I asked.

"Nah, Jackie. I blocked their hit," he answered unconvincingly.

His physique, sadly, is no longer that of a 21-year-old. Only he is blind to this. Daddy lives on bonus time. I've seen the black and white 1953 photo of him in his twenties; his straight posture; how his confident-woman-melting smile lit up the camera lens.

My father no longer stands at full flag. He droop walks, like men in their eighties do. He is not bent over, looking at his toes when he moves, only slightly folded. He is still handsome. High cheek bones. Jet black in skin color with shades of gray sprinkled throughout his hair and mustache. He smiles like a man who would never tell a lie. My mother would be quick to yell, "he lies through his teeth."

Not everything changes. Daddy's front yard still has the same flowering tree and crisp green grass and a healthy green bush. Unfortunately, the spring tulips became too much work. Not so the maintenance free, huge, glass rocks that took their place.

Daddy found what my mother tagged the “ugly looking things,” years ago in an alley. Or maybe on a job while working as a scale mechanic. His growing pile of foreign items has become part of the porch’s charm. The American flag he found flies on military holidays. A collection of rotating fixtures has visited the porch, including an assortment of religious statutes and artifacts. More alley pickups.

When I go home, I reminisce with a heart of joy about the old porch sitting days. We’d sing with or without the record player. On sunny, feel good weekends, we grooved to Aretha Franklin’s *R-E-S-P-E-C-T*. In the late 70s as our white neighbors were escaping city life, our isolated lives were rocking to the song *Black & White* by Three Dog Night. Whenever a gangster walked by, the porch crew broke out in Jim Croce’s *Bad, Bad Leroy Brown* song. Regretfully, we had too few steps to debate a war killing black boys who were looking for college money. So, we sang and clapped to an upbeat tune about how the Vietnam War was good for absolutely nothing. To Daddy’s despair, we fought the powers that be by rapping our frustrations to songs with heavy social messages and little melody.

The front porch is all Daddy’s now. I no longer run up the chunky seven flight of steps in my cute cheerleading outfit, rushing in the house to fix a hot dog, only to return moments later to devour it while watching the block come back to life when the neighborhood kids returned home.

With the exception of a few, the Clyde Avenue families clung to their porches. Day and night, swapping at dozens of flying, crawling and biting insects, rehashing the latest neighborhood news. Who did what and to whom is what we talked about.

Daddy: That “K” boy was out on the porch drinking beer

the other night. He only 17 or so.

Mother: Is there any gossip you don't talk about, Julius?

Porch Crew: (in unison) No, No, No, No, No...

Television didn't matter much in the era of hippies, civil rights, Vietnam and Watergate. Everyone knew everyone's steps. The bad, shaky spots. The favorite seats.

Sister Suzanne: Jackie, let me sit on the bottom ledge. You know that's where I always sit.

Me: I'll move, but you owe me!

Daddy usually sat on one of the porch ledges too. This way he could easily strike up a conversation with neighbors and put the fear of God in strangers.

If any unfamiliar kids walked by, they got the 4-1-1 drill.

Daddy: Boy, what you doing over here? Don't you live on 76th and Luella?

Boy: Yes, sir.

Daddy: Then get your black behind back on your own street. Don't come over here, starting no trouble. Keep that mess on Luella.

Daddy was surprised whenever crime visited Clyde. "That kind of stuff usually happens around 79th and Yates," he told me.

On Sundays now, Daddy sits on the porch pews. What a contrast from the past when he wanted nothing to do with the Lord's house. Growing up, Daddy sat on the front porch and waved goodbye as his wife and children left for church.

Daddy: Y'all have a good time. See you around midnight.

Mother: Funny! I expect to see you here when we get back, Julius. Have Sunday dinner ready when we get home.

Daddy: You the funny one. Y'all have fun.

Church was an all-day event for us. First, Sunday School. Afterwards, worship service, and then bible study. A relentless and unending tradition Mother never let us miss.

During our hallelujah time, Daddy was at his favorite tavern spinning records. Two-three hours of that, he came home and put on his porch sitting clothes. Khakis and an old tee shirt; holes didn't matter; neither did shoes if he wasn't going to walk around. He'd hit the stairs, center front, holding court. He would be greeted until the sun went down.

Adults passing by: Hey, Julius!

Kids passing by: Hey, Mr. McLean.

The perfect location during block parties— our house sat in the middle section. Street races could be judged fair and square when sitting on the steps. The plastic tables loaded with BBQ, hamburgers, hot dogs, ribs, potato chips, also in close range. Streamers ran from one house to the next. Neighbors celebrated the end of the school year; the start of summer; relieved the winter was over.

Since the 90s, the porch has become the ideal place to duck or run inside during a drive-by. The view remained the best asset.

Daddy: We need to keep this house in the family. This a good house, good street, even if niggers around us going crazy.

And “go crazy” happened many times. The porch was where neighbors cried and remembered Mrs. P's grandson, shot dead in the alley two blocks away.

Neighbor #1: Sho gonna miss that child.

Neighbor #2: He the first one of us to be killed.

Neighbor #3: What a fine boy.

Neighbor #4: So cute. All that pretty hair.

Neighbor #5: Just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Daddy: That boy was always in trouble.

Neighbor #6: Think they going to put him away at the funeral home on the corner?

Neighbor #7: Yeah, make it easy.

Daddy: I'm tell you now. Don't take me to the corner funeral parlor. Take me back home, back down south.

Mother: You better make sure your insurance policy is paid up. Otherwise, you going to be laid out right on the corner.

The porch breaks out in laughter.

By the new millennium, the laughter and conversations happened amongst a mixed generation. Only a handful of the originals stayed put. The old X family's house belongs to a new set of characters. In several other homes, the children have grown up and moved on. A few leftover parents either died or now live in nursing homes.

Sit on the porch with Daddy on a rainy day and the story of each house will be brought back to life. He knows the block's history, the scandals, and can probably find the buried bones too.

Daddy must have learned early on the value of a front porch. At his mother's shotgun house in Baton Rouge, we'd hang out on the steps there too. Grandma Lizzie's front porch also sat in the center of the block. In arm's reach of the neighborhood store. She, too, absorbed life on her porch on Myrtle Street in the state capitol of Louisiana. The front porch told it all. The same as our house.

The world, as we knew it, zoomed in, out and around us as life ticked by on the steps of Daddy's front porch on Clyde Avenue. We stepped away only to walk to the 69th Street beach, before any signs of a decaying inner city sprouted roots.

According to city data, white people started departing from the South Side in the early 60s. The city's finest hour of integration ended as the age of Aquarius faded. The

neighborhood shifted back to the Black Belt. A name assigned to the South Side when blacks from the South started the Great Migration North.

Black-on-black crime became a neighbor's biggest fear in the new Black Belt. As the murder rate of black youth reached ugly numbers, part of the neighborhood was known simply as "the hood." Porches throughout South Shore sat empty with shades down. Residents in the neighborhood retreated indoors. The first visible decline of the front porch on Clyde.

Daddy: That's the second time that Lexus circled this street. Mrs. T's bad-ass boys selling dope outta that house. She know it and don't care. Hell, she probably in on it too.

Let Daddy tell it, he could spot a bad apple a mile away.

Daddy: Too many grown people living in the house on the corner that crazy Asian woman owns. Too many cars parked out front too.

Pick a day, any day, Daddy's probably out on the porch. He'll stand on the steps in the winter—looking left to the corner, then right, to the other end—quick glimpses to check on any danger. On good weather days, he's primed and ready for conversation.

He's always eager to talk about his outdoor improvements. The gigantic, clear, shiny glass rocks—almost mini boulders—came in the early 80s. Another junkyard-find along with the plastic flowers in the pots on the ledges. No one needed to worry about dying plants. Carpet arrived in the 1990s. Tacked and stapled on every step—extra carpeting Daddy rescued from dying in the alley. Beige, household carpeting on outdoor steps that never got vacuumed.

Mother: This is the worst of all foolishness.

Daddy: Make no sense to throw it out.

Sister Suzanne: But it makes sense to keep it?

Daddy: Jackie, make sure you sweep the stairs before you lock up the house?

Me: Why don't you buy a vacuum cleaner, Daddy?

Daddy: Broom just as good as a vacuum cleaner, girl. Just sweep the steps.

Later, the chores included dusting the worn out pews my minister brother threw away. It made sense to Daddy to rescue them too.

Brother Tyrone: Daddy, what you going to do with those pews? They're no good. Someone will come to the church and pick them up.

Daddy: Yeah, me!

That's the story of how Daddy got extra seating for his front porch.

Had Daddy been sitting in the pews on the day of the robbery, he would have seen "the punks" before they struck. Instead, he sat on the ledge near the bottom step with his back away from foot traffic. The criminals caught him off guard.

Daddy has sworn he will not sit on the porch again unless he's packing his pistol. Reality TV? Season after season, on Daddy's front porch.

Nobody thought about the front porch when most Americans had them and used them. The great American porch was just there, open and sociable, an unassigned part of the house that belonged to everyone and no one, a place for family and friends to pass the time.

~ Davida Rochlin, Home Sweet Home



My family moved into the house on Clyde Avenue in the spring of 1971.

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Love Letter to Kurseong

I wasn't expecting to fall in love with Kurseong. From what I'd heard about our father's childhood, this mountain town in West Bengal was a sad place where he was sent, in 1946, as a four-year-old who had fallen so far into the depths of despair over losing his beloved dadu that he was sent away for four years, until he was eight years old, until our thakurda got a job abroad and our family relocated to North Carolina in 1950 for good.

"I thanked your thakurma later," he told me, shaking a strong fist, "for sending me away and making me become a man. She'd just hang her head, though, when I said that." He'd shrug with that last line, like it was silly for her to feel bad for sending her baby away.

"She didn't want to do it?" I asked.

"Her sisters made her, I think."

So he was sent to boarding school in Kurseong, 4,680-odd feet in the sky on the very top of a very tall segment of the Himalayas, 364 miles from home in Calcutta, where his older brother, mother, and father continued living before Partition.

During those four years in Kurseong, Dad only returned to his family for holidays. The school itself, called Dow Hill, was actually a Scottish girls' school at the time and, like the ones in the southern U.S. he'd later encounter, it was mostly segregated. It was only because he and his cousin were the nephews of their masi Bijoya, who taught history there, that they were admitted.

I cannot say that our dad's time in Dow Hill was happy. He was still grieving his deceased grandfather, who was his best friend, when he was torn from his family to go to this boarding school, which was a whole other kind of loss. And so he lived among a clutch of 1940s Scottish-descended teenage girls who felt entitled to make little-Indian-boy bodies do what they pleased.

"I used to get in trouble for eating rotten fruits. And for scraping chocolate off the floor to eat." He would run his fingernail across dry air when he said this, then laugh.

"Bijoya would strike me with bamboo poles!" he would say, good-naturedly, slicing the space between us. "I wasn't starving, though. I've seen pictures of myself. I had full cheeks." This last bit added, as if to dull the blade.

We'd grown up with our dad telling these offhand stories. In a sense, they were what called us to Kurseong during the two-month research project I was conducting in India to trace our family history. My desire was to unhook these hurting bits from our dad's heart that he'd carried with him for maybe his whole life—hurting bits that my sisters and I might be carrying too.

"It wasn't that bad though," he told me over masala cha one morning. "I was so little, what did I know?"

All along, I had thought Kurseong would feel haunted, that I would want to track someone down. I joked about wanting to punch someone (not our long-dead thakurma or our aunties, of course . . . but those girls, maybe).

So when we arrived to Bagdogra, the nearest airport, I wasn't expecting to breathe in the green of the Himalayas on a slow switchback climb past towering mango trees with their hard, sour fruits, aching to be pickled, or to find myself falling toward the gentle tumble of the Balasan River, where village kids dove

headlong into rushing waters, or to swoon for long cloudy views of terraced tea gardens, or the signs warning drivers to give way to drunken elephants who regularly plundered tribal people's fermented corn and grain, or to be given access to the storytelling of our generous guide and driver, Sabin, who told us about growing up the son of a mother who secreted sacks of the best tea to dry, twist, and ferment at home, because folks who work the land should have the best of what they labor for. I wasn't expecting stories of the ironwood trees called Tarika that shrunk as they aged and looked like the hala trees I knew from living in O'ahu, becoming more dense and sounding like stone when they were cut for long-lasting firewood, or the cicadas that told local kids when it was playtime (they were loudest in the morning), or, how our dad and other mountain kids would venture into the forests to collect massive block-sized, flying beetles to battle to the death. I wasn't expecting Kurseong, known for its azaleas, the land of the white orchids. As we wandered into our umpteenth stop on the side of the road, mid-climb up to the Cochrine Hotel, Sabin handed me, wordlessly, a flat string of lemongrass for the mosquitoes he saw me itching away.

I wasn't expecting any of this.

When we arrived at Dow Hill School, I *was* expecting the chills I got later as we walked past the dorms, as I gazed into the faces of the older teachers, as the current headmistress told us that she had no records to show us of the kids Dad went to school with, even though we all knew that these old colonial schools hold onto every single paper they write on.

When we finished the tour of Dow Hill and the school's guide left us, Dad and I gravitated toward a large puddle turned reflection pond inside the school's gates on a gravel roadway. D, my love and traveling companion, stood just behind us but a ways off to give us privacy, as Dad and I considered the

Victorian-style school before us. It looked massive. Clouds misted across it, erasing buildings and clumps of trees, only to reveal them and take them away again.

Dad was visibly uncomfortable. Maybe he was thinking about the mountain. About wanting to make it to Darjeeling before the rain. About wanting to descend a bit out of this cloud before we lost light or the roads got too slick. He'd angled his body toward the front gate, toward Sabin, who brought us there. He was clamping down, this much I knew from being his daughter. He didn't want to talk about this anymore, which meant I had to let go my desire to exorcise this place from our father's heart.

He surprised me when he did, finally, speak out the truth of this place. Of the scars it left on his heart and mind, of how it changed how he saw himself and what he thought he could offer the people he loved, the women he welcomed into his heart.

When the clouds rolled in, bleaching everything around us like a bright white screen, he was finished. He shrugged hard, maybe not to communicate that he didn't know so much as to shake the story out and off him.

I stepped back and hugged him around the narrowest part of his torso, my hands resting on top of his belly. I pressed my ear to his back and listened to his heart thump.

"Oh, this gut of mine!" he said.

When he smacked his belly, the moment shattered just like that, as it must.

D appeared from the periphery, where I found out later he'd been taking pictures of us: me, the half-Bengali daughter standing awkwardly and looking very American in a mismatched kurti and leggings, eyes downcast, my thumbs hooked into backpack straps; Dad standing akimbo, confronting the school with what might have been a scowl on his face. It's hard to tell from the camera's angle, and I can't recall since I wasn't looking

at him, but that's how I see his face in this moment in my mind.

Looking back, I know that all of this helped. We had touched a core. We hadn't come to collect ledgers to name names, to seek vengeance, or to clutch pain and hurt close to our hearts. We'd come to look this space in the face, to find those pieces Dad left in the forest and in this school as a child, and to hold them close, to tell them that they are not lost, that we carry them with us, and that they are safe now. That we love them. That we are loved.

Maybe that's how love works, I considered to myself. Waiting for us after sixty-plus years, filled with all these things we don't expect, in what could be the most unsuspecting and devastatingly beautiful places.

Looking for Where the Sky Meets the Sea

On the runway little girls hold babies half their size, while around them naked children scuttle and fall, pick themselves up, fall again. The infants wear circles of white powder on their fat cheeks, a sign of beauty as well as a sunscreen, and on their necks hang silver capsules which hold their umbilical cords in protection against evil spirits. The skinny girls are strong and sinewy, bronzed from the Balinese sun. No one begs here. The image is the same elsewhere in Southeast Asia – naked babies, bony girls looking like young mothers – but here they just stare and smile, waving as I slow my pace to avoid a lunging toddler. They have simply come to see who is going, who is arriving.

I booked my hotel in Kuta, the major tourist town, excited about the image of lying on deserted white beaches, drinking pineapple juice and reading novels, but I am now not sure that I will stay. Drunk Australian men zoom through the dirty streets on rented motorbikes with pretty young Balinese women seated behind them. The discos pound out a beat until the sun rises, and you can get a drink at any time, nearly anywhere. Black diesel exhaust fills the air. The beach is littered with beer bottles.

Balinese vendors approach travelers with emotional detachment, harassing them to spend, and then grow angry when they buy nothing. I sit on the beach and stare at the ocean, trying to hear the roll of the waves as they pull in and out, in and out. I ignore the trash around me and wave the

yelling beach hawkers away with a polite “No thank you.” They continue their pitch, even though I speak in their language. I begin to ignore them, try to look straight past them, through them, as though they do not exist. I do not like the feeling of ignoring another human, but I can’t think of what else to do.

Tourists go topless, while the Balinese wear modest shirts. Long ago, Western missionaries, insistent upon civilizing the natives, made the women cover their breasts. Now the Balinese scorn Westerners who come here to tear off their clothes. These tourists do not appear to notice the sideways glances, the lack of any shirtless islanders. The government outlawed Balinese toplessness years ago, and though apparently it still happens in parts of the island, it is certainly rare enough that one may never see it, except among the white-skinned women who walk in batik sarong skirts and hand-beaten silver jewelry.

Finally, the hawkers walk away, but a white man and brown woman remain, weaving slowly and aimlessly along the beach. They block my view of the ocean and kick up sand which blows into my face. The woman hangs onto the man’s arm with too much affection. Her smile looks forced, and her gaze toward him, a little desperate. Prostitution and human trafficking are a major business here, but most people act as if it doesn’t exist. The man beams with a self-assured air. Perhaps he believes that the woman is enjoying herself like he is. Perhaps they have silently agreed to pretend that this is not her livelihood, that, after him, there will not be another man, and another, and another. That they will not also buy her food and scarves and jewelry, and she will not hold their arms as they walk down this same strip of beach. The woman wears a Buddhist charm on her neck. I think of the girls and babies at the airport and wonder if they will grow up to be this woman, or the women selling sarongs on the beach, or if they might be lucky enough to get

a job in a hotel restaurant. I don't know how the system works here, but it feels to me like opportunities seem limited, especially for girls, even on an island so full of business and rich with natural beauty. I wonder if so many of the shops with names like "Danny's Surf Shop" are owned by Balinese or foreign capitalists; I know the larger chain hotels are, certainly all the luxury resorts. Those beaches are walled off, with gated entrances that I used to think were oddly keeping people inside like a zoo, but now I see are keeping people out.

I get up to leave, feeling unsettled, and I discover my new sandals have disappeared, stolen by the beach hawkers. Barefoot, I walk home trying to avoid puddles and glass shards, trying not to look any street sellers in the eye, trying to act like I can't hear their calls to me.

The next morning, I rent a jeep and drive away from Kuta, up into the hills, to Ubud. This small village is known for its traditional arts. There are no discos here, no taverns, no mopeds. The highlanders smile genuinely; they show me their crafts in small shops, but I don't sense any pressure to buy. Perhaps it is just in contrast to Kuta, but here everything smells fresh and wet. The air feels cleaner, the sun unfiltered. The light beats down as strongly as it did by the ocean, but my sweat does not feel oppressive, the dirt not as heavy, the dust not as thick. A trace of incense floats in the breeze from a nearby temple hidden in the jungle brush.

It may be the mountain air that makes me lightheaded. Higher altitude causes blood vessels to expand, as if trying to hold their bearings. The lesser flow of oxygen to the brain gives me a feeling of faintness, of resigned weightlessness and disorientation, of being on the verge of ecstasy or death.

Upon hearing of my desire to see countryside and not tourist

attractions, a generous shop owner insists on accompanying me up a paved road, to a smaller paved road, to a dirt road that ends at a large house. The home is actually two buildings, connected by a walkway. Two families –wealthy, I presume – live here. The woman runs inside, leaving me outside near a man who holds a tiny baby.

He points toward the hillside, bouncing his daughter comfortably in his arms. Parenting in Bali is a shared responsibility. Older siblings watch after the younger, keeping them out of the way of jeeps and mopeds, of pigs and chickens. Mothers breastfeed, but it is more common to see fathers happily cuddling their babies as they point animatedly at flowers or lizards.

I have not heard any babies crying in Bali. As soon as a child's mouth opens to cry, five elders rush to her side, comforting and petting her until she smiles again. Physical affection is lavished upon babies, and the social system cherishes them as a blessing, as evidence of the community's future. Though they run around in squalor, in conditions which would make most American adults grow pale, these children seem to be happier than any I have ever seen.

The father's face is soft, and his daughter pokes at it forcefully. He only smiles and coos indistinctly. I laugh, and she stares at me for a moment, fascinated. In the stare that only a child can give, I feel as if I am wonderful, and this child loves me and sees the good in me, sees me as the most attractive thing in the world. A second later, she is distracted by a butterfly near my head. I try to attract her gaze again. Her father laughs, and she looks to him.

The shopkeeper still has not returned, so I look out on the hillside – it is what I came for, and I am beginning to feel uncomfortable staring at the father and his child. He knows no English, and I have used up my few phrases of Bahasa.

The landscape reaches out in tiers, as far as the horizon. Terraces of tea fields cover the mountains in all directions. The land is cragged and unpredictable, and terracing makes it economically arable. Space is thoroughly exploited, and the creative farming designs procure the highest possible yield. These crops look so fertile and lush, almost taunting the fact that many Balinese are poor and malnourished.

Far below, a few workers prune the tea fields. Their straw hats, like broad inverted cones, distinguish them from the tea leaves. Labor may be slow in Asia's outdoor heat, but it is cheap, and therefore exploited often by foreign companies. The Balinese accept hard labor as a simple, basic part of life the way Americans used to. They give attention to detail that an American might now feel is too tedious, time-consuming, repetitive. If we turn a blind eye, we don't need to think about the fact that someone is doing this labor, but not being paid for it.

There are so many palm fronds, cabbage leaves, tea plants, it is hard to see depth or difference on the vista. The sun feels weaker, as if the expanse of chlorophyll were drawing it away from human skin. Scientists say green is a relaxing color. On these fields, it seems almost too technicolor, indistinct, unreal. The green looks so inviting, tempting me to jump over this wooden ledge, to fall sweetly through cool air and into the soft, deep hues. Though I know that the branches and earth would be hard and unyielding; though I know that under the leaves seethes a jungle of scorpions, wild monkeys, and tigers; and though I know that the workers in the field are toiling and hot, earning in a day what an American might spend on a cup of cappuccino, I suppress these voices of reality and rationality and let my thoughts dive into the green and the coolness. This is a place of peace.

I am told I must visit the neighboring village; it is a special day today. About a half-mile from the town, the small dirt road is thick with people. I can drive no further, so I park the jeep and join them, walking up the slope to see crowds gathered around large decorated structures. Villagers mill up and down the edges of the road in a continually shifting pattern. In one spot, a priest in white robes sits in front of a large paper maché cow mounted on a long wooden box. He chants, and those gathered around nod and mutter with him. The cow has a large erect penis, covered in gold-leaf and painted red at the tip. I find it hard not to stare at it. No one else seems to notice it. They stare at the priest, or at the family with dutifully lowered heads earnest in prayer, or at me. I am the only tourist, the only white-skinned person here, and I am glad at least that I left my camera at the inn.

Inside the box lies a dead man. This is the Brahmin. The other, poorer families in the village usually wait till a Brahmin dies and then bring their dead to join his funeral celebration. They dig up the bodies of relatives buried within the last few years, build decorative paper and wooden structures to house them, and perform the proper cremation alongside. A Brahmin ceremony is elaborate, with an official priest citing the Hindu scriptures. Now the dead can pass into a better world. Fire makes flesh disappear, freeing the soul from its worldly ties. In the highlands of Bali, death is a celebration of the better life after earthly existence, a joyous occasion, and the dead must be given a respectable festival of congratulations.

A group of men gather around one of the cremation structures, which measures about eight feet tall and five or six feet wide. The square concentric layers rise like rice terraces on a mountainside. Gold and silver shiny paper shimmers in the breeze; tiny pieces of mirror reflect the afternoon sun. Red,

green, blue, yellow – little cut-out circles of shiny paper dot the structure, bouncing different wavelengths of light back to my eyes. Inside this image of brightness stands a rotting human body we can't see, on its feet and upright. Above its head, the structure tiers off, crowned by a tiny balconied watchtower with golden spangles and glittered paper flapping in the air.

Young boys run through the streets, banging on pots and pans, on hand-made drums and tin cans. To my ears, it first sounds obnoxious and grating, but their music gradually becomes a background rhythm, a joyous element of excitement and anticipation to the whole occasion. The boys laugh, making as much noise as they can, and everyone, including me, smiles back at them.

Bamboo poles wrapped together with wet palm stripping form about twenty-five square spaces underneath the structure. After prayers and appropriate preparation, someone shouts a call, and men scramble to occupy one of the carrying positions. Men not in an individual box crowd the edges. Children run closely alongside, but are kept out of the men's way by watchful older siblings. I pull back with the crowd around me, giving these men enough space to hoist the structure on their shoulders. They wobble under its weight, and shouts correct any lopsidedness. Suddenly they lunge, and the crowd gives way.

The men seem out of control; they whirl back in another direction, their feet and hands struggling to keep the structure steady, and to keep themselves from falling. Soon, however, it becomes apparent to me that this lunging and circling is an intentional part of the ceremony, a kind of dance of dashing forward, whipping to the left, running back, while the crowd runs away or after. An old woman tells me that they believe that sometimes spirits don't know the path to the afterworld, or do not realize they are no longer part of this world, and they walk

back into their houses, knocking over cups and scaring children and animals. The dead, while an occasion for celebration, are not welcomed back to the land of the living; it is not their place here, and precautions must be taken to ensure their permanent departure. The structures are spun around, then, in order to confuse the spirit of the dead, so it will not return to the village.

The structure sways and darts to the left, swirls clockwise, lunges down, misses me by two feet and swirls again, retreating. Although the men's shouts and laughter ring above the children's banging, sometimes a twinge of fear appears in their eyes, as the group changes direction. The leader calls out, and feet scuffle carefully, arms reorient their pressure, shoulders square out balance. The frenzy pitches higher and higher, and I am afraid for the tiny children, standing without fear in their nakedness as the men hurl toward them. Somehow, though, no one is hurt; and now a call signals that the spirit, successfully disoriented, can begin its ascent up the mountain toward its next incarnation.

I follow the procession. I don't know how it happens, but I lose sight of the structure, gone way ahead. Everyone is moving, yet the crowd has thinned, and I find myself among groups of chatting wives and children holding hands. Twilight falls as we all keep walking, and I look up from the dust of the road and the mangy dogs trotting alongside. Far down the path, dark figures mill about a flat clearing, their bodies made shadowy from the dying sun and uncertain flickering of small pyres. When I reach them, I lose my bearings in their chaotic, constant motion, losing sight of anyone familiar. Music and noise fills my ears. The fires look large up close, and increasingly larger, as they lick up the sides of golden structures. Metallic shimmerings smolder into soot and red ash which flies dangerously in the wind. Smoke from the five, now six, cremations darkens the air even more,

blocking out spots of the wide sky and emerging stars. The moon rises in a perfect crescent. Venus hangs like a drip off the edge of a porcelain cup.

The crowd seethes with movement. I push through aimlessly and come upon a group dancing to a gamelan orchestra. Soft clanging tones beat an earthy pulse which celebrates the liberation of soul from skin. The music and noise creates a kind of frenzied hypnotism, a monotonous, erotic rhythm which makes all of our bodies move in an instinctual swaying. The continual motion of the crowd is like the beat of the community's heart, a motion of connected blood. Moving, dancing, this rhythm, and the dizzying smell: I become caught in the flow, I cannot resist it, I am in the midst of it, a pulse so deep under my feet that I can't stand still on it, I have to move with it and with the crowd and with the music. The heat of the flames fills my heart. Burning flesh fills my lungs.

It may be the altitude, but I see something very clearly now. Something I have been running from – the death of my loved ones, my own death coming here it all is, wrapped into colored looking glasses that sparkle even in the darkness. The sense that we are sewn together in this rivered line of movement, making our way up the mountain to the path's end, carried on by those around us. The need for us here to set these spirits free, to embrace the grief as integral to the luck we had for being here to live it, to feel this.

The sway of human music wakes the dead. As the pyres blacken and the fires gain life, six spirits stretch in new warmth, shaking their sleepy heaviness. The fires roar now and we must all pull away from the flames. Only designated pyre guards can remain close now. It is not just the intense heat we must be cautious of, a young man who wants to practice English tells me, but the ignorant movements of the dead in their newly-awakened

lightness. Lifting out of the crumbling structures, they break loose from the top of the pyres, sending them to fly in flaming showers toward the dust around them.

In the noise and the bright heat, there is a sudden feeling of quiet. The dead hover and swirl in the smoke above dancing heads. They may try, but they cannot join the dancers below. They cannot find the road back to the village either, so they are left to float in the soft wind of human breathing, higher, and higher, until the soot which carried them gives way to the call of earthen gravity and the voices below, falls back upon our heads and into our lungs, as the spirits fly freely now, up toward an empty moon.

The jeep is due back in four days. I decide to drive down the mountain, leaving the crisp clear air, down quickly to the ocean on the other side of the island. The air gets wetter, but the atmosphere is still light; there are few tourists. Two Balinese women pass, carrying burdens on their heads. A small towel curled in a circle holds the basket or jug in place. They let me try it; I have to use my hands to hold the weight steady. I almost drop the jug, but they do not jump or ask for it back. They are patient, generous, and enjoy my interest in their culture, or at least indulge it. After a few minutes, they walk away steadily, heads high and straight, down the dirt road. I think later about head lice, and my scalp itches for the rest of the day.

I stop in a small town where the beach is white, the water clear aqua. Below my hotel verandah, women with batik sarongs and handmade jewelry call out prices to lurching tourists. It feels rude to not engage with them, but after realizing they ultimately want a conversation to end only in a sale, I learn to ignore them like the rest of the people in the hotel restaurant, and also soon to resent their calls to me at every meal. If I go

quickly, I can make it to the water before they run down the beach with their displays. The ocean becomes a haven. As I swim out, the air turns quiet and peaceful again. The waves lick at my floating skin, lap over my dangling shins and outstretched arms. If I look straight up into the wide sky, I can make the palm trees disappear from my peripheral vision. Closing my eyes mingles the sensations of warm water, cool wind, and shimmering sunlight.

Suddenly a large wave rolls over me. Coughing, I look up to see a boy struggling to swim with one arm, the other holding a large fruit high above the water. “Pineapple? Pineapple?” he calls, and suddenly the ocean is not a refuge. Bali is commerce. No matter what I do, I can escape for only a few moments. Swim away, it follows; run up the beach, it is there running after me; retreat to the verandah, but it is ever there, waiting for a look, any cue to call out in hope of money.

But here is the truth: I can not resent this. I am no victim. I eat whatever I like, buy new flip flops without a thought. I sit in the restaurant, order what appeals to me, decide not to choose a banana smoothie and feel good about that. In the US, I am in the middle of the middle class, but in the world, I am rich, and I can not take that for granted. This is the deal we strike: we come here, happy to have all we want, the sky, the sea, all easy and there for the taking, and in return, we give some cash. I am not, as I feel, a victim of commerce; simply being here, I am a perpetrator. I will go home to my bedroom and kitchen and living room and walk-in shower that is all mine. I do not need to swim each day to sell a pineapple, to share one room with five; I have wood flooring, a quiet roof, a private toilet, and my worries are about career ambition, skin and hair products, car trouble, espressos and gift shopping. This hope: this hope for some money, this hope to buy what we need, then what we’d like, this

is a blood that moves us all, and I see it is not the boy's fault, or these women's fault; I am a faceless fish in a riptide of commerce – and the hope of the fisher can not be blamed. It is we, the peach-skinned folks on the verandah, who wish to think of those circling us as sharks, but perhaps we are the sharks swimming unaware of the damage we leave in our bloody wakes. Or maybe, instead, we are all symbiotic parts in the ocean's tides, all of us only looking for a place to live out the time we have, all of us part of one ebbing and flowing, one beating heart.

I head again north, searching for something else, and stop in a small hotel – a resort, I'd say – in a village mentioned by my guidebook for backpackers. Development has not reached here as it has in the south, and few tourists speak English as their native language.

Balinese life on the North of the island presents itself as relaxed and easy-going. The hotel staff never hurries to bring a menu or sweep the walkways of plumeria blossoms. The clean hotel feels cool and airy at all hours, and the light casts changing shadows on the bungalow walls with traces of pink and yellow. Brick walks and flowering bushes separate the bungalow huts, and orchids and rows of palm trees paint the landscaped garden with rich vibrant colors. Every evening, spectacular sunsets feel different and new.

I get to know some of the villagers. They teach me a little about Indonesian food and tease me about my mosquito bites, saying that my eating red meat gives me sweet blood. I avoid the beach hawkers, or they, now realizing I will not buy, leave me alone. Fishing boats line the beach at evening; at any hour, the water feels like a warm bath. On the other side of the road beyond the hotel, the jungle grows wild, stretching to the upper reaches of the sacred mountains.

Once again, Bali seems like paradise. I hum Bali H'ai as I sip a pineapple juice and watch the sun turn orange and gold as it dips into the warm sea.

Back in Kuta, after returning the jeep, I look for a restaurant to have lunch before getting a cab to the airport. I pass a travel agency with posters of palm trees and white beaches and a sandwich board on the sidewalk which says: "BOOK CREMATION HERE."

Drinking Stories

When James joined chess club, it didn't take long for us to discover his rating and ability. We got to calling him "Master James." And whether we meant to or not, we started a monarchy.

When James became the chess club president, it only seemed appropriate. James was different than the rest of us. He knew more about chess, but also about other things—or at least we believed he knew about women, sex, drinking, and other worldly pleasures than the rest of us.

Ivan was the first to follow. But Ivan is known for his following. During James' games, he becomes a sports announcer, saying, "Great attack, Master James! What'd you think of this fork?"

But internally, I know, we all follow in different ways. A cult leader doesn't have to be great, he just has to appear great. During club one day, James said we should all go to Adams Morgan and bring our boards. Ivan started making plans.

Nick tried to invite me to come along. "You should see Master James when he's drunk. He starts banging up bitches—he even tried to dance with me once!"

I wanted to say I was doubtful a girl would touch someone lanky like James. That James' supposed luck wouldn't rub off on Nick that night. That I didn't drink, and that I wouldn't learn to drink around a bunch of chess playing boys. That getting drunk

around a bunch of single men was like bringing your queen out in the middle of the board during the first five moves.

I said I was busy.

“That’s a shame,” Nick said. “Maybe next time.”

Maybe next time.

Ivan said he was trying to study James’ opening of choice: the Scotch Opening. He said, “Maybe I’ll try this tonight at the bar.” He said it like he was trying a new dance move, or putting on his friend’s dress shirt. Like the Scotch Opening was a chick magnet.

It made me wonder what other bad habits Ivan might try to emulate, and I suddenly felt motherly with fear.

The next day, Nick tells me he has stories. Nick has stories for everything. This is why he’s going to become a teacher, because he can make anything into a drinking story.

He says they got to the bar and unrolled their boards before ordering. That Ivan ordered a Sprite, and there was some hot blonde that Nick made eye contact with, once. That Ivan didn’t care about blondes or the world and played game after game of blitz. That they were there ‘til two in the morning.

Nick probably said something like, “Maybe some chicks’ll come and watch us.”

That’s probably when James waved his arms on the dance floor and said, “Hey ladies—wanna play some chess?”

Nick tells me James started grinding with some girl, but I don’t believe that part.

But he insists that the blondes came by the table. I imagine them stumbling over with their exposed stomachs and drugged out fuck-me mascara eyes. That they looked at the

board and asked, “Is *that* chess?” I imagine they asked it like they were trying to define the parts of a run-over cat.

Ivan nodded and didn’t look up from the board.

Nick says Ivan was winning. I’m not sure I believe that part, either.

“Can we watch?”

“Uh...OK.”

Nick loves to tell this story with his impersonation of Ivan. He lowers his voice to this southern drawl. We laugh, letting ourselves think that we are somehow better. Like we haven’t made the same mistakes, or ignored what could have been our road to salvation, at least temporarily.

But Nick tells me about a girl at work who pushed for a relationship and he said no. He says he wonders if he should’ve said yes, but I tell him that a girl that throws herself out like that is an en prise rook in the middle of the board. You have to ask yourself why it’s there. Is it just the player’s careless? Or is there a tactic hidden several moves later?

Maybe Ivan was wise to not interfere with that. To keep playing, and leave the rook in the middle of the board. There’s more important tactics to watch out for. Greater moves to play.

Nick tells me that James got drunk enough that he started dancing with him. And they danced. And that was the end of the story. No chicks, no phone numbers, no vomiting. I don’t know what happened to the spectator blondes. Maybe that’s just why the story ends there—because nothing happened with the chicks. The story isn’t about the chicks. It’s about James being the hero. James, and chess, and maybe something about what you do to substitute for loneliness. Or maybe I just added that part in.

A week later, Nick says they brought all their boards to the bar again, but a man stopped them at the door. He asks Ivan just how old he is and Ivan told him. Seventeen.

I ask why he didn't just lie. Why he didn't at least try for a tactical maneuver.

But apparently chess strategy doesn't apply off the board. That it's much harder to manipulate words over pieces. Words are living. Pieces are sitting, waiting to be moved.

And they didn't try to get in, either. Even if the rest of them were legal. They turned around, carrying their chess bags, and went into McDonald's. They played until two in the morning, their fingers quick and focused. There weren't any chicks in that story, either.

FINALIST: SCOT LYCAN

Into Morocco

Beauty is unbearable, drives us to despair, offering for us a minute the glimpse that we should like to stretch out over the whole of time. – Albert Camus

We had driven for hours, about ten or so, over the High Atlas Range leaving Marrakech in our wake. We passed primitive housing blocks and abandoned Kasbahs through an ever changing dryish landscape painted by hues of beige, ochre, and slate grey dotted by oases of olive groves. Our group had gone silent as we stared at the awe of the landscape. The only sounds were those of the computerized chirps emanating from digital cameras throughout the mini tour bus ushering us into an astoundment of the senses. One would assume that after this many hours, the landscape in southeastern Morocco might get monotonous, yet it was ever changing, and every town that we drove through had some sort of football game scrimmaging in muddied streets by children as men labored away on the sides of the road with their skills and crafts.

We bounced over primitive roads through towns with names like Tilaria, where the Kasbahs are, Kelaomgouna that has a crimson river running through it, and ironically, is home to a festival of roses every April, and were ogled at by barren hills with such bizarre folds in their geologic formations, that one could have sworn they had eyes. We were somewhere on earth unlike anything we had ever witnessed in our lives. A dust devil,

far off in the distance, and a curtained sky draping the road ahead, signaled the unfolding of yet another desert spectacle.

We were sidling the beginnings of a sandstorm, but the dark clouds in the distance told me that the sky's moisture would quell the blowing dust. I was wrong. Whatever forces are at work in that desert defy comprehension. Where the casual observer might see a desolate landscape devoid of life, we were witness to a life force that took on a Soul of its own; it was a vast emptiness, yet it filled the sky to our side and to our fore.

Our bus stopped and let us out in the town of Erfoud. Leaving behind our main bags, we brought our overnight bags and boarded a couple of four-wheel drive Jeeps driven by desert Berbers who spoke only that language as well as Farsi. When we asked if our driver could speak English or Spanish, he bluntly replied "François?" And off into the desert we bounded.

Into the heart of the two storms we drove. The elements of sand, wind, and rain pelted at us. They had a particular balance amongst them in which they all coexisted equally. Our driver apparently didn't know about air conditioning or didn't care, because in the excruciating windblown heat, we drove with the windows down. The sand was coming from the hills, but the surface on which we drove was hard, bumpy, and rough. It was the color of asphalt.

We arrived at the edge of the Sahara's towering dunes, the Gran Erg Chebi, less than fifty kilometers from the border with Algeria. At our "hotel" in the middle of nowhere, known as the Ksarmerzouga, we were welcomed by robe clad men wearing Berber headwear. They showed us to our tents in the desert, just behind the Berber lodge. The tents were made from the hair of dromedaries, also known as camelids. They had the musty smell of rank dirty socks further enhanced by the rains. We were now "checked in." The only type of settlement that we were even

near to was one known as Merzouga, but I never saw it, or just plain missed it.

That night we were entertained by the employees in the in the glow of the lodge—a place of low couches, teeming vibrant blankets, and pillows that pulled one in. We sipped green mint tea and experienced different rhythms on some hand drums as the storm raged outside with repeated lightning bursts. Dinner was served in two huge tagines full of savory chicken and tasty vegetables smothered in a wealth of spices, preceded by marinated green olives and followed by melon slices.

The storm passed and the electrical show was on the horizon as the night faded into our tents. Being the only male in the contingent, I had my own tent steeped in darkness. Unable to sleep, read, or talk to anyone, I wandered off into the desert, looked up, and saw a sprawling cloud of stars dotted by the zodiac. It was still hot; I tossed my shirt, and off went my shorts. I danced off into the dunes in nothing but by boxers. No one would ever see me.

Ever.

Hours passed, so it seemed. A rising crescent moon, kissed by the silhouette of a palm tree, assisted me to retrace my footsteps back to my scattered clothing. My eyes had adjusted to the low light. I was never afraid, not like I had been in the city, the labyrinth known as Marrakech. I felt that freedom that I used to have as a kid, when I would go hiking into the North Cascades near the Canadian border, but lost so many years ago.

There had been camels out there that night in the desert. I could have cared less what they saw, I'm just glad I didn't trip over one. They sleep sitting down. After a couple hours of rest, dawn cursed the sky. I met with my companions in much the same place where my escapades had begun the night before; I noticed my footprints still dancing off into the dunes into the

morning twilight.

We mounted the legendary creatures of the Sahara whose fur contributed to the tents we had slept in the night prior. In two separate trains we were led by herders, slowly and methodically, out into the dunes. When the dunes got too steep, we dismounted and climbed the final steps of the dunes ourselves. A dusty and seemingly foreign sun rose out of lands probably stranger than the one we were in, farther East and even more entrenched in history. I wondered if it was just now setting in my homeland, my Hawai'i.

After breakfast, we drove back through the desert to Erfoud. We drove through settlements that were an earthy construction. We happened across some nomadic dwellings. A few children played nearby— I haven't any words to describe their plight, out where they were. If they were happy, and the children appeared so, it's because they hadn't ever known another way of life. These dwellings were in the middle of what seemed a stark desert of pavement. New power poles were being erected in this nowhere to stretch lines from somewhere to God knows. I became transfixed on that thought, for some odd reason. Just when I thought that we weren't going to make it to Fez, a vibrant and historical city in the north, the drivers somehow found some eccentric route through the rocks and valleys.

If Marrakech is the Sensual Heart of Morocco, where our crossing began, then Merzouga and the whole of the desert is the Soul of the Country. This is the true Africa— the Berbers, the herders, and the nomads. A piece of history is preserved beyond the Atlas Range. Time is touching it, through power grids, the motion picture industry, and tourism, but the past and its way of life are firmly entrenched here, the desert so colossal, and that unsoiled sky!

FICTION

JUDGE'S NOTES: FICTION

Judge: Paul Lyons

Paul Lyons is Professor of English at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where he teaches courses in U.S. literatures; postcolonial, settler colonial, and indigenous literatures of the Pacific region; literary and cultural theory; and writing (fiction and essay). His own writings include *American Pacificism: Oceania in the US Imagination* (Routledge); essays on topics such as Southern regionalism, Herman Melville and Globalism, Epli Hau'ofa's pronouns, the Question of Authenticity, Native and Non-Native Collaboration against Empire; regular book reviews for *The Contemporary Pacific*; and three novels (*Table Legs*, *Going for Broke*, and *Button Man*). Most recently he was co-editor, with Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, of *Pacific Currents*, a Special Issue of *American Quarterly*.

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First Place: Sam Gridley
"The Genuine Article"

With clarity and compassion, "The Genuine Article" explores the charged aftermaths of violence. The adult narrator's connection to the boy he was when he went to jail for killing his step-mother can neither be fully rejected or rectified. Story lines converge brilliantly around a dinner date at which, as he works up courage to unburden his own past, he must take on another's traumatic present.

JUDGE'S NOTES: FICTION

Second Place: Jeffery Ryan Long

“Scantron”

With freeway noise which makes him and his pregnant spouse yell to communicate, and outdated office equipment which overpays underpaid employees, a young fiscal-officer struggles to stay sane and fair. Humor, care, allowance for the crack in things, and good sense light the way through the gray areas of bureaucratic space—the story achieves its own fine warmth and balancing of accounts.

Third Place: Sam Ikehara

“Weaving”

“Weaving” captures lyrically the difficulty of finding mutuality, and ways in which unmet desire remains obscure. Summer (a “national alien”) adores Anna, a student from Bologna, who locks arms with her, but as frequently keeps her waiting, controlling their emotional tone and distance. The pathos of Summer’s willingness to wait, the story within a story in which we see little fire of feeling, coils like smoke over the gaps in their relationship.

The Genuine Article

It's his common name, he suspects, that keeps him camouflaged. According to Wikipedia, "Chris Carter" could be a screenwriter, a synthesizer player, a honcho in the music biz, a politician in New Zealand or one of numerous sports figures—his favorite being the slugger who led the American League in strikeouts with 212, a heroic number of misses. A search engine offers umpteen more options, and even if you narrow the term to "Chris Carter murder," you come up with myriad possibilities. It takes a long while to find the real ex-him, the guy who spent 16 years in jail for killing his stepmother when he was 14. It was a small-town sensation more than three decades ago, covered by a local newspaper that didn't go digital until long past the turn of the millennium. You have to plow deep into the archives of the state court system to locate the case.

He still lives in the same state, in a city just 200 miles from the crime scene, and though he briefly considered changing his name, he stuck with the old, tarnished one. He believes in facing the truth, he tells himself. Yet right now he's struggling with the need to reveal his story to the woman he suddenly loves more than he thought himself capable of loving.

He tries to reason himself out of a confession. Does she really have to know? Haven't many decent people, even celebrated ones, maintained disguised identities? Arguably he didn't *have* an identity at 14—that, to a large extent, was the problem. He had little sense of himself until age 37, when he could put two degrees after his name: a B.A. in psychology and

an M.S. in occupational therapy. He got a job in a rehab clinic helping patients relearn to write, to use a telephone, to maneuver a wheelchair. *This is who I am*, he realized then. *I help damaged people*. In his view, he has nothing in common with a scared, reclusive kid who was found to be clinically depressed but still capable of distinguishing right from wrong, so why can't that juvenile-tried-as-an-adult be omitted from his resume?

Of course, Penny in no way resembles the damaged people at the clinic. A third-grade teacher, she tells warm, amusing stories about her students and her own 12-year-old daughter. In one incident she related to him, her daughter threw a fit over a cell phone, demanding an ultra-expensive model with a fashion designer's nameplate. Penny just laughs about the way she cajoled the girl into a compromise.

Once Penny learns Chris's story, will she worry he can't handle a situation like her daughter's meltdown? Will she expect him to snap out sometime and smack the girl in the face? He's certain he'd never do that now. He has hard-won perspective, he assures himself.

The thing is, as a 12-year-old—or 14 in his case—you lack perspective. You're trapped in the narrow present, convinced the truths of your life will remain fixed forever. The sense of helplessness overwhelms you. That is how he explains to himself what happened.

Elmira. The name itself used to set his teeth on edge. He never liked her and couldn't fathom why his father had married her. She was not a bad or mean person but incredibly annoying. Loud. Big and running to fat. Prone to orange sweatshirts and pink slacks. An atrocious cook who kept the house stinking of cabbage and grease. Always jabbering. Intrusive. The kind who'd throw open his bedroom door to insist he come watch something funny on TV, even if he was listening to the new Def

Leppard album and reading the best sci-fi thriller ever written. Even if he'd told her he hated sitcoms. Even if, maybe, he had a hard-on under the sheet. Or else she'd carry on interminably about the need to make friends in ninth grade, though it was a huge county-wide high school where the seniors yanked his curly hair in the hall and the teachers struggled to remember the name of a nondescript little kid with mediocre marks.

Yet, for the sake of his father, he worked hard to get along with her. Both Walter Carter and Elmira Stearns were middle-aged by the time they got together—he 51, she 49—and each had one child and no other surviving relatives. Elmira's husband had left when their daughter Marly was four. Chris came from a marriage that likewise ended when he was four, but more dramatically because his mother jumped off a bridge in the final act of a longstanding depression. Neither remaining parent dated much, and their wedding, when Chris was 12, may have cured a wretched loneliness for both. Which didn't mean that Chris and his new stepsister had to like it, but Marly was lucky enough to escape immediately to college. He was stuck.

Before Elmira's arrival he had done fine without a mother. Day care and then afterschool programs kept him busy, and he had an instinctual knack for blocking memories of the lost parent. He kept only a blurred image of a sticky feminine presence who would hug him tight while weeping into his hair. In his mind this became an unpleasant tableau that reeked of tears mixed with deodorant and sweat—and lurking behind those odors, the specter of mental illness and death. Naturally he wanted to stay free of that.

In many ways, having only one parent, an abstracted and half-oblivious father, proved an advantage. No one pestered him to be home at a certain hour or to eat the carrots in his lunch box. He could make sure there *were* no carrots in his lunch box.

Moreover, Chris got to watch raunchy TV shows that his peers caught only in glimpses, and the music he listened to was never censored, his father having no clue about the lyrics.

To be honest, Chris had occasional moments of rage in those years, usually directed at a female who put too much pressure on him, the worst being the time he hit a teacher and a fellow student. This happened during a paired learning activity when his partner, smarty-pants Randi with her squeaky voice and long pigtails smelling of fruity shampoo, interrupted his oral reading with a niggling correction every five words or so. He finally screeched at Randi, and when the teacher intervened, pulling him back into her body, he cuffed her on the knee. As the teacher let go, Randi stuck her face in to say he was acting stupid, so he smacked the girl's nose as well, cracking it. But he was only six when that happened, in first grade, and after several sessions with a school psychologist it was written off as a bad temper tantrum, perhaps exacerbated by the teacher's clumsy restraint. He apologized to the teacher and Randi. No other incident required medical or psychological intervention.

When Elmira was forced upon him, Chris tried his best to get along, and in the early going he succeeded. As long as his father was healthy, she had a focus for her hectoring. She could nag Walter about lawn care or drafty windows or his favorite ratty flannel shirt; she could demand to know why he wasn't eating the barbecued short ribs made with her aunt's best recipe, though he'd told her multiple times he couldn't abide fatty meat. She'd once owned a shop for antiques and collectibles and now amused herself with flea markets, so the house Walter brought to the marriage was soon overstuffed with Hummel figurines, vintage cake plates and once-popular brands of dolls and teddy bears. Walter accepted this junk with an occasional sigh, probably glad of the excuse it gave her to travel around the region. He was

a workaholic anyway, spending late hours at his machine repair shop where he dealt with antiques of a different sort: sputtering lawn tractors, sewing machines, industrial vacuums. In Chris's interpretation, his dad labored especially long hours to avoid Elmira—and the overwork contributed to the stroke.

With his stepsister off at college, Chris was the only resource Elmira could call on when, a week after Valentine's Day, Walter crashed to the bathroom floor after breakfast. Chris was the one who phoned the emergency line while Elmira screamed and tried to revive her husband by slapping and poking. Later Chris had to interpret the doctors' messages when Elmira was too upset (or too stupid, he sometimes thought) to understand. He ordered pizza late at night for both of them. He cleared the table and did the dishes while she phoned the nurses' station for the seventh time in four hours.

All in all, he acted mature beyond his years, and he was proud of himself for that. But when he escaped to his room for some welcome relief, it felt like his world had broken its anchor. His bed with its old plaid comforter drifted aimlessly on a vinegary sea, bumping against a murky cloudbank overhead.

On the second day Walter woke up and said a few words in a slurred voice. Despite this progress, Elmira's anxiety continued to make her foolish, unable to understand the nurses or find her way to the cafeteria. Though Walter needed to sleep, she babbled at him till a nurse eased her out of the room. Chris steered her around the halls, her fleshy forearm wedged into his side, her wide hazel irises swimming spasmodically like fish caught in a trawl. That night she demanded he sit with her on the couch, watching game shows, sitcoms and prime-time soap operas for distraction. Until then he hadn't realized how preposterous *Dynasty* could be—a show to which Elmira was addicted. Though she had only picked at her dinner, she ate a

pint of ice cream while the psychiatrist seduced the oil tycoon's daughter. He imagined he could see the fat of her arms ballooning.

On the third morning Walter had a second stroke, and then another in the afternoon while Elmira squeezed his unfeeling hand in the ICU. Both Elmira and Chris were outraged at the hospital and doctors for not forestalling these attacks. But at 7:00 p.m., when the lead neurologist offered a grim prognosis, they were too overwhelmed to yell or weep. They headed home, and Elmira's erratic driving on the ice—heavy throttle mixed with heavy brake—nearly killed them.

She chattered for the rest of the night: Reasons the doctors could be wrong. Evidence of Walter's strength, such as the time he'd lifted a lawn tractor off his foot. Speculation about the side effects of medications whose names she mangled. Misinformation about the patient's blood oxygen level. Specialty hospitals where he might be transferred. What he would want them to do if he could speak. Whether he had blinked that afternoon.

She phoned her daughter at college, for the fifth time since Walter's collapse, and talked for 45 minutes, Chris hoping all the while that Marly would get the message to come home. But three times he heard Elmira insist that Marly not interrupt her studies unless, unless ... (sobs choked back).

He did want to be the family stalwart, to provide the emotional support Elmira needed. Introverted kids don't get much chance to be heroes. But gloom started to close over him, and around 10:30 he hid again in his room, where the cloudbank above the bed darkened and pressed down tighter. The carpet rolled like waves. Four times Elmira burst in on him, asking hysterically if they should do this or that. There was nothing to do but wait, he tried to tell her. She couldn't hear that.

After her final intrusion, he whapped his head on the wall until he got dizzy. He cried a little and let his resentment blow into a silent storm. When he slept at last, he dreamed of running down an endless hospital corridor. The walls closed in and there was no escape from that infinite bone-white tunnel.

In the morning, staggering out at 6:30, he found her smearing the mail from the past two days around the coffee table. Had she slept at all?

“Any news from the hospital?” he asked.

“I don’t know what bills he’s paid,” she whined. “\$76.80 for gas, should I take care of that?”

“You don’t have to do anything today,” he advised, still reaching for wisdom, but the effect was muted when he tripped on one of her recent purchases, a Shirley Temple doll that had tumbled off the mantelpiece it shared with four of its siblings.

“Be careful of that!” she yelled. As he dropped into an armchair, she retrieved the wayward moppet, brushed it off with care and set it back on the mantel next to a scalloped cake plate and a 30-inch imitation grandfather clock with a Mickey Mouse face. Then she came over and hugged Chris, smushing his nose into her flabby shoulder. Her bathrobe smelled of old sweat and years of too-sweet perfume. “You’re being so brave,” she moaned, “I wish I could be as brave as you but I can’t get my head straight, it’s just too awful.”

He strained to catch his breath against the saggy upper-arm flesh that engulfed his face. Bile rose in his throat and the room turned brown. The lamp by the couch had a sickly orange halo around it. If Dad never came home, he thought in a panic, there’d be no one to save him from this. He’d be trapped here for years until he could make a break for college.

This wasn’t bravery, it was despair, the worst he’d ever felt. He remembered his mother’s solution—where was the nearest

bridge?

“We should get some breakfast,” he muttered, beginning to pry himself out of her grasp. When he slid out of the chair toward the mantel, the motion was more abrupt than he intended, and she teetered, thrown off balance as he jerked away and stood up. To cover this maneuver he chattered, “Did you eat anything yet? You need to keep up your strength.” He had the stomach-turning sense that his words were as empty as the dialogue on *Dynasty*.

Recovering her balance, she stiffened and trembled at the same time, like a twitchy marionette. “Oh!” she said. “Oh!”

“How about fried eggs?” Though he was far from a good cook, he thought he could manage, unlike Elmira, not to shatter the yolks. The thought of eggs made him queasy, though.

“I see,” she moaned. “All right.... I shouldn’t.”

“Shouldn’t have breakfast? Yeah, you should. Would you rather have scrambled?”

Now she turned away and refused to catch his eye. “You can’t be expected,” she stated in an almost haughty tone.

“Hmm? Expected to what?”

“To do ... what needs to be done here. To help me.”

“Huh? What have I *been* doing?” he snapped. She was offended because he jostled her while trying to get away? How idiotic!

“I’m skipping school again today to go to the hospital with you,” he went on angrily. “I’m missing a biology test. I’ll help with the bills if you think they have to be paid. I’m going to cook the eggs. What *else* do you need me to do?”

In spite of the edge to his voice, both his words and the emotion behind them seemed random, as if someone else were feeling and talking while he asphyxiated from hopelessness.

“I have to call Marly,” she declared with an imperious tilt of

the nose. “My daughter. *She* cares about me.”

Though bringing Marly home was exactly what he’d wished for, he barked, “Are you saying I don’t care? With all I’ve been—”

“You’ve never,” she said in a mix of whine and scorn, “treated me like your mother. For two years, two years, two whole years I’ve been just an interloper to you.”

“That’s not fair!”

“It’s true!” She advanced on him, shaking a finger in his face, assaulting him once more with her perfume. He wobbled, dizzy and fully nauseous now, trapped in the huge pungent presence of her.

It was fight back or drown, and he reached wildly for anything to save himself. By evil luck, the nearest object on the mantel wasn’t one of the Shirley Temples. It was the heavy cake plate made of Depression glass with a thick pedestal. It shattered in his hand as it smashed her face, and when she toppled, her head bounced like a melon on the floor.

Two days later, while Chris dozed in a jail cell with his lacerated arm bandaged, his father also died.

Though Chris was not accused of meaning to kill Elmira, the attack was characterized as malicious and intending harm, leading to a charge of murder in the third degree. Represented by a court-appointed lawyer who, he later realized, did a lackluster job, Chris pleaded guilty. It was an era of strict, inflexible punishment, and he had no urge to defend himself or mitigate his fate. When he saw Marly among the spectators in the courtroom, he felt her taut-lipped stare was worse than anything the law could do to him.

In those half-awake moments when he relived the final scene with Elmira, it gave him the shakes. But when a court psychologist asked about it, he couldn't bring much emotion to the conversation. Did he "feel sorry" about his actions?—sure. Did he "regret" them?—yes. Elmira did not deserve her fate. But regretting what he had done didn't mean wishing she were still alive; indeed, it was hard to feel anything for her personally. Whether that made sense he didn't know, and he couldn't explain it to anyone. Overall, his remorse was like a lump he carried in his abdomen, the way a wounded soldier bears an irretrievable piece of shrapnel.

Oddly, his prison experience had a few benefits. Over the 16 years inside, he earned his high school equivalency degree, and he acquired useful skills such as rudimentary plumbing and carpentry. Most important, the prison doctors prescribed medication for his depression, and he became a more even-tempered person.

He also had his initiation into sex, and that was not so pleasant. In his first prison he was molested by older boys, and in later years, in adult facilities, the aggression turned into rape on two occasions. Infuriated, he fought back, enough to land himself and others in the infirmary, but after the second incident he realized his rage did no good. He decided to control, or at least manage, the derangements evoked by the brutality of prison. Gradually he discovered a paradoxical freedom in helplessness, peace in desolation. He read books about Zen and began to practice his own version of meditation. As much as possible he kept to himself, engaging neither with other inmates nor with the staff.

He also developed, not a strong identity, but a certain feeling of personal integrity based mostly on what he did not do: he did not steal from other prisoners, gamble, snitch to the guards,

use drugs, tell routine lies or spit in people's stew. He never denied his guilt, criticized his sentence or even spoke of such matters. While serving his full term, he never sought parole.

He had grown into a man of average height with a rounded, almost chubby face that made him look younger than his actual years—ironically as if life had forgotten to mark him. His hair remained curly, dark and thick. Only his habit of looking to the side, away from people's gaze, suggested a painful history.

After his release from prison, he went to college, got his degrees, went to work—luckily the state did not demand a criminal background check for jobs at outpatient clinics—and by that point he understood Elmira better. An aging, scared, weak, hysterical woman who had no escape from her terrors: in a way she'd been trapped as much as he, and perhaps she had truly loved the husband she was losing. Grasping that, he felt an abstract pity for her. Yet this softening never led him to contact Marly, whom he'd left as alone in the world as himself; she was one judge he could never confront.

Today the shrapnel remains, that guilt that forever marks him, and so does the ghost of his own hopelessness. In his time behind bars, even while being raped, he had never felt so desperate as when he faced living for years with Elmira. How appropriate, he thinks, that the weapon was Depression glass, and how unbearable it would be if that desolation ever returned.

As it turns out, it's love that brings the hopelessness back, along with a ridiculous, contradictory optimism.

Working a 6:30 to 2:30 shift at the clinic, he stops at a coffee shop on his way home, where he browses news and sports sites as a way to unwind. This is better than heading straight to the

isolation of his small apartment. Penny similarly relaxes with a mug of cocoa between sending her students home and picking up her daughter from afterschool sports. Among the regular customers who occupy tables in mid-afternoon, they are the only ones over 40, perhaps the sole people over 30. They begin to nod to each other over their electronic devices, and eventually they chat.

As they share their interests and bits of their histories, he mentions where he got his undergraduate and graduate degrees without revealing that he started in his thirties. He talks seriously about his job and the people he helps. He tries to make his life sound interesting, and he concentrates on not letting his glance duck away.

Like him, Penny wears no wedding ring. A short, slender woman with winter-pale skin and slivers of gray in her dark hair, she went to a much fancier university than he, and evidently didn't have to work her way through as he did, but there is no pretension about her. When she purses her lips in concentration, lines crease her cheeks, and for him these marks of age add to her appeal. Sometimes he's panicked in her presence, but they grow friendly, with subtle signals that they both look forward to these not-quite-chance meetings, and after several weeks they get together for a movie on a Sunday afternoon.

In the dark of the theater he sweats like a 14-year-old on a first date. In point of fact, this *is* his first date in more than a decade. During his college years, surrounded by women half a generation younger than he, his attempts were undermined by multiple layers of self-consciousness. He was too old, too inexperienced, too criminal. Just once did he get a girl into his bed, and then he was astonished and insulted by the way she left as soon as they were finished. He couldn't understand what had gone wrong, and the notion that nothing *had* gone wrong was

even more unsettling. It seemed better not to try again.

Since leaving the university, he has pursued no one until Penny. He has never used online dating sites, partly because they would invite exposure, but mainly because, in an environment where people routinely lie about themselves for little reason, he would find it particularly despicable to lie for a big reason. There is some comfort—cold comfort, to be sure—in telling himself he doesn't meet the qualifications for sex, whatever they may be.

Thus he's relieved when his and Penny's arms touch only once during the movie, by accident. That night, however, alone in his apartment, he gets frantic with yearning. His legs shake. His thoughts skitter. During the 93 minutes of the movie, with no more incitement than the occasional faint noise of her breathing, he has leaped from interest to infatuation to all-out romantic drunkenness. In prison he learned to subdue sexual cravings, but now they make him as helpless as he was in all-out depression, and this terrifies him. At the same time he realizes how absurd he is. Hopeful, hopeless, he can't predict what he'll do next. Jump out the window? Send a jokey text to the phone number she gave him? Guzzle beer until he falls asleep?

Though he tries to subdue his excitement with meditation, his mind refuses to empty itself of images of Penny's face and arms and imaginary visions of her hidden parts. Giving up on Zen, he searches online for information about her, turning up only dry details about her job and education that he already knows. He wonders if she's tried searching his background, and if so whether she'll persist long enough to unearth his secret, which he pictures glowing gaudily in the dark recesses of the Internet. He feels desperate and alive.

For the next three days he avoids the coffee shop, and when he turns up at last on Thursday, he is clumsily apologetic. Though Penny seems to accept his vague excuses, he wonders

what she really thinks. He spills coffee on his shirt and pretends that a passerby bumped his arm.

Squishing theraputty onto Mr. Pochowski's middle two fingers, Chris instructs him to spread them apart with as much force as he can.

"This is for the ladies, huh?" says the elderly stroke victim.

"It's for everyone. It strengthens the muscles and improves coordination."

"Foreplay," says the old man in the chair, wiggling his fingertips. "What they like, no?"

His eyes glint up at Chris, who laughs. Here at work, Chris feels easier and more relaxed than in any other setting.

"Our focus right now," he tells the patient, "is your activities of daily living, and if that's the activity you're most concerned about ..."

"I have a reputation to keep up, I'm countin' on you to get me back in action, Chris."

"We're working on it. As hard as you can, now, move those fingers."

"What about you? I don't see no ring, you playin' the field? You aren't gay, are you?"

Chris blushes. "No."

"You got a girlfriend?"

"Come on, pay attention. Back and forth, please."

"How 'bout that gal Amber at the front desk, she's cute, boobs like pumpkins. She says how can I help you, I say, how's about you come over my place tonight?"

"You have not said that to her. Both your arms would be broken by now."

“I’m sayin’ she’d be a good one for you. I bet you can handle her.” With his free hand, Mr. Pochowski does an excellent imitation of squeezing a breast.

Chris laughs again. “I don’t know,” he demurs. “I have enough trouble with patients like you. I’ll give you a sheet of exercises, and I want you to do them three times a day.”

“My theory is, you gotta strike while you can. These women today, they don’t need us no more. They got jobs. They order babies from Guatemala. If they ever feel a tingle they can’t satisfy, they get the electric gadgets from Amazon.”

Chris shakes his head in mock dismay. “Mr. Pochowski, you are a character.”

“That’s what my last wife said.”

The next week, while munching biscotti in the coffee shop, Penny claims that her grandmother’s paella recipe surpasses that of a famous downtown tapas bar. Chris says “Hrmmm,” in which she detects a note of skepticism, leading to a spontaneous invitation to cook for him, after which she bites her lip and looks surprised at herself. But remembering Mr. Pochowski’s advice, Chris seizes the offer before she can retract it.

Actually he has never been to a tapas bar. Nor has he been to a woman’s place for dinner, and he agonizes about what that means. Does a private meal in her apartment suggest sex afterward? He feels as if his knowledge of social conventions dates not from the previous century when he was sent to jail but from a century before that.

If she does want sex, will it be obvious he has practically no experience? His lust at the prospect overshadows his terror, but he’s apprehensive about going to bed with her under a false

pretense—the pretense that she’d still want to associate with him if she knew who he was. If he tells her afterward, will she be overwhelmed with disgust and hatred? But he doesn’t dare tell her before because he’ll lose the chance.

How long, he calculates, can he keep his secret? Say he lives to his father’s age, 53—that’s only seven years from now. At work he’s maintained his facade longer than that, though admittedly no one at the clinic aside from Mr. Pochowski has an interest in the lives of the therapists.

It’s not deceit if you simply omit certain facts, right?

At last, on a Saturday night, this 46-year-old conflicted 14-year-old drives to the condo address Penny gave him, bearing a bottle of Spanish Garnacha that he has spent half an hour choosing in the liquor store. It has taken him even longer to pick the right clothes from his collection of nondescript chinos and cotton shirts. It is within four days of the 32nd anniversary of his crime.

The doorman phones upstairs, directs him to the elevator. The apartment door is opened by a large, top-heavy blonde woman in her sixties, wearing dark tan slacks and a long-sleeved yellow blouse. “Hi, Chris,” she says.

“Uh?” he pants, suddenly sweating under his winter coat.

“I’m Penny’s mother. Marlene.”

He then remembers that Penny had said, “You may get to meet my mom,” an enigmatic comment that barely registered at the time. But the main source of his confusion is that Marlene is the full name of his stepsister Marly. This woman doesn’t look like Marly, but her hair and body type give her a strong resemblance to none other than Elmira.

Confronted by this weird combination of the mother he murdered and the sister he orphaned, he has to fight an impulse to bolt back to the elevator, and it takes several seconds for him

to notice the hand Marlene holds out. He shakes it gingerly. “I’ve heard a lot about you,” she adds. “Come in.”

At this point he hardly perceives the dashing of his romantic hopes. As he steps in, he’s awed by the size of the living room and the prosperity implied by the contemporary sectional sofa, bronze lamps, Oriental rugs, shining parquet floor.

“Excuse the mess,” she says, “we don’t get many visitors.” Her proprietary air suggests that the apartment belongs to her rather than Penny. But why would Penny invite him to her mother’s home? Do they both live here?

“Um, this is a beautiful place, I don’t see any mess.”

“My papers—I had to bring work home from APP.” She waves at a neat stack on the coffee table. “I’m just putting it away.”

“APP?”

“Adult Probation and Parole. I’m director of the anti-violence units. We fight recidivism with mountains of paper,” she smiles. “And the more the system is computerized, the more paper we produce.”

Parole? Though he never applied for parole, his gaze rotates like a trapped firefly. Routinely the state board reviews major cases before a prisoner is let out, so won’t she have seen his records? She said she’d “heard a lot” about him—but she let him in the door—what does that mean?

If the combination of coincidences were merely astonishing, Chris could scam. But the situation feels surreal, almost supernatural. He’s been captured again, set up for exposure and punishment by powers far beyond his control. In his mind he hears a metal gate slamming.

After taking his coat to a closet, Marlene says, “Penny’s in the kitchen.” The apartment is so vast he can’t make out the way to the kitchen. As he hesitates, she scoops up her papers—

which he's convinced contain a summary of his own case—and marches down a hall, calling out, “Robin, Robin, our guest is here.”

A couple of minutes later, while he stands rooted in place, a skinny dark-haired girl pokes her head out of the hall. “Hello,” she says, grimacing.

This must be Penny's daughter, but he can't manage to speak before she disappears again.

Marlene clumps back in. “Where's that girl? I told her to come out of her cave and say hello.”

He summons all his courage to pretend everything is normal. “She did. She said hello. Just that.” He tries to smile wittily, and Marlene offers a wry version of her granddaughter's grimace.

“Well, our family isn't always so rude.” She takes the bottle of wine that he has been strangling by its neck since he entered. “This looks good, thank you. Come, let's find Penny. Last I saw, she was hacking tomatoes with a bread knife. I gather she's tricked you into believing she's a good cook.”

“No, she ... I mean, she said it was her grandmother's recipe.”

“Grandmother on her father's side. I think the talent has skipped recent generations, but Penny may surprise me yet. I'm always willing to be surprised.”

As they approach the kitchen, two things at the periphery of his consciousness grow dominant: a rich oniony tomatoey seafoody smell and the pounding rock of an old album by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Penny, her face moist and hair disheveled, is beating a wooden spoon on the paella pan in time with the music. “Oh no,” she cries when she spots Chris. “I didn't hear him come in. I'm not ready.”

“Turn down the music!” Marlene cups her mouth in a mock-yell. “Don't splash that sticky broth on my stove!”

Penny punches a button on the stereo and then grins lopsidedly. “Hi, Chris.”

He looks at the gleaming wood cabinets, his knees trembling. “Hey, Penny.”

After this awkward start, the evening smooths out. Penny, though clearly nervous, is talkative and funny. Chris, though convinced Marlene has the goods on him, controls his alarm enough to chat with a semblance of normality. At any moment the truth will burst into view, but the quietude he learned in prison comes into play. After all, if he’s about to be denounced as a fraud, what more is there to worry about? Only his stomach runs riot, and he must exercise strict control over potential belches and farts.

At one point Marlene says privately, in semi-apology, “Sorry if I’m intruding on your evening, Chris. But when Penny mentioned this guy she met in a coffee shop, I was so skeptical I had to stick around to see if you were the genuine article. I don’t believe in coffee shops as social centers.”

Again he wonders—she hasn’t yet dug up his case, but she does guess he’s far from a genuine article? Or she has and she knows?

The meal turns out to be excellent. In a spacious dining area adorned with contemporary paintings and lit by a chandelier of rounded glass balls—very modern-looking, he thinks—Marlene eats heartily, Penny and Chris politely, and 12-year-old Robin picks at her plate. Marlene, speaking with an air of expertise, praises the wine Chris brought, and after that bottle is finished opens a Syrah, which she pours liberally for herself and him. Rolling it on his tongue, he tries to discern whether it contains truth serum.

The pinkish wine glasses, Marlene says, are what’s left of her mother’s set of Depression glassware—“pretty stuff but cheaply

made”—and she nods as if he should grasp the significance. He shivers and drinks more to steady himself.

Penny tells a story about her students on Valentine’s Day, when she gave each one a handmade, personalized card. One boy was so embarrassed at the sentimental note from his teacher that he wouldn’t look at her the entire day. “He was so funny. ‘Davey, Davey,’ I kept saying, ‘where are you? Is your mind here on Planet Earth? Hello? Earth to Davey!’ Finally one of the girls told me his problem. How she guessed I don’t know, but I think she was jealous because she has a crush on him.”

“That is *so* juvenile,” comments Robin.

“It was just a few years ago you were in third grade, honey,” Penny reminds her. “You needn’t act so superior.”

“But that kid is stupid.”

“Davey? No, he’s one of the brightest in my class.”

“Anyway it’s all dumb. The Valentine’s bit. Hearts and flowers and cards and chocolate and shit.”

“Language, Robin, please.”

The girl, who has disdained all ingredients of the paella except two shrimps wiped clean of sauce, throws her fork down. “Everybody knows it,” she declares. “Shit, shit, shit. What Planet Earth is all about.”

“Okay, stop,” says Penny. “You cannot sit with us at the table if you’re going to be rude and obnoxious.”

“Thank you!” the girl shouts, and while stalking away she flings her cloth napkin behind her. It lands in the paella serving dish.

Penny looks stricken. “I’m so, so sorry,” she says; “this is inexcusable.” She hastens after her daughter.

Marlene sighs and raises her eyebrows as she plucks the napkin out of the food. “I’m afraid my granddaughter’s kind of unpredictable. More wine?”

Already lightheaded, Chris motions a negative, but Marlene refills his glass anyway.

“I should tell you ...” She pauses to consider, drinks again, then goes on, “... they haven’t had an easy time of it, these girls. Not that I want to scare you or anything, you already seem nervous. Still, you shouldn’t be ... drawn into a situation—” She takes a deep pull at the Syrah.

“I’m not,” he says, “I mean, not scared of *that*.” He gulps and then hastens to set the proper direction. “It’s just I, uh, feel for Penny, whatever’s going on with Robin, it’s a difficult age. I wasn’t an easy kid myself.” He angles this mixture of sincerity and smokescreen toward Marlene’s left shoulder.

“Well ... it snuck up on them, in a way. Abuse can start like that. Isolated incidents, fights, it was easy to find excuses. At least for Penny it was.”

“Sure,” he agrees, bewildered.

“Until the final time. She’s never told me how it began but it ended with him ripping clothes off her in front of the girl, and then he smacked Robin when she tried to intervene.”

He’s stunned. “Oh. God.”

“I’m talking about ...”—Marlene stares at him now over the glass, eyes grim, lips moist, her large head swaying, and he tries not to look away—“I shouldn’t be telling you this, but I want you to be careful with them both ... I’m talking about my ex-son-in-law.”

“Hrmmm.” Chris’s throat clogs from the congestive effect of outrage and sympathy.

“But the girl makes excuses for her father, Robin does, you know—complicated feelings. In spite of my knowledge of the court system, it’s taken a lot of lawyering to keep him away, and Robin resents it.”

Trying to frame a response, he mumbles into his plate.

Aside from protective impulses toward Penny, he's feeling a sudden affinity for the girl who has been nothing but rude to him, and now there's another ghost in the room, his 14-year-old self who wants to share with Robin their mutual anger and despair. He takes an uneasy drink of wine, but instead of calming him it makes his brain fuzzier and his stomach jumpier.

"I'm telling you," Marlene goes on, "because you're the first, after three years, to come in here and make her think she can start a normal life again. Is it time yet? I don't know. So ... just a word of caution. I don't want them hurt anymore."

Marlene's head continues to sway, from emotion or alcohol, and Chris now perceives part of her role here: to clue him in that her daughter and granddaughter are damaged people. Which, paradoxically, makes him feel less awkward and afraid, because he knows about damage and has been trained to deal with it.

"Penny's father," Marlene murmurs, "had a touch of it too. But he didn't dare lay a hand on me or my children. Sometimes I suspect all men have it in them, you know?"

The "it" remains unspecified, but her direct gaze across the table, with the dark knowing pupils swimming in an ocean of greenish brown, takes him back once more to those she represents. He doesn't hate Elmira now, he realizes, he can meet her glance. And Marly's too. In fact he's drawn to them both. Pulled deep into those eyes, he sinks woozily into the full physical presence of this mother-sister-judge. Is it her perfume he's smelling now, drifting over the wine and seafood?

This may be the moment. In his eerie state, suspended between two points in space-time, his head swaying in concert with Marlene's, he begins to frame his apology, though he doesn't know whether his tongue is still under his control.

Penny's return breaks the spell. "Robin's going to bed early. She admits she's not fit right now for civilized company. She says

she's sorry, Chris."

Yanked back into the present, he's disoriented. He blinks while he parses Penny's words and reminds himself how to speak. "No problem," he manages to say. After a gulp of wine he adds, "I get it ... where she's coming from."

"Yeah?" Penny looks from Chris to her mother and senses something. "Wait. Mom, have you been talking about us?"

"No," says Marlene.

"A little," says Chris.

"Shit," says Penny, "to quote my daughter. Why couldn't we have dinner without exposing our psychopathology?"

"It's not like that," Chris assures her. This persona of his, the one that goes on talking like a normal person, amazes him.

"Relax, honey. Have another glass of wine," says Marlene, taking another swallow herself.

Scrunching her lips, Penny examines the table. "There's—I guess we're done with the paella, with or without a napkin in it—there's dessert, and coffee if you want it. I'll clear the table."

"I'll help you," he says, standing. "But before dessert, I—" He takes a deep breath, almost snorting in his intensity. Is this really Chris Carter who's talking? "First ... first, I've got a story to tell you. About stuff much worse than throwing a napkin. And worse"—he catches Marlene's eye—"worse than any kind of ... what you said." Out of a delicacy that seems bizarre under the circumstances, he refrains from uttering the word *abuse*.

"Is this about your own family?" Penny looks troubled, the lines in her cheeks deepening. A strand of damp hair has stuck to her forehead.

He has an overpowering urge to hug her, which would not be appropriate, so he stumbles as he gathers dishes. "I should say right now," he mutters, his voice stiffening into formality, "how much I've enjoyed this dinner with you both ... because, because

when you hear me out, you may not want to offer me dessert.”

“Huh?” Penny wonders. “Why wouldn’t we ... ?”

Chris straightens with a stack of dirty plates at his chest.

“We’ll find out if I’m, quote, the genuine article.”

“The what?” says Penny.

“Right.” Marlene sends him her parole-officer gaze, blurred by alcohol. “We’ll get to the bottom of everything. But dessert is only imitation New York–style cheesecake from the corner deli. Not genuine at all, so you can have it regardless. As long as—watch out!—you don’t drop my good china. Careful!”

With shaky hands he juggles the dishes to the kitchen until they slide safely into the sink. He turns to see Penny behind him, watching him rather than the plates, and he has to suppress an anxious fart.

“You have me intrigued,” she teases.

He produces a tilted, jittery grin, which he thinks is genuine.

SECOND PLACE: JEFFERY RYAN LONG

Scantron

God is not a factory.

My wife often said this when she was having a hard time getting pregnant. Not that she believed in God. She just meant that problems—every fuck up and every disaster, every embarrassment and fall from grace—was not, as I liked to believe, a recurrence of the same pattern of manufactured tragedy that had beset humankind since time immemorial. No, problems were to Naomi works of art, hand-rendered. To be discussed, analyzed—appreciated even. Not simply managed.

I, on the other hand, thought everything could be managed. In that, I was wrong.

“Roger, can I talk to you for a second?”

I’d been sitting deep in my workstation reading over the payroll logs a fifth fucking time. Something was off in the totals. I couldn’t figure out where the mistake was, or who’d been paid incorrectly. The same Philip Glass record revolved on repeat in my computer CD-ROM, which I’d been playing ever since some informal feedback I’d received about how Sun Ra’s *Space Is the Place* was not only not suitable for the work environment, it was also seriously freaking everyone out.

I felt a twinge in my jaw as I turned in my chair to smile at Carol. My teeth, I hadn’t noticed until then, had been gritting against one another for hours as I went through payroll again and again. I’d been gritting my teeth for over a year. I couldn’t figure out what went wrong.

I was in love with Carol. I was married to someone else, of

course. I experienced a violent, if not totally unpleasant, seizing of the chest whenever she spoke to me, or even crossed my line of sight. She was a mother of three with exquisite hands and made butter mochi for office parties.

“Sure,” I said.

“I don’t mean to bother you. I know you’re busy.”

The scantron sheets, I thought to myself. I’ll look at the scantron sheets and match them up against the payroll logs.

“I thought we could go someplace more private.”

The bright possibility of privacy with Carol lasted less than a second, because I began to suspect that this would not be a question about her retirement fund contribution rate, or if I wanted to sign the other Roger’s consolation card. Privacy meant a concern of a sensitive nature, a human resources issue I was undoubtedly ill-equipped to address.

Still thinking of the scantron and the overpayment I’d made, I led Carole to a conference room table with overhead projector affixed to the ceiling, for which I had never made reservations and out of which I was frequently kicked, because of impromptu meetings like this one. I sat at the end of the table, and when Carol took the seat next to mine I almost moved over. I was not comfortable in this mode. Nervous, I was first to open my trap.

“You still get season tickets to the volleyball games?”

She looked at me for a moment, confused. “Yes, but—I wanted to talk about Stephen.” She sighed and crossed her legs. “Is there any way you can talk to him? I just want him to stop.”

“Of course,” I said, nodding slowly. “Stop what?”

“What he says. Like all the time. I try not to even walk past his office anymore.”

I’ll look at the copies of the scantron sheets and match them up with the payroll logs, I thought to myself.

“It makes me not want to be here.”

“What he says,” I repeated.

“Yeah, like ‘I hope my girlfriend looks as good as you when she gets to your age.’ Does he even have a girlfriend?”

Someone opened the door and looked in for a moment.

“Sorry,” I heard Rick say as the door closed again.

Carol pushed her hair behind a ringed ear. My heart was breaking. “And it’s not just the comments. It’s the coming around. The lurking at my desk for no reason. Just to make some asinine comment. I have to work, you know?”

I nodded. The proper institutional response to sexual harassment, according to my training was—what? Investigation? Termination? More training?

“I don’t want to make a big deal out of this or anything,” she said. I breathed deep, relieved. “I just want it to stop. Can you talk to him?”

“Yes,” I said. “I can definitely talk to Stephen.” I was about to put my hand on her hand comfortingly, but reconsidered. “And if the behavior continues, you let me know.” The matter was already shrinking in my mind, like a doomsday asteroid that had blazed past Earth. I just had to talk to Stephen. Already I was back onto the scantron sheets, the payroll logs.

“Thank you. I know this is the last thing you want to deal with now.”

We both turned our heads as Rick opened the door again, the IT crew behind him. “I think we have the room scheduled,” he said.

I’d known Stephen since we were undergraduates. We went to many of the same parties, and at the end of the night it was often him and me sitting across from each other on the ground, competing for biggest cloud of bong smoke. I had made an unsuccessful attempt at a creative writing program after college, and Stephen entered the workforce right way, an Institutional

Support gig for the university. When my grand failure at grad school had developed into a kind of entropy, I reached out to Stephen and he hooked me up with an HR position in his office. He was my supervisor. He was everyone's supervisor.

An hour after my meeting with Carol, after I'd thoroughly compared the payroll logs to the scantron sheets, I knocked on Stephen's open office door, two sheets of paper in my hand.

"Saffron, my man," he said, eating a jabong over his wastebasket, spitting seeds onto the liner. "What's up?"

Saffron was a nickname Stephen had given me in college, when we were cutting classes for sixty-four ounce beers at Manoa Gardens. It was the only fun we'd had together. I sat down cross his desk and slid over the copies I'd made.

"What am I looking at here?"

"That's payroll for one of our casual employees. Romeo Hernandez."

Stephen wiped his hands and looked back and forth between each sheet of paper, not comprehending.

"Well, the scantron sheet I filled out," I began.

"Fucking bubble sheets? We're still using that old bullshit?"

"For casual hires, yes."

"UH really gotta upgrade. I mean, this is ridiculous."

"Yeah, I know. I'm the guy who has to fill these in. The important thing is the numbers. The numbers on top of the scantron page, and what was actually paid out to this Romeo guy."

"Romeo. Janitor dude. Likes to take the late lunches."

"Janitor? Late lunches? Anyway, they don't match. The numbers don't match."

"So what do we do?" He slid the copies back to me.

"It's like he got overtime or something. But I entered the right amount on the bubble sheet."

“Hey man, you don’t have to give me the song and dance. Everybody makes mistakes.”

“It wasn’t a mistake. This is what he should have been paid.”

“Okay, I got it. So what do we do?”

I thought for a moment. “I guess I could less his pay next pay period, and he’ll even out for the month. Probably wouldn’t even notice it.”

“There we go. See, you don’t need me all the time.”

I stood up to leave. Just as I stepped out the door, I backed up and closed the door in front of me. “Look. Carol—”

“She’s hot, man. You know that. Even if she’s getting up there.”

“Come on, Stephen. You can’t say that. You have to stop saying things like that.”

“What, did she tell on me or something?”

“No. It’s just what I overheard. Just don’t—don’t say she’s pretty, or hot or whatever.”

“Who said I did?”

“Nobody. Just don’t, man.”

“Then tell me she’s not hot. Go on. Honestly tell me Carol’s not hot.”

Naomi was sleeping when I got home that evening. It was the last year of the lease for the apartment. The place was actually Naomi’s before I gave up my studio walkup on Kapahulu Avenue, which had been furnished with a bed inherited from a friend’s dead mother and an old roommate’s drafting table where I’d set my computer. Naomi’s apartment—our apartment, I had to remind myself—was a carpeted scene prone to black freeway soot, which floated in through screened

windows and coated the pressed wood furniture.

The freeway noise—we lived Makai of the H-1 just past Ward Avenue—was omnipresent, so we often didn't speak to each other without raising our voices. We watched television with the closed captioning on. When I stayed at my parents' home in Waianae, which I was beginning to do more often, I couldn't sleep in the silence. I heard only a far off, persistent ring. I needed the acceleration and deceleration of rubber wheels on asphalt, intermittent sirens to overpower the silence.

Not that I was in love with the city. At that time, Honolulu had become a distorted exaggeration of itself, all road work and tents on the sidewalks and corners, cranes in vacant gravel lots surrounded by naked rebar, fences everywhere, all of them covered over in torn black felt to hide the construction machinery. When Naomi's lease was up—our lease—we would move in with my folks in Waianae. Trade the city for the traffic jam. At least in Waianae I could pretend, as I jogged below the brown mountains on that access road above the pig farms, that my world hadn't totally minimized to cars and bills and work and kids, that it was truly without end.

"How was work?" Naomi's belly preceded her into the kitchen, itself clad by the drooping overhang of an extra-extra-large UH t-shirt. The same clothes I'd seen for over a month now.

I hated that t-shirt. I didn't recognize the girl I'd fallen in love with under the clothes. Even her nose didn't look the same. From a sac of fluid in this vessel, our children would emerge. Nevertheless, after the scantron and Carol and that asshole Stephen, in Naomi's presence I found peace, a drowsy kind of peace I'd known after weekend afternoon picnics at Kapiolani Park when the light is the best.

"Ah, you know. Same old bullshit." I don't know why I

didn't mention the payroll or any of the other stuff. After two years of marriage work was one of the few things we could discuss without self-consciousness, self-consciousness being the defining nature of our relationship. With passion, even, conviction. She was a fiscal administrator in another department on medical leave two months before she was to deliver our children. Twins.

I moved over to her to put my arms around her, but she backed away. Lately she hadn't wanted to be touched.

"You sleep today?" I asked.

"It's not like I sleep all the time," she said. "You try carrying two kids inside you. They're like these bloated parasites, devouring my will to live."

"We could have waited," I began to say.

"Really? Do you really want to get into this now?"

I stood looking at her—shorter than me by a foot, stout and lumpy in her maternity outfit. I didn't want to get into anything. We hadn't made love in months. And now she was carrying two babies, conceived of a procedure that cost six thousand dollars. I turned and opened the refrigerator.

"I forgot I took out this chicken. Chicken tonight?"

So we ate baked chicken and some potatoes I cooked in the microwave, both of us in front of the TV watching early-evening syndicated reruns. We used to eat on table on the lanai, but when Naomi got big the wooden chair hurt her butt (it hurt mine, too) and she took to sitting cross-legged on the couch, her plate in her hand. I looked out and longed for the glass of wine, the stereo playing on repeat the greatest hits of Os Mutantes, Naomi folding her legs on the seat of the wooden chair, going on about a uniform reimbursement allowance or the salary cap for federally funded faculty. I could relate then. I could not relate to this woman in pajamas, breathing heavily and struggling from

chair to bed.

After I washed the dishes I put on my sneakers and shorts and left the apartment. I ran, as I usually did, in the evenings, first down King Street to Kapahulu Avenue past the old studio apartment I still considered my own, then around Kapiolani Park until the sun went down and everyone I passed had gone for home and the air was so still I could smell the hay from the backside of the zoo. I ran until I knew Naomi had gone to bed. Back at the apartment, I took off my shoes and my sweaty clothes and stood naked looking at the lights of the apartments opposite. After a few moments, I unplugged the laptop and carried it into the bathroom and closed the door behind me.

The next pay period I lessed Romeo the overage from the previous check. This would return him to his regular monthly pay, even though he'd take a cut in his semi-monthly paycheck. I'd never met the dude, but knew he'd come find me if he had questions. If he was smart about his money—few of the employees were—he'd know he'd been overpaid and he was just paying back the wages he hadn't technically earned.

I wanted to document the arrangement in Romeo's personnel file, but when I looked in the locked cabinet with the other employees, I couldn't find him. Instead, Romeo's file was stacked in an overhead bin in somebody else's cubicle, the fiscal guy who arrived every night with his motorcycle helmet under his arm to move pennies out of closed accounts. The brown personnel jacket was thick, as if Romeo had enrolled in a suite of benefits, with years' worth of leave cards filed.

Which had never been the case with Romeo. His status with the university was “casual,” which meant that after every

eighty-nine days he got fired and would be hired two days later. It spared the department the cost of fringe benefits, a real recruitment. For years he'd been doing this, and nobody bothered to create a regular position for him.

I assumed the reason for not changing his casual status was his scope of work: building maintenance, some grounds duties, and the occasional janitorial assignment. Romeo was some kind of high-level custodian, a handyman who should have, long ago, been classified as such and joined the union, picked up medical and retirement. Without even knowing Romeo, I was familiar with the situation. "If we change the position, we might lose it and there's no guarantee we could hire you, anyway." So we buried the position under a stack of files on someone else's desk, and better he stayed happy with what he had. Was it his wife who carried the medical? Did anyone bother to ask?

I could call someone's attention to Romeo, the misclassified casual job that was robbing him of benefits. But with the civil service system structured the way it was, there really was no guarantee that Romeo would get or even be qualified for a regular position.

I was getting ahead of myself. I only had to straighten out his payroll. Afterward, I would disappear on paternity leave and play dumb.

As I was shelving Romeo's file, Carol walked by with only a glance. She wasn't even stopping by my desk to talk about fantasy football anymore. In that one-second glance she communicated one clear accusation: "ineffectual."

"Shake it don't break it," Stephen whispered behind me, softly.

Even though I'd adjusted his pay on the scantron sheets, Romeo ended up getting overpaid, the same amount he'd received the previous period. The only way to adjust it the

subsequent period was to not pay him at all.

The next couple of weeks Naomi grew impossibly bigger, impossibly less tolerant. She didn't seem to mind when I made it a point to be less present in the apartment—often running, though sometimes I'd look for other things that would send me on an errand.

“What about that dish? That microwavable dish to heat the bottles in? I could drive to Target.”

“We have one already,” Naomi would tell me. She took those kinds of questions as me expressing anticipation of the babies, and nestled close and heavy to me on the couch. Her eyes closed. I shifted so she couldn't hear how fast my heart was beating. Lately it beat quickly, especially in bed, alone and awake while Naomi strolled, basket in hand, through the Targets and Wal-Marts of slumber land.

Payday came around again and I thought of how Romeo might find me once he realized he hadn't been paid. I planned out my lecture to him. You see, you were overpaid these previous periods—no, take a look at your paystubs—and I just lessed—I took away the money you'd already been paid. You were overpaid, see? I foresaw a joyless slog in providing documentation and explanation. His pay rate—did he even know what his pay rate was? Or did he just show up and work everyday and money would be delivered unto him?

But if we were the ones who overpaid him wasn't that our fault? The more I went over my spiel for this motherfucker, the

more panicked I became. What, you spent all the money already? That's on you. You should have known.

By lunch I was a mess, and an hour after lunch, long after payroll had gone through, I still hadn't gotten a call from Romeo. Maybe he just understood everything anyway. Maybe he knew the ins and outs of DAGS and central payroll office scantron bullshit. This pay period I hadn't even submitted a scantron sheet for Romeo because he wasn't getting paid.

When I logged into the financial management system I saw he'd once again been overpaid, just as he had the previous periods.

Was it truly unjust? Thousands of dollars in taxpayers' money going to a janitor because of a mistake. My mistake. Unjust to whom, though? To Romeo, who by every reasonable measure had been underpaid and undervalued for years? To the taxpayers, who were already throwing gobs of money down the toilet to pay off canceled executive contracts? To me, who was trying not to get fired before his kids were born? I called payroll.

"Hernandez, yes," the payroll clerk said. "He was paid the amount your office submitted."

"But I didn't submit an amount," I said. "I didn't even turn in a scantron sheet."

"That's inaccurate. We wouldn't have paid the employee unless a scantron sheet was submitted."

"I have my copy here," I said, holding the blank scantron sheet to my face.

"Your copy of what was submitted?"

"I didn't submit anything," I said.

"I don't understand. You're saying you didn't submit anything, but you have a copy of what you submitted. I have to go now. What we process through the scantron is what the employee is paid."

The scantron. I hung up the phone.

I hadn't noticed Carol standing behind my cubicle wall. Carol, for whom my love was cosmically unfulfilled. If only I died at that moment, so I would have a chance with her in my next life. Her standing there, dressed in white and severe—I felt my chest as bottomless, I felt my heart falling and falling into it.

“I'm sorry to bother you. I really am. I just wanted to follow up.”

“Hold that thought,” I said, and stood from my desk.

Carol stepped out of my way as I walked past her to Stephen's office. Yes, I'd been to some training, and I knew the terms. But I couldn't imagine what I would say to him. I thought of only the scantron, how it was ruining my life, and no one even noticed. Stephen was clicking away a window from his browser when I pushed the door closed behind me, hard. I didn't slam it, I just closed it hard enough so they'd all see me through the window when they looked up from their own administrative bullshit.

“Jeez, Saff, I'm gonna have to ask you to schedule an appointment.”

“Cut the crap,” I said, and immediately I saw the anger, the automatic hatred, bloom over his face. I needed to keep talking before he started. Before I lost my nerve.

“Keep your mouth shut. I'm telling you this for your own fucking good. You got someone out there this close to filing sexual harassment on your ass. This isn't bullshit. This is termination. This is ‘my career is ruined and I can't get a fucking job anywhere.’ I told you already. I hear one more word from Carol, or from anyone, I'll have an investigation so far up your ass you'll be shitting from your eyes.” I wasn't sure what that meant. “And you know what? I'll make sure I get assigned to the investigation. Then, I guarantee you, you're going up the river

for good.”

For the first time since I could remember, my heart rate was even. And I wasn't even thinking about Carol, or an investigation, or that everyone heard or saw from the outside. I was thinking about how some fucking obsolete machine in some office on campus was going to ruin me, and what my daughters, when they were older, would think of their homeless dad.

As soon as it had appeared, the anger and hatred dropped out of Stephen's face.

I felt sorry for him. How many women had I sexually harassed in my mind? I just didn't have the guts to do anything about it.

I walked past Carol to my cubicle and opened my bottom drawer, withdrawing the pack of cigarettes I'd been stashing at work because I'd told Naomi I'd quit.

I smoked at the Japanese gardens, a little gravel path on a hill that led to a fishpond surrounded by rocks. When I brought lunches to work I ate them there, throwing little balls of bread from my sandwich to the koi in the water. I sat on the grass near the stream that ran below the gardens because someone else was in my usual spot, lying down and laughing as he spoke on a cell phone. At first I despised him, but moments later I recognized him from the driver's license copy we had on file.

Romeo Hernandez did indeed like his late lunches. Here it was 2:30 and he was still on his break. His little cooler bag, Hawaiian print, was next to where he lay in the grass. I considered walking up to him, casting a shadow on his smiling face as he talked to his—wife? Son? Mother? I'd ask him if he knew he'd been overpaid. Maybe he knew it, maybe that's why

he was smiling, because he'd put one over on the man.

I wondered what he'd been saving, what he'd been putting away for retirement. What kind of house he shared with his family. What his kids thought of him. If his boss would try to fire him. I knew Stephen would come at me, after he'd put together a little scheme in his insectoid brain. Like I was the one harassing everyone. And where would Carol be then?

What kind of self-respect did Romeo have? Even with a couple hundred bucks more a month from unaccounted overpayments, what could he have to smile about?

It had been awhile. It had been a while since I called my wife from work. It had been a while since I lay in the grass. It had been a while since I smiled. I finished my cigarette and spent the rest of the day in meetings, though fuck knows what they were about.

It floated before me, a black mass with no visible edges, incredibly dense, carved out of the night itself. The single feature that distinguished the Scantron from the night was the flickering red light at its center. The red light that proved that the Scantron was always on, to absorb all that was thrown into it.

When I awoke I was shaking. Once a man had walked in on me and his ex-girlfriend in bed—he jumped on me and punched me relentlessly in the face, before he pushed her into the closet. Awake now, I found myself shaking as I'd done then, after I'd put on my pants and made ready to fight him outside. His former girlfriend stood screaming in his uncomprehending face. Emerging from a blackout stupor, he realized where he was and left without a word. Later, as she held me in bed I shook, and shook and shook.

Naomi placed her hands on my back and at once I stopped. “What’s wrong, honey?” she said to the back of my head. I’d turned away from her in my sleep.

Naomi’s hands ran along my back and I cried. Only in the eyes. I exhaled, long and deep.

“Is it the babies?”

My sister had died in a car accident the year earlier, around the time Naomi began talking about children. Her death broke my parents. What would it do to me? Who the fuck would put themselves through this shit?

“No,” I said.

It was only the fingertips along my back now. I closed my eyes.

“What is it?”

“Would you stay with me if I lost my job?”

“Of course,” she replied at once. Then her fingers stopped. “But you’re not losing your job, are you?”

“I hope not,” I said.

“It isn’t the greatest time.” She sighed. “But I’m going back to work again, after all this. If you weren’t working, well, that would give us more time with the babies. Us. Not just me.” She yawned. “But I know you couldn’t live with yourself if that happened. You care about things too much.”

“I don’t think I do, Naomi.”

“Stop it. You care about what everybody thinks. You care about what I think way, way too much.”

I turned around. “Is that bad?”

“No. It just means that either one of us could be completely full of shit at any given time. So let’s just take it easier, man. We’ll be fine.” Naomi pulled me close and kissed me.

It became clear what I had to do. For Naomi, for myself, for

my job, for the two kids for whom I had no say in the naming.
I had to destroy the scantron.

I knew what building housed the scantron because I'd had to drive the payroll bubble sheets directly to the office when there was a late report, to avoid missing the pay deadline. It was in one of those non-descript portable buildings at the bottom of campus, unmarked doors behind which the most sensitive operations of the university took place. Social security numbers, birthdates, salaries—all locked in drawers and databases and reported to the state payroll office, via fax and notarized originals. Even at that time the whole thing was archaic.

I arrived at the wooden portable—elevated slightly above the ground and accessed by three stairs—late in the night, wearing a hoodie and running shoes. This late, security focused their efforts mostly around upper campus and the dorms. There was no one to see me. All I needed to get into the office was a plastic card and a flashlight.

Beyond the entrance was a counter with two trays, one for pickup and the other for drop off. I stepped behind the counter and pointed the flashlight into two open doors of adjoining offices, one an expansive space with several desks and computers, filing cabinets and drawers along all the walls. In the other room, a single desk and behind the desk, a metal table with what looked like a gray plastic box on top of it.

The scantron wasn't the infinite black substance of my dream. There was no flickering red light to indicate its sentience. It wasn't even on. In the blue beam of my flashlight, it looked like a printer, with one tray for feeding the bubble sheets and another catch tray for the processed sheets.

The terror was gone. The drive to destroy state property had departed. I simply held the scantron in the glare of my flashlight, shaking though I was quite warm, having run all the way to campus in a sweatshirt.

“You’re going to make me lose my job,” I said.

And at that moment I saw my future.

I saw that Stephen would be out of his office in the next few weeks. They’d put Carol in there. I saw that, in the end, Romeo would be all right. I saw that I’d be making Naomi dinner that evening. I saw that I’d be making Naomi dinner for the rest of my life.

“So what did you do, Daddy?” I heard my daughters say. “What did you do to the machine? What did you do to the janitor?”

Well, that was when they caught me trespassing. I was arrested, naturally. A few hours and jail, but your mom bailed me out. You can ask her to tell the rest of the story when I take you back to her place this evening.

You know the story. The payroll office was burned to the ground. They’d seen me on security video. I got two years.

I apologized to Carol.

I apologized to Stephen.

I apologized to Romeo.

The janitor? I made him pay back every red cent to the university. When he didn’t, I sent a collection agency on his ass. Garnished his wages, made him show up in court.

“What did you do, Daddy?” I heard my daughters say.

Like Naomi said before I left the house: all I had to do was go back, go back to Romeo’s records, change the rate of pay, get a signature from someone who didn’t read what he signed—and he probably wouldn’t care if he did—and Romeo would be paid what he should have been paid. Like Naomi said. Like the

scantron said. I just had to fix it.

“So what did you do, Dad? What did you do?”

What did I do? What the scantron told me to do.

I turned off the flashlight and left the office. I played God. I gave us all a break.

THIRD PLACE: SAM IKEHARA

Weaving

*“Often, it was as if I had never spoken,
I heard my words echo in deep caverns of thought,
as if they hung about like cigarette smoke in a still room,
missionless; or else they were lost for ever
in the sounds of the city” – Sam Selvon*

It’s 9:57 at night and the highway, unpopulated, seems as though it will never end, but end it must—United Airlines is waiting for me. Two sleeping pills later it’s like this: I’m here and here is the city. Unlike home, there are bridges here, from Covent Garden to Waterloo, from St. Paul’s to Tate, from station to station, from she and I, between Anna and I—mind the gap.

Find a calendar, pick a date, and any of our days happen like this: I wait for Anna outside of our shared building, and when she comes out, she has her lighter and fag ready, but the mighty wind has her beat, so she stashes it in the pocket of her coat. She is beautiful to look at, both in sunlight and moonlight, but there is something about the mid-morning gray sky that accentuates her luminosity to me, makes me feel as though this city and its climate were built for her. Her shoulder-length hair, dry from years of bleach and color, floats, but does not flow in the wind; I take her arm in mine, our elbows lock, and she walks. I am happy to follow.

We arrive at Hammersmith station and she is hungry. Anna thought a smoke would be filling enough, but don't worry, I tell her, I don't mind having a second breakfast—and I don't. We take the District Line to High Street Kensington (there is a great salad bar there, she assures me). We emerge from the station and are met with sudden downpour—while umbrellas stampede toward us, we rush out and are lost within a matter of cold minutes. She says, I've gone this way before, it should be here, why isn't it here? I'm sorry, I say, as if I were at fault. We eventually find it and laugh—how could we have missed this three story Whole Foods? Anna makes a salad of beets, arugula, farro, and roasted carrots, topping it off with extra virgin olive oil, then balsamic vinegar, and finally with a sprinkle of salt and pepper. I pour myself a ladle of the Thai red curry, but also the Guinness stew, taking extra care to keep my bowl straight, steady, so as to not have the red and brown weave into each other and become one. I fail. Anna, however, approves and buys naan to wipe the bowl clean.

Both beets and carrots are in season, and as we walk through the winter bounty, I wonder if Anna knew that as she composed her salad. We walk through the aisles, our elbows lock, and she shares with me her favorite things: the citrus kombucha facial cleanser, the mortadella in the showcase. She reads me nutrition facts from the different flavors of muesli, taking important note of the sugar content—she jokes that with me, she needs no excess sugar in her life. I laugh, politely, and make a face but am flattered by her platitude and remember it fondly for the rest of the week. We bid goodbye to the market, all three stories of it, and stop in Zara, which she tells me is a Spanish owned clothing store. All my life I have learned to enter stores and look down, so as to never really see, never touch—that is, until I've reached the

back, where damaged items are available for a price within my reach. But Anna, she looks with intent at everything, but especially that which graces the front of any store, the season's freshest bounty of both produce and fashion. She grabs coats off hangers, sits down to try on shoes, and she looks beautiful in it all, for Anna knows that she is beautiful and has no trouble discerning what will best service her. When she is done, we walk down the high street, our elbows lock, and I try to figure out how the rain is falling—but the wind forces it from the left and sometimes the right and it is piercing, searing, without reason, or method to its celestial madness.

I was returning from my interview at the Hammersmith TESCO. When I was a child, I had loved the noise cash registers made as they *beeped* items past their scanner, and ever since, it has been my dream to work as a cashier in a grocery store at some point in my life. And though my status as a national alien caused me to immediately fail the interview, I remember the day fondly as it was the day I met Anna in our building's lift. She was coming home early from the gym with our neighbor Arthur, where he played football and she studied to be a physical trainer and nutritionist. We were fast friends—Anna, she'd been in the city three months longer than me and she taught me to leave milk on the shaded part of the windowsill, to not bother shopping on Sundays (everything is open for a measly six hours), and to say rubbish bin (never trash can)—all valuable lessons she learned while making the transition from her native Bologna to here, to the city. Anna bought me a card holder for my Oyster card, so I would no longer stumble with my wallet, hold up the bus line, and expose myself as other in this city, as I did every time I felt compelled or was required to speak in my American way. And it is with her I sat down at a table and became a master of this country's currency and put the

last of my American necessities away, loose change and my license, hoping to never need them again. Now I am able to pay for my blue cans of baked beans precisely, with exact change, in a matter of seconds.

One morning we wait for the 371 at Sainsbury's. In her purse she carries four beefsteak tomatoes, cradled atop her knitted scarf, 80 pence apiece. She is overjoyed. Summer, she says, tonight I will begin my family's *tagliatelle al ragu*, you know the secret? Some milk. Surely, you did not know that true *ragu* has milk, no? And the carrots, they must be small, so small, so you get their natural sweetness, and nothing else. When my grandmother makes it, it takes eight hours—torture, I tell you, waiting eight hours. But the rewards are infinite. I never eat pasta anymore—it's all empty carbs, and no one, absolutely no one would trust a trainer and nutritionist that is fat. But I want to make it for you.

The bus moves at a glacial pace through the incessant rain so we return to the building much later than anticipated and Anna is itching for a smoke. Our conversation is always the same when she smokes, it's always Anna telling me about the guilt she feels, making me wait in the cold and inhale her smoke, and it's always me telling her that it's okay, that I want to be with her. The face Anna makes when she smokes and the face Anna makes after she sprints a hundred meters—they are one and the same. Her thinly plucked brows furrow and her eyes, always looking for something far off, contain a suggestion of fear, but mostly relief, and I somehow come to find her even more beautiful. Today she asks, why don't you at least try one, who knows, maybe you'll like it. And I make the mistake of divulging to her that, only a year ago, my grandfather passed away from lung cancer. Mother and I didn't even know he was sick until it infiltrated his lymph nodes. As if my heart wasn't beating quickly enough already,

Anna weaves her fingers through mine, and holds my hand to her chest. She was smiling only seconds ago, but now wears that familiar face, though because of me, it is distorted. I stare at her eyes, which bear fear more than anything else. The one who feels guilt is now me, for making Anna uncomfortable, when all she's ever done was give me hope for this city, where winter won't quit and summer, with its rain and its haze and its soggy leaves, isn't really summer at all.

We both see Arthur, running from the bus stop, using his bag of football gear to shield him from the weather. It's the usual fare: fancy seeing you ladies here, massive rain today, innit? Anna quickly relinquishes my hand, tries to hide it as if it were not connected to my body, and insists he take a smoke, which he happily accepts, explaining that his are all probably soaked and that he'd repay the favor soon enough. He asks if I've heard back from ASDA, another place I applied to for work, and I tell him it was another instant rejection, as always because I am alien, monster, grotesque in my many forms of deviance: national, cultural, social. He explains that his best mate, Rob, works at this pub and they need dish washers. He continues, telling me that it's a bloody good deal, as you take home money every night and more importantly because this pub has an Ollie—and an Ollie, he relates, is what every person like *me* wants. An Ollie has spent his life savings, and his parent's, building a pub, and an Ollie will turn a blind eye to employing illegals, Orientals, what have you, so that he may continue sliding pints to the blokes who root for Chelsea, Manchester, whatever.

Now I commute to the East End six nights a week and wash dishes. As per Ollie's orders, I go in through the back door and wash whatever Rob and Peter drop into the sink. At the end of the night, I am rewarded with a small wad of bills, the amount of which varies from night to night, and a shepherd's pie in

desperate need of some salt. After a few weeks of having never broken a pint, a plate, or my perfect attendance, I ask Ollie about my chances of someday seeing and working the front and he tells me maybe. But you know, he continues, this place is more than a pub, it's a home for men, for a community of men. You can see that, can't you? Robby and Pete, they fit, they belong, they can get in on the banter, the football, they can down a pint like the rest of them, and it's like neighbors, like family. Surely you understand.

The next day I am at Hammersmith station and I look to the wall populated with clocks; Anna and I agreed to meet at eleven, giving her time to head to the gym for an early workout, and allowing me the chance to sleep in, but it is half past noon. I feel in my coat pocket for my cell phone, but remember that I have no minutes left in my pay as you go account, so I alternate between standing next to the flower kiosk, where we agreed to meet, and watching the young woman roll out pretzels at the small stand in front of Starbucks. To pass the time, I remember the afternoons Anna and I spent at Richmond Park, looking at herds of deer, sitting under different trees. I would rest my head on her right shoulder, making her scent of citrus easily accessible. I stretched my mind in every direction, desperate to uncover some fascinating tidbit of trivia to entertain Anna, perhaps make her laugh. Only once have I made her laugh so hysterically that she was rendered completely inaudible, comparable only to a muted television, and that was when I disclosed to her how, at the age of seven, I inflicted a black eye upon myself. I ended up telling her what little, insignificant things I knew about Lord Byron: his deformed right foot, his unbelievable number of pets, and how he died a hero in Greece. She bestowed upon me a courtesy laugh, and said, wouldn't it be nice if we lived in a place that allowed us an absurd amount of

pets? Or at least one dog? I agreed that it would be nice. A lone deer attracted her wandering gaze and I knew she began to envision that alternative world in which, together, we raised a dog, and at the time, I wondered how much the image in her head matched my own. She began considering dog names aloud, and then began talking about her mother, who made her *sfrappole* every Sunday. Every country, every place has fried dough dipped in sugar, Anna assured me. But my mother made it special, she said, her secret was orange zest and orange juice, she called them angel wings for her angel. She would have loved you, Summer. I asked how her mother is, if she could come for a visit, and before I knew it, before we knew it, she wove her fingers through mine, telling me that she passed just a few months before. We sat there, deer abound, fingers laced, and we scared each other by approaching our own fundamental truths. How did we get here, why are we here, where do we go now, when does it end, does it have to end at all? Who is the city, who are we in this city, who will this city make us become?

At fifteen past one I am eating a cheddar pretzel, though the whole point was to get lunch. I begin to think the worst, that there was an accident, that she is in trouble, or worst of all, that she has finally realized I am not worth her time. She arrives at half past one and is shocked that I would still be waiting, failing to understand that I have nowhere else to go, and no one else to be with. I thank her for coming and she asks me if I'm mad, and I tell her, no, mistakes happen, I can't imagine being angry with you. No, she says, *mad*, like, the Mad Hatter, as in, are you crazy? And in my happiness to see her, and her massive guilt, I fail to acknowledge Arthur's presence. I'm sorry, he says, as if he were at fault—and as he continues speaking, I realize he is. We got caught up at the gym and were famished from the workout, so we had a bite at that place in Covent Garden—to die for, he

says. The three of us board the District Line for High Street Kensington anyway, and I sit opposite to the two of them in the crowded tube, and after a while of reading the back of someone else's newspaper, I look at Anna, expecting to see her eyes looking for something far off, but instead she is laughing with Arthur, pointing at ads for various West End productions above my head.

Anna and Arthur watch as I eat the lunch they bought me and I am reminded why people always insist that eating is a social, communal thing. I never thought I'd say this, Anna says, but I actually wish I were hungry, then I could eat with you. I finish drinking my butternut squash soup as quickly as possible, so much so that I feel all the points and places the soup touched on its way down long after we leave the cafe, as the three of us look upon sites that have grown so familiar, perhaps even nostalgic. Each time we enter a store, there is a dispersal, like roaches after the lights come on, but I somehow manage to find the both of them when it's time to leave. On the way home, I try to quell Anna's unusual amount of silence and ask what she bought at Whole Foods, and she tells me that she's finally going to make her family's *tagliatelle al ragu* for me.

The next time I see Anna, a month later, we sit on her twin bed and drink whatever the both of us have in our limited pantry though it's only three in the afternoon. I have been told that you don't mix colors when it comes to liquor, that the brown liquids like rum go with Coca Cola, and the clear ones like vodka go with Sprite, but Anna and I have always found vodka and Coca Cola to be the perfect amalgamation for us. She pours the Coca Cola, then the vodka, and I notice that my months old, low-shelf vodka has grown syrupy, resists the Coca Cola's efforts to penetrate it. Anna complains about having to work in the morning and I complain about having to work at night. She tells

me that she and Arthur have gone on “proper” dates now, to which I shrug.

She says, he bought me this frozen television dinner of spinach ravioli. It was like a proper movie, Summer. He set the table, lit a candle. But when he went to the toilet I saw the box in the rubbish, and the pasta, it had so much sodium, just so many calories, I couldn’t eat it. What do you think? I was rude, wasn’t I?

I stir my drink, trying to force the two liquids together, and nod in the right places so she knows I’m hearing her. I assure her that Arthur’s feelings are not hurt.

But, she says, you’re being too nice. It was a bit heartless, wasn’t it? After all, he made it for me.

I remind her that buying and heating a frozen meal doesn’t mean anything, requires absolutely no effort.

Yeah, but you know, you should have seen it, if only you had seen it, then you might be able to understand. It was something out of the telly. Now that I’ve got a Brit for a boyfriend, I’m kind of Brit too, aren’t I?

Maybe by association, I think, but dare not say.

Anna smiled. I’ve got a proper reason for being here, she said.

A week later I am in her kitchen, restless, as I sit quietly and watch her stir, taste, add salt, stir again, taste again. Her hair is tied into a bun, sauce has burst on her sweater in different places, and she uses socks as potholders to drain the pasta.

Don’t worry, she says, they’re clean.

For the first time, I am nervous to be with her, and force laughter as a way to fill the silence. Without missing a beat, Anna pours the Coca Cola, then the vodka, and I occupy myself by contemplating the weaving contained within my glass that has grown so mundane, the way in which things sometimes refuse to

consolidate, forever weaving past, through, above, around one another, often times leaving the possibility of reversal impossible for both, though sometimes only one.

We finally sit to eat and Anna is disappointed. There are noticeable chunks of carrot and celery in the pasta and she insists that it needs more salt, that maybe she didn't put enough ground pancetta. Between bites she tells me it's not right, not even close, that her mother would not recognize this mess of red and brown in front of her. She abandons it quickly, waiting for me as I finish every bite of the small bowl (portion control, she warns, is an important practice) and then we both stand in the kitchen, Anna holding the pot while I scrub the crusty bits and demonstrate to her the fruitful education of my life in the city.

Kipuka

Plenty times before, Pastor Cooke had surfaced from deep sleep to find he was stuck inside himself. On those mornings it was normal to wake with heat and tightness in the chest, and like a shifting under the skin—just like organs rubbing, grinding, maybe. Sometimes he'd panic. If the limbs stayed insubordinate for too long or the tremors inside got to where they might split him up the middle, he would close his eyes and pray, ask for calm and clarity of mind, for reason, and he'd wait out the paralysis, which was just an awakening before the body had finished its R.E.M. cycle, a malfunction of the flesh that would soon fix itself, God willing.

This morning, waking on the living room couch with the rattan armrest digging into the back of his neck, he couldn't talk himself calm. The body, he told himself, was imperfect, this paralysis the same as all the others. But he couldn't ignore feeling like something was in the room with him. Cooke thought to belly breathe, a trick he taught to congregants when they felt overwhelmed in a counseling session. He watched the chest inflate with a long, deep draw, but it was only the mechanics of breathing, not breath itself, the air getting lost in the lungs, never making it to the blood.

The room flickered, his head expanding at the temples. The thing was watching him. He sensed it, tucked away in the periphery. He called for Lani, asleep in the bedroom, but he

could only make guttural, underwater sounds.

What Cooke saw when it stepped from the periphery on the far end of the couch was an upright figure, black and long-limbed, dimensional but featureless. It stepped over the armrest and began to crawl over his body, just like a shadow man with eyes, yet Cooke could feel like its gaze on him. He shut his eyes, felt the thing's dull weight pressing on his chest, and began to say a prayer that quickly unraveled to the word *please*, repeated again and again. He tried to force the idea that this was all just sleep paralysis, the black figure nothing more than a hallucination caused by being stuck between sleep and waking. Soon, and with lots of focus, he was able to ease into this explanation, accepting the premise and its reasoning when the weight on his chest lifted and his anxiety began to calm, as he peeked through his eyelids and saw that he was alone in the room.

Dusty sunlight came through the blinds and shone in slants on the carpet beside him. From somewhere in the forest, he heard a band of wild roosters crowing into the morning. Cooke raised his leg a few inches. He shrugged a shoulder. His arms and legs felt just like touching an electric, cattle fence, the pulsing and popping. A breeze lifted the blinds, filling the room with sunlight and sweet and brine, the trades coming in from the ocean, banking off the cliffs and through the stand of plumeria trees, through the picture window screen. He wiped the sweat from his hairline and neck.

The roosters crowed again, closer now, in the backyard, but this time he noticed how clearly he could hear them, how their calls were plain and undevoured by the noise of the heavy machinery next door.

No diesel engines, Cooke thought. No beeping from trucks backing up, no tires grinding the cinder road. He listened for the hammers on wood, the churning cement mixer, and he listened for the blown speakers that buzzed the low notes of jangly country music.

Almost two years and Jenkins still wasn't done with that house. He'd been building it piecemeal, when money was good, Cooke assumed, because he'd seen how the gaps in construction were in line with the gaps in Jenkins's tithing frequency and amount. The records showed that Jenkins was having a fruitful year, which pleased Pastor Cooke. But, he was also displeased with the recent additions and alterations to Jenkins's never-ending project.

Jenkins's house was just like a cartoon, exaggerated and bloated, something from a dream. Its imposing walls, made of dull concrete, rose 30 feet and were shaped into battlements at the top. Encircling the compound was a koi-filled moat that had gone green with algae. With the new money, he'd installed a plywood drawbridge that raised and lowered on a pulley system.

Cooke had tolerated the project at first because Jenkins had been a faithful member, an asset to the congregation, and had taken an interest in the spiritual life since their first meeting. That tolerance had lessened in recent months when, one by one, turrets went up at each corner of the compound, stretching beyond the tops of the ohia trees, the second taller than the first, the fourth taller than the third, until the house blocked Cooke's view of the ocean and the horizon. Jenkins's castle belonged in Disneyland. Not here. Not in Puna.

Jenkins had been part of the most recent wave of mainlanders washing up in Puna, some of them speculators, some of them looking to own a piece of paradise for good—silver-haired retirees, gays starting bed and breakfasts, nirvana seekers. Never mind the unpaved roads. Never mind that they were off the county water line. Sidewalks and streetlights were the kinds of things that bored them, anyway. The talk going around blamed Oprah. She was one of the first to go on TV and encourage everyone to buy up the cheap land in Puna, even if it was off the grid and Kīlauea flows constantly remade the landscape. “*God’s not making any more land in Hawai’i*,” Oprah said. Cooke had been around long enough to know that this was a thing before Oprah said it was. He had grown up here, on the cliffs at the border of Kīlauea and the ocean, where shafts of vog lifted from volcanic vents on one side and the tides rose and plunged on the other.

He’d met with Jenkins in the church office the previous day to talk about some faith issues he was having—a common reason for congregant appointments. Jenkins sat down on the other side of the desk, reluctant to make eye contact, and instead concentrated on his hands, which were cracked and scarred. He nervously stroked a blackened thumbnail.

“I think you’re doing OK,” Pastor Cooke said. “Reading your Bible? Daily Prayers, yeah? Then you’re doing all the things you’re supposed to do.” He closed his eyes and tapped his finger between his eyebrows. “Although, it’s guaranteed nothing, but I’ll ask anyway. Because, I’ve noticed you’ve been attending Sunday services more infrequently lately. And, I wonder if your project is becoming an idolatrous activity, the reason for your faith issues.”

Cooke couldn't put things in order. He had been aware of the paralysis as soon as he woke and he remembered feeling the other's presence in the room. But, he started to second guess his own story. Because he swore he felt the dark presence even before he opened his eyes. He couldn't arrange in a timeline when he heard the rooster, when he saw the black figure. When did he notice it was silent next door? It was as if all of these moments had converged on him in a single revelation.

"This morning when I first woke up was crazy," he said to Lani at dinner that evening. They were sitting at the table closest to the giant fish tank near the entrance of the restaurant. Neon tetra flitted through the dust-flecked water, avoiding the large, bug-eyed one hovering just beneath the surface.

"Cause you couldn't move?" Lani asked, motioning for the shoyu. She took it from him and poured it in loops over her noodles, never looking down from the mounted TV.

"Yeah, but I was thinking about Jenkins at the same time. Weird, yeah? I was thinking, 'What? No racket from that damn house?'"

"He wasn't working, huh?"

"Nope. I don't know why."

"Maybe he chickened out and went home." She nodded toward the TV. "I would chicken out, too, if right after I moved here Pele started taking people's houses. Look, Tanaka's store is about to go."

“If it was that, he would have told me. The guy’s got problems, and lucky for me I get to hear every single one.”

“That’s how, right?” she said, shifting her focus from the TV to her bowl. “He wouldn’t see you if he didn’t have problems. They have problems, you fix problems, they feel better, the Lord blesses everyone.”

“But, I blamed the house when he came to see me. He was having faith problems again. He was doing grouting up on one of the towers of that thing and the wind blew him back. He almost went over the edge but grabbed the wall and got himself back up. Not before seeing that water twenty feet below, breaking on the cliff. He swears to me he felt the spray. Sat up there until evening time. Just thinking, he said. He felt hopeless. But who doesn’t feel hopeless sometimes?”

“He needs a wife, kids, something to make him responsible.” Lani’s hand was halfway to her mouth, a tangle of noodles pinched at the end of her chopsticks. “You blamed the house...”

“It’s just with everybody else, when they come to talk to me about problems they’re having, spiritual or temporal, whatever, I run through the church-bible-prayer questions, and tell them as long as they’re doing those three things they’re on-track, on the straight and narrow, and when our spiritual responsibilities are fulfilled our temporal ones are as well.” Pastor Cooke picked a grain of rice from his empty plate and slipped it into his mouth. “You know the talk. If they’re missing any of those three—with Jenkins, we hadn’t seen him in church as much—we work to strengthen those areas, put them on a plan. You’re going to read x-number of scriptures each day, x-number of missed Sunday

services before we come by your house to pick you up, three prayers a day to start. Talk about the blessings to be had. If not the blessings, then punishment. That kind of talk. But, yesterday, with Jenkins, I totally left the script and launched into talking about idolatry. How for some people it's that brand new car. Or their job, making money. For a lot of people it's buying things they can't pay for. Worldly things. Maybe I just got tired of telling him the same thing. I mean, since he's been here he's come to talk to me every month. But, you think he ever listens to me? No way. I say, 'Steve, this house might be affecting your spiritual progress. Already you're missing Sunday services to work on it. It's taking your attention away from God.' I start to ask him questions about almost going over the edge that day. Try to make him relive it. 'What did you think of first when you started to go off balance? What did you feel when you saw that water?' He doesn't say much. Always, he never says much. Tells me again he felt hopeless, but when I ask him to describe it more, he can't."

Lani took another bite, slurped up the noodles dangling from her lip. "And what?" she said.

"And... And, I should've stuck with the script. I don't know why—"

Their waitress interrupted, asking if they had room for dessert, but Pastor Cooke waved off the idea. "Full," he said. He complimented the food, said it was real tasty, like always. The waitress placed two foam containers and the bill at the edge of the table.

"Here, take it. I cannot see," he said. He slid the bill across the

table through a pool of water.

“She didn’t give us discount,” Lani said, handing back the bill. “She’s right there. Hurry, before she goes.”

Pastor Cooke put on his glasses and held the bill away from him as he read it. “I don’t know how you can read this chicken scratch,” he said.

“You know what *hurry* means?”

“Oh, never mind. I see.” He turned and waved his hand to get the waitress’s attention, but she was busy scribbling on a small notepad the orders of the next table. Pastor Cooke leaned over and tugged lightly on her apron. She jumped, glared at him as he explained she’d forgotten to include in the clergy discount. “Is it five or ten percent?” he asked.

She smiled flatly and told him she’d be with him afterwards. She was new. Probably didn’t even know what the daily specials were, or what *clergy* means, or who the regulars are. She would learn, eventually.

“I don’t see it on here,” Pastor Cooke said when the waitress returned. “I don’t see it.” He held the bill out and she leaned in to read it. “The clergy discount.”

“I don’t know what’s that but I ask my manager.”

“Who’s tonight? Wayne? Tell Wayne it’s for me. Tell him Pastor Cooke.”

“Wayne, I don’t know. It’s Linda,” she said, pointing across the room. “It’s OK, I ask Linda now.”

“Linda?” Lani said, after the waitress left. “Who’s Linda?”

“Who’s Linda?”

“That’s what I just said.”

“Oh. I couldn’t hear. I don’t know who is Linda.”

Cooke rested his glasses on his forehead. He stretched his neck so he could see over the top of the booth. The waitress was at the register, pecking on the keys and speaking over her shoulder to the woman behind her, a gray lady with a half-palsied face. She looked like a fresh-off-the-boat from Guangdong, another cousin or aunty or sister shipped in to work and earn.

Cooke sat back in the booth and twisted up his face so Lani understood that he had nothing new to report. He refilled his teacup, lifted it to his lips and blew into it, cautiously sipping as he tried to remember what he was saying before the waitress interrupted. Yes, that’s what it was.

“Maybe Jenkins would start thinking,” Pastor Cooke continued, “about how the house was affecting his eternal wellbeing. Falling over the edge might be some kind of message from up there.” He pointed to the ceiling.

“You...”

“Me, what?”

“Just... You,” Lani snorted into her glass. “Nothing. Never mind. Oh yeah. It’s ten, tell her. Tell her Wayne usually gives us 10 percent.”

The waitress was still on the other side of the room, now huddled with the gray lady, bent over the counter. Cooke scratched the skin between his eyebrows and gave in to the weight of his eyelids. Closing his eyes relieved the pressure in his temples.

A lot of the members had a hard time with Lani. He watched her gulp down her glass and could see how some of the members said she was stuck up, which is the gossip he’d heard for a long time. She was like his mother: if you say or do the wrong thing, she was going to make you pay for it. Now he felt stupid for trying to talk to her about it. There was no point trying to explain himself, how he handled the Jenkins situation. And, he didn’t know how to tell her that he spent the day feeling like the ocean would come up over cliff and sweep him out to sea, or how he was too aware of the size and speed of each car in the opposite lane as he drove to Hilo.

The bells fastened above the entrance doors jangled.

“James,” Lani said.

Cooke opened his eyes.

“Honey... Duane...” She cupped her hand to her mouth to contain a dribble of water. A dark kid had come in wearing only board shorts and a thick-linked, gold chain around his neck. He stood at the entrance trying to make eye contact with the

waiters. He was long and sickly, his arms and chest marked with the shaky lines of green tattoo ink. He was barefooted, his toes caked with mud. He looked eighteen or nineteen, twenty, maybe—about the boy’s age. But, this kid had a different face, the nose too thin, the chin too sharp. The posture was different. When a waiter asked him what he wanted he said he needed to use the phone, but the waiter, pointing at the dark kid’s feet, laughed at the idea.

“Stop looking,” Cooke said. “It’s not him.” He turned to get another look and saw the waiter holding the entrance door open, yelling words that sometimes sounded English, sometimes not, but the dark kid was begging, his hands steepled. He said he’d be real quick, no long distance.

This kid looked nothing like the Boy. Lani was crazy. Maybe a little bit here and there, the height and the shape of the arms—his grandfather’s arms. But, that’s it.

Almost a year the Boy had been away, somewhere out in the thick Puna forests, rambling with the wild ones, the lawless ones, the unmonitored and unprincipled ones. Despite Pastor Cooke’s efforts, the Boy didn’t choose the path of righteousness, and let the world to get to him. It started with the lawnmower, which he denied taking. Other things disappeared: the grill, the power saw, cash. The Boy denied all of it. He was at home less and less, until he stopped coming home altogether. “It’s not James,” Pastor Cooke said.

Strange to say his name. He wondered what it meant—if it meant anything, at all—that calling the Boy by his name made him uneasy. It always had. On the TV, the flow was approaching

the old plantation cemetery. Tanaka's store would be gone in a few days. It reminded him of the way the Boy felt in his arms one night, many years ago, as they watched Pele crawl toward them, up a hill, in a Kalapana subdivision just a ten-minute drive from their house. The park rangers were there, managing the crowd, herding everyone back—mostly tourists, but some locals—putting them behind a wood traffic barrier. One of the rangers' voices crackled through a megaphone, appealing to the crowd to stay close, not to wander off, to listen to his instructions because their safety depended on it, that this particular flow was a pahoehoe flow, the smooth, viscous kind, as opposed to an a'ā flow, which was rough and crumbled as it moved forward. The ranger spoke of the mythology, of gods who lent their consciousness to these kinds of natural phenomena; he spoke of geology, of pressure and the movement of heat beneath the crust, of an earth unaware of its processes.

Up the road, flashlight beams were sweeping over the pavement and behind them the headlights of dozens of parking cars. They were here, like Pastor Cooke was here, to see a show. Maybe a house or two would go, maybe the whole subdivision covered. Not Pastor Cooke's house, not his subdivision, though it easily could have been, and he made sure to tell the Boy this as a lesson. Occasionally, a heavy gust from the ocean spiraled the embers into the air, sending an uncountable number of glowing pieces into the air. The Boy stood in front of him, his round shoulders fitting neatly in Pastor Cooke's palms. Another gust came, everyone cheering when they were swept up and extinguished overhead.

The rangers shuffled the crowd further uphill. But, there was a resistance in the Boy's shoulders. With each retreat up the hill,

each shuffling of the crowd to a distance deemed safe for the time—a safer distance marked by a change in air temperature, a coolness that registered first on the eyelids and the upper lip—Pastor Cooke found himself pulling more forcefully on the Boy’s shoulders to dislodge and stagger him backward.



Earlier that week Pastor Cooke got a call from one of his congregants, a newly married man in his thirties. The young man was calling about his marriage, said it was falling apart because his wife was hanging out with her high school friends again. She was living secularly, going out to bars on the weekend, coming home late, probably fucking other guys. The young man apologized for swearing. He said he was just happy that they didn’t have kids because it’d just be another thing for her to fuck up. He apologized again. They had another argument about it that morning. They were driving to work. She was being too crazy so he pulled off on the shoulder. She was telling him if he couldn’t love her for who she was, she could find other men, better men, who would.

Pastor Cooke interrupted him. “Are you having daily prayers? What about prayers with your wife? Because,” he explained, settling into a rhythm, “the power of prayer, especially when shared between husband and wife, could move mountains and dry up the seas.” The young man said he was praying, but said he could pray more. He’d asked his wife to pray with him many times, but she would act like she didn’t hear him, or just wouldn’t say anything. But he would keep trying. He’d never lose faith. “But, what about your scriptures?” Pastor Cooke asked. “Are you reading them? I think a chapter a day can

change your outlook, change your life.” For good measure, and because it related to his counsel about prayer, he suggested Ephesians 6:18, and quoted the verse out loud and from memory because it built confidence in the listener, and because after all these years he’d forgotten how to say certain words and phrases and passages, forgot how to speak about the spiritual life without being overcome by that cadence, the Holy Spirit:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit.

He had repeated this same verse over the phone in what would be the last time he spoke to the Boy, but he was interrupted before he could finish when the Boy asked to speak to Lani instead. He handed her the phone. “Hello,” she said. “Are you OK?” Pastor Cooke couldn’t decide if he wanted to walk away or take the phone back, so he stood there, cracking his knuckles. “Do you need anything,” she said. He could feel it, the promptings of the spirit overcoming him, that warm, numbing sensation spreading through his body, pushing outward from his chest. He snatched the phone from Lani and yelled into the receiver that he would pray for the Boy, that there would come a day when the Boy would have to answer for his life. There would be a judgement. Which side of that judgement did he want to be on? The Boy hung up.

After that it was tense between him and Lani. Though she never said it, he guessed she blamed him for all the trouble with the Boy. She didn’t need to say anything. It was all there, in her silence, how she refused to talk about anything but the most trivial, day-to-day stuff.

“We need to talk to him,” Lani said, shifting in her seat, returning her attention to the greasy, half-empty dishes, then to

Pastor Cooke. He stayed quiet, nodding halfheartedly at the proposal as he watched the kid and the waiter argue on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant. The waiter shoved the kid over the curb and into the parking lot. The kid stood and walked toward the waiter.

One punch was all it took, a flash of movement, the torque of the kid's torso and the extending of his arm blurred by speed and the yellow lamplight of the parking lot. One shot to the jawline shut the waiter off. His body seized up and fell like a post. He lay there on his back, rigid, feet inches off the ground, arms extended upward, wrists and fingers gnarled, trembling. The kid left the scene, slunk across the parking lot and disappeared into the overgrowth, the whole thing unnoticed by Lani, who was scooping the remaining food into the Styrofoam containers. She was still talking about the Boy, saying he was only seventeen-years-old, still their responsibility, that it was time to take initiative, call around. What was faith without work, right? And though Pastor Cooke had been nodding in agreement while Lani spoke, he didn't hear the details of what she said. He'd been unable to take his eyes off of the waiter, who was beginning to regain consciousness, moving his legs, turning over onto his side. Pastor Cooke looked around the restaurant. Nothing, no alarm. No one else saw what he'd just seen: the waitresses scurried back and forth between the tables and the kitchen; the other diners were still hunched over their meals; in the back, Linda the supervisor was breaking a roll of change on the register drawer; and there was their waitress, approaching their table again with the bill in her hand.

"My supervisor said there's no discount," she said, handing Pastor Cooke the bill. "I'm sorry." She twisted her face in a way

that was meant to be sympathetic.

“Well, I guess it’s coming out of your tip,” he said.

“Is there any way you could call Wayne?” Lani said, politely. She reached across the table and rested her hand on Pastor Cooke’s hand. “I’m sure he could talk to your supervisor. Linda, right?”

“She said that Wayne wasn’t supposed to give discounts like that. I already asked her.”

“Like I said, it’s coming out of your tip.” He pulled his hand from underneath Lani’s hand and reached for his wallet. “God only gets ten percent, but you get fifteen? Here. And forty six cents.”

“I’m sorry sir. I’m not trying...”

“No, you’re not trying. You’re not sorry either.”

“My supervisor...”

“I’ve been coming here longer than your supervisor’s been on this island.” Pastor Cooke gathered his things and motioned for Lani to do the same. “Longer than you’ve been alive.”

At the entrance, Pastor Cooke held the door open for the waiter, who was still in bad shape. As the waiter lurched past, Pastor Cooke patted him on the shoulder. “You did the right thing,” he said.

The waiter, still somewhere just beneath the surface of

consciousness, wrinkled his brow. He rubbed the side of his face and continued into the restaurant.



At home, later that night, Pastor Cooke sat out on the lanai, on the wooden table and bench, facing mauka. In the distance, low resting clouds, thick and curdled with sulfur dioxide, collected over the vent, reflecting and diffusing across the sky the deep, red glow of the lava beneath it. It must only be a miracle that this property had lasted through the years, a miracle marked by the '86 flow that spilled over the western boundary of the property but stopped and hardened as it approached the house.

Pastor Cooke crossed the yard to the spot where the black fingers of the flow touched the centipede grass. That night, as he and Lani stood at the living room window and watched the flow crawl across the yard, he had been no more afraid of it than he was now, no more threatened by the heat and flames than he was by the porous basalt, silent under his feet. He'd been unshakable in his faith, knew without a doubt that his home and life would be delivered from harm. He—his family—belonged on this spot of land, which had been purchased way back in the Kingdom days and had been passed down ever since. Generations of his family had put their faith and flesh into the ground here.

As the flow encircled his property, Pastor Cooke understood what it meant to have faith. To have faith was to know that terrors will skirt the boundaries of our lives if we're deserving, if we've earned it.

Surely, he was deserving. Maybe Lani, who held him so tightly

that night that she bruised his sides, didn't feel this sense of entitlement, and for this reason she preferred to intervene in God's work; if he was honest, she'd never been very faithful, not when it counted.

Pastor Cooke walked the southern edge of the property, ripping naupaka leaves from their bushes as he went, looking eastward, toward the ocean. He stopped at the southeast corner when the turrets of Jenkins's castle appeared in plain view. No lights were on. It seemed to slant like a shadow, its outline a relief carved into the darkness.

After all, he deserved the view of the Kalapana ocean, which had always been a part of his life and the lives of his ancestors. He deserved his son's obedience; James belonged to him. Faith didn't promise a life without suffering, but it did promise restoration, that a man, such as himself, who had worked hard and been diligent, would not only receive all that he should, but all that had been lost. He continued along the eastern edge, heading toward the front of the house, the presence of Jenkins's castle looming over his shoulder.

In the bedroom he pulled back the sheets and lay beside Lani, who stirred, mumbling something unintelligible, asking if he was clean, because she'd just changed the sheets. He didn't respond, but brought his body up against hers, draped his arm over her and stuck his fingers snugly between the mattress and the spongy skin of her back. As he often had been as a child, he was afraid to close his eyes now, afraid to let go, to drift away into sleep, where he was most vulnerable; what if he woke separate from himself, under the weight of a ghost? He pushed his hand in deeper, the palm turned upward to feel Lani's flesh, which

filled the spaces between his fingers, viscous-like, salt water warm.

Road-Kill

Herb drives a 17-year-old white Chevy van. The vehicle he owned before this one was also an old white van, and he'd liked it—the first one—though a friend used to call it Herb's Rape-Mobile. Herb actually got his first van in Ohio because of the Chevy Van song of the 1970s.

Now he cruises different areas of O`ahu, looking for other people's leavings. Chairs with foundations good enough to reupholster; tables that just need a good sanding and Varathane or paint; chest of drawers or vanities with missing handles. Herb stops at curbside and loads the *findables-fundables*, as he calls them, into the van, which had never been pristine since he'd purchased it for \$3000 two years ago. He'd worked to fix the engine, the carburetor, the decaying radiator, among other repairs. He bought reconditioned tires that now need replacing, but he waits until he knows he can wait no longer. He understands an object's need—a need for someone to make things right.

Herb lives with his girlfriend, Gail, in the one-bedroom cottage in the rear of Gail's parents' place. Gail's 19-year-old daughter, Cathy, lives with them. Gail is a designer of clothing, one-of-a-kind creations. Gail is 34.

Every day, Herb makes his rounds finding salvageable items and hauls them back to the workshop spilling out of the garage of the cottage. He screws. He hammers. He measures. Piles of potential surround Herb, and he is a busy man, though his income barely pays for their food and other necessities—though

neither Herb nor Gail pays any rent. Gail's parents are relieved that Gail has found a kind man, though he is a haole from the Mainland.

Gail has not had good luck with men—before Herb. Bad boys had been her usual choices. But she is proud that Cathy attends Kapi`olani Community College, *to become a computer geek*, as Herb puts it. Cathy brings home computer components and other electronics that Herb won't touch. Herb freely admits that computer technology is beyond him. He's content with his Chevy and *findables-fundables* and other doodads.

Herb drives the H-3 heading for Kane`ohe, sees something, pulls carefully onto the right shoulder, backs up slowly. There. A dead black and white cat—road-kill. Herb grabs his flat-bladed shovel and scrapes the carcass off the asphalt. It must have been hit recently because the torso isn't smashed flat. He pitches it into a garbage bag and tosses it onto a couch in the van's bed. Hurries back into the driver's seat. Cars whiz by. He sweats freely.

Funny, but Herb has collected several cat cadavers along this same stretch of the H-3 on the way to Kane`ohe. Way up high on the pylons. He wonders, as he drives on, if someone or some people—say, a group of mean kids—were trapping them and releasing them on the highway. The hapless animals would have no choice but to run along the road, where people routinely drive 65 miles per hour or more.

Oh well, their loss, his gain. He himself would never kill an animal—except for insects, fishing, or the occasional chicken. But he skins the dead cats and Gail fashions the pelts into beautifully wearable pieces of art. *She's a brilliant artist*, Herb thinks. Proudly. Lovingly. Gratefully.

Herb is 56—a generation older than Gail. He is mystified

about what she sees in him.

Gail's business is called, "Making Things Beautiful," and that is what she does. She buys up old kimono, cheong sam, and vintage aloha shirts, takes them apart carefully, and constructs clothing. The animal fur that Herb brings to her she fashions into vests, or trim. Hats, handbags, cuffs, stoles.

Their cottage has few items new-bought. Even their toilet plunger is second-hand.

Herb's special pride is the bookcase crammed with clocks, pocket watches, and wristwatches, all stopped at different times. Herb held a job at the Sears Watch Repair Shop at Ala Moana Center for four years, until the store closed.

Gail's birthday, September 30th, was coming up, and Herb had found a wristwatch at Goodwill with red-faceted glass stones inlaid on a black leather wristlet. Herb kept the jeweled watch in his van. Gail was not a snoop; she was too busy to look for trouble. It was part of why he appreciated her. "I'm so lucky to have a hot, young chick like you, Baby," he'd say, his eyes on Gail, away from Cathy. "*You* turn me on."

Sleeping next to Gail, Herb sometimes dreams about screwing around with a teenaged body and the face would always end up being Cathy's—no matter how differently the dreams started—her sullen face pulled into a mask of arousal, caterwauling as she came.

He drives to the Chings' house-lot in Kahalu`u. It's getting dark and he needs to skin the carcass and go about preserving the pelt. Herb parks in the side yard and maneuvers the couch from the van, leaving it, with its raveled cushion cover, out, trusting that it won't rain. The darkening sky is completely clear of clouds—unusual for this part of the island.

He gathers the garbage bag and calls out, "Hi, Hon," as he enters the garage.

“Hi, Sweetie.” Gail came out and saunters up, laying a kiss on him.

They enter the cottage. The TV is on. A woman with layered blond hair says, “Research has shown that a way to watch for a potential serial killer is violence against animals—like dogs and cats. This behavior can escalate to violence against human beings—especially, but not limited to, girls and women. Some serial killers, including Jeffrey Dahmer and ‘Son of Sam’ David Berkowitz abused animals when they were young.”

A man with thick, curly hair says, “Would that apply to anyone who’d, say, put a magnifying glass with sunlight on ants?”

“That is a form of animal torture—”

“Or pulling the wings off flies and legs—” Gail clicks the remote and the TV goes dead.

A sound from the garage: the stray cat Gail has been feeding, mewling at the window. “We should put up her picture around the shopping center. She’s getting to be expensive.”

“I’ll do that later. Right now—” He indicates the bag in his hand.

“Another one! Poor thing, yeah? What color is it?—Don’t show me! I don’t want to see it.”

He tells her, and then goes back out to the space near his van, to skin the animal. The pelt is a little pieceny, but usable, and Herb takes his time preparing it, scraping, stretching, hanging it out to dry. The skinless carcass he returns to the garbage bag and places in the trash. He washes his hands thoroughly in the kitchen sink.

“Sorry I didn’t make dinner. I got all involved in making... this!” She holds a dark red bodysuit over her curvy figure. It’s low in front and thigh high from below. The neckline and hem are trimmed in black fur.

“It’s gorgeous,” Herb says. “You wanna try it on for me?”

“It won’t fit. I made it for Matt-Ann.” Cathy’s best friend. “For the bowling ball she gave her. She’s bigger than me.”

“You’d look sexy in it—and out of it.” He makes a grab for her and she shrieks and laughs, fending him off. “Okay, okay,” Herb says. “I’ll make dinner for you, okay?”

As he chops onions and minces garlic for spaghetti sauce, Gail tells him about the coffee date she had with Janet Oki, a neighbor. “She took her nephews to the beach and they saw a sea urchin. The boys got sticks and were poking at it. Janet said that’s what civilizing is all about, when you’re bringing up boys—teaching them not to poke things.”

“But how can they know what something will do unless they poke it? In other words, how do you find out what’s going to happen unless you do something?”

“That’s not the half of it. If boys weren’t curious, there’d be no civilization!” Gail said. “It’s the awareness that something might happen, and the move to make that something happen that’s human potential. In science, in art. Leonardo da Vinci never finished a painting. As soon as he solved the problem of the work, he lost interest and moved on.”

“I’m just an ordinary guy,” Herb says, stirring in the canned tomatoes. “Most boys are ordinary. Leonardo—”

“But you can fix engines and clocks. You can make things run.”

“But your thinking runs circles around me, Baby,” he says, reaching down to hug her with one arm, stirring with the other.

“Wait. What time is it?”

He looks at his watch. *Six*. “Time for your meds.”

Gail takes a glass of water into the bedroom, then reappears.

“What’s the matter?”

“Cathy’s not home yet. She was supposed to be back about four, after her last class. We were going to the bowling alley.

And she's not answering her phone."

"Maybe she got hung up someplace and turned it off."

"Where would she get hung up? I know she's been getting more and more irresponsible, but—she wanted to try out the bowling ball that Matt-Ann gave her."

"Did you call Matt-Ann?"

"She hasn't seen her. And it's dark already. I don't like this."

Into the night, Gail frets about Cathy, phoning her every half hour. "Don't you think we should call the police?" she says for the third or fourth time, as she dials. "Her voice-mail is full." Gail weeps. "I'm really worried."

Herb's brow furrows and he puts his lanky arm around her shoulders. She is only chest-high to him. "Maybe we should," he finally says. He calls.

"No. It's just that this never happened before," Herb says to the policeman.

"If there's no evidence of something wrong, you can file a missing person's report twenty-four hours after she went missing. She's probably with a friend. Does she have a boyfriend?"

"Well." Herb considers. "She has friends who are boys. But no boyfriend." He looks at Gail, his eyebrows raised. She shakes her head.

"She'll probably be home in the early morning. After midnight. You know how kids are."

Herb rings off. He hugs Gail, who'd stopped crying. "Honolulu's finest," she says. He squeezes her again. She puts her arms around Herb's neck, tiptoeing to kiss him.

"Do you want me to go out and look for her?"

"We could go together. If you don't mind eating later."

They get into the van, back out onto the road, listening to light jazz. They spend two hours driving to KCC, cruising

around Kaimuki, Kapahulu, Waikiki, going around the loop of Palolo, and driving back to Kahalu`u.

Gail goes to bed, shedding her clothes when they return home, and Herb boils some spaghetti, warms up the sauce, and eats alone.

When he goes to bed, she is still, her arm over her eyes. He moves the thick book next to her from the library—*Honor Killing*, about the infamous Massie Affair. He lies down and pulls up the covers and sighs. She doesn't move, as if dead. He drops into sleep like falling into a well that echoes with the barking of dogs and screaming of cats.

Herb awakens at 5 a.m.; he always gets up at that time. He'd been dreaming about getting it on with Gail, who lies quietly snoring at his side, but Gail was a teenager with Cathy's passion-contorted face. *Youth is Beauty; Beauty, Youth*, someone whispers in his ear. He's sweating. He groans and heaves himself out of bed. Gail turns onto her side, but does not awaken; hers is a heavy, drug-induced sleep.

Scrambling his two eggs, Herb eats them on toast with guava jelly. Somehow, the brown-striped stray had gotten into the cottage; she lies in his chair. This irritates him, but he takes the opportunity to photograph her with his phone as he eats his toast. He e-mails the image to himself. *She's cute against the red leather*, he thinks. Gail won't be up for another couple of hours. He constructs a bologna sandwich and puts some won bok kim chee into a plastic container. He showers, dresses in tee-shirt and shorts, pulls on his socks and shoes, and kisses the sleeping Gail. He goes into the garage area, after he picks up the cat, carries her out of the cottage, and drops her on the ground. He feeds her some Purina Cat Chow and fills the other bowl with clean water. Then, after checking the pelt, he moves the couch into the crowded, covered garage.

He turns on the radio as he pulls out, and the local news is on. Something the governor said; something the president did; something about the Senate Majority Whip. More blah blah blah as he drives over the Pali, the mountains huge and fresh. He gets onto King Street and takes it to the end heading Diamond Head, then goes up Wai`alae Avenue over to KCC, scanning the sidewalks, the shops, the coffeehouses. He sees a group of five boys hanging out in front of Coffee Talk, and turns his head to look them over. He turns onto Koko Head Avenue and gets to KCC, cruising the parking lots, the sky lightening. Only stray cats and early morning walkers. He switches to a talk radio station.

“How can we prevent young girls from falling victim to gang-rapists?” the host booms. “We are talking about the alleged kidnapping and gang-rape of a 19-year-old University of Hawai`i student. Hello. You are on the air with Morning Brewster.”

A man says, “The way young girls dress. Whoa, they jus` asking for trouble. Short-shorts, their butts hanging out, low-cut tops—”

“Thank you for your opinion. Hello. You`re on the air.”

Another man says, “About that last caller. Remember that somebody, some official, described Dana Ireland as a pretty girl in shorts? People have the right to wear whatever they want. Nobody should have to be afraid of getting attacked.”

“Thank you for your comments, sir. To remind our listeners: Dana Ireland was a young woman from the Mainland who was deliberately hit by a car and brutally assaulted by local men on the Big Island. And left to die. This incident happened in...1991. On Christmas Eve. Hello, this is Brewster.”

A man says, “Hi, Brewster. My question is: What was Dana Ireland doing riding a bike in the Puna District by herself? It`s

like the wild, wild West out there.”

“Thank you for your call. Hello. You are on the air.”

A woman says, “Those boys were just trying to have some fun.” She speaks sarcastically. “I mean it. They probably had fun doing that. What kind of animal thinks it’s fun to attack a young girl? I mean, some guys think so. Obviously. Or they wouldn’t do it. Right?”

“Thank you, ma’am, for your comments. So folks, lively discussion! And the question is: How can we protect girls from sexual predators? Hello. You’re on the air with Morning Brewster.”

A woman says, “I think you’re asking the wrong question. The question should be: How can we prevent boys and men from raping young girls? And women? That’s the real question.”

Herb snaps off the radio.

He remembers being fifteen, in an avocado-colored Impala with five other boys, none older than nineteen, cruising the streets of Cincinnati during a hot, steamy summer night. The driver, Ron, stopped and three of the boys got out and tried to pull a lone girl into the car. She screamed, kicked, and clawed. A group of young women came out of the Ice Palace.

“Come on!” Ron said. “Let’s go!”

One of the boys pushed the lone girl—hard—and then she was on the sidewalk. “Fucking bitch!” the boy said.

“Hey!” one of the other girls yelled.

The boys jumped back into the car and they sped away. Herb was shaking, leaning forward—he was scared stiff, and didn’t want the other boys to see—and the Impala held a charged silence. Then, “shit,” Ron said, turning left onto Main Street. “Do you think those bitches saw us?”

“Naw,” one of the boys said, the one who had pushed the girl down. “No way.”

Herb knew that no matter how wild hormones made him feel, this was not where he belonged. Still, he concealed the shaking of his hands from his fellow would-be predators. It would be decades before he realized that it was nothing more than dumb luck that had kept him from unrewindable horror. But he had wanted so desperately to get laid that he probably would have gone along—even with the big ideas of Ron-the-Jerk-Off—if the conditions had been less jungle-y.

He’d heard about a drug you could slip into a girl’s drink—but how would he, a guy with no looks or moves, even get close enough for a killer move like that? He could justify the sex part—just look at the way girls dressed—*everybody* wanted the sex part. But rough stuff—violence for thrills—had never been part of his game, and he decided then that it wasn’t going to be.

They drove around in tense silence for a while. Then the boys headed back towards the central district. They cruised off onto a side street, and then Ron pulled up to a woman in a short skirt and platform shoes, beeping his horn. He shouted at the woman, trying to negotiate, but she said, “What d’you think I am, anyway? A mercy fuck? Get outa here!”

“Old cunt!” Ron shouted. They roared off.

Herb wasn’t a believer—he wasn’t even a Bengals fan! —but he gave thanks for *something* saving him from the earlier disaster that night, relief coursing through his veins. Within a few years Cincinnati, armpit of Kentucky, became where he was *from*. If he bothered to mention it at all.

Herb turns on the radio, pushing buttons until he gets an easy listening music station. He takes the H-1 going in the `Ewa direction and takes the H-3 to Kane`ohe. By the light of the

morning sun, he looks at the fading color photograph on his visor of Gail at sixteen, her brown legs dark against her white short-shorts. He looks at the road ahead, ready for anything.

FINALIST: JOE TSUJIMOTO

Water

He sat on a boulder near the rushing stream, fixated on the flashing light and the stones and rocks and pebbles just below the surface at the water's edge, glinting silver and gray and gold in the morning light and the flash and sparkle of the water from the mountains, having rained heavily the night before, as if the water were endless, ceaseless, polishing the stones, like the water, originating in the mountains. And for a space of exquisite minutes he was the sound of the moving, bubbling water and the light and the winking stones and the passing breeze in the water spray; he was the place, at once alert to and immersed in everything.

During his descent from the mountain stream, he recalled his visit to the Hawaii State Art Museum; one whole gallery was dedicated to water, holy water, captured in the paintings and photographs of the rain and mists and the mountain waterfalls, the watersheds, the cold springs, to the green pools and streams, to the tide pools, the black sand beaches of the Big Island, to the reef-pounding waves, and the far-distant outer sea. *Kai*. One picture was of water dripping from ferns, water collecting in giant leaves, dewy moss, lichen-matted trees in the rainforest at the mouth of an old lava tube. Another was of the fresh-water irrigation system of the terraced *loi*, for the growing of the sacred *kalo*. Then he stood, speechless, in front of an enormous canvas of luminous, light blue particles scattered on a light blue and white background. The painting was called "*Ko`iawe: Light Moving on Rain.*" *It was like the soft, dreamless sleep from*

which you wake totally refreshed, he thought.
Blessed.

He came into the kitchen damp from the dew. Elsa, the live-in housekeeper, closed her marble notebook *with a dark claw* and rose to get Kenji's coffee.

"Where did you go, to the stream?" She slid before him his coffee mug. "You smell like the wet mountain."

"It's pretty special in the morning. Especially after last night's rain, almost white water. I think it's going to rain some more. I can feel it in my bones. These knuckles don't lie."

"Want some eggs? Maybe omelet? Have lots of vegetables."

Hours before going to the hospital, Estancia, his recent flame, emailed Kenji forbidding him to visit her until five days after her operation.

Call it a woman's vanity. I simply want my hair to be pleasing. I've been thinking about our last lovely evening together. Middle aged, my foot! I can still feel the moonlight on my limbs, my breasts and thighs, and you holding me from behind. And for long moments I yearned for nothing and would have been content with my life were I to pass away right then and there. I feel so fortunate to be alive.

He stood at his study window watching the rain fall, steady and predictable, from an unusually uniform gray sky, not unlike the slate gray sky that often hung over Manhattan during the wet days of autumn. And in the same way, the gray light seemed to signal an all-day rain, the clouds hanging low over the length of

the Ko'olau Range. Soon the aluminum gutters would be gushing white water, the flower and vegetable beds, the yard sopping wet, as if the earth were layered with slugs and little bubbles. *The noisy toads*, he thought, *will be everywhere tonight*, having climbed the slope from the stream, climbing over his Samoan rock wall, invading his yard. *Better than the weeks without rain, when the wild pigs would descend and uproot the plants, digging up the shrubs and bushes for water. Rain rain go away, come again some other day. Little Kenji wants to play.*

Poor Estancia.

The pain in his hip and thigh was awful this morning. He wondered if the damp weather had anything to do with it, as Elsa claimed, complaining sometimes about her arthritic hands. Putting his weight on his right leg helped a little; then he would shift his weight to the left to see if the pain was still there. It would be, of course. Or he would test it by pacing the study or walking down the hall, as if pressure and movement would loosen the muscles around the nerves. The pills sometimes worked, but not today, while his Chinese massage therapist was on vacation in Beijing. Strange. He did not feel pain at all when he was working—teaching—but as soon as the last class was over, it was right there to greet him, like a faithful dog. A nagging, hobbling pain, remembered because it was relived. He could not recall the pain he suffered after his operation, *thank God*. Nor could he imagine the pain that Estancia would feel after *her* operation. Knowing that she would suffer brought Kenji another kind of pain, *akin to grief*, which he could not endure very long if he dwelled upon it. That it was accompanied by anger was like a godsend. Otherwise, he would drink (*why not?*), which he planned to do this evening. *Nothing works better than alcohol to turn off the brain. Sometimes it helps dull the pain, too. Pain, pain go away . . .*

The rain fell like locusts--

“Kenji!” called Elsa, from down the hall. “Lunch!”

“Coming,” he said, putting on a Billie Holliday CD, *a perfect fit for this weather*. The first cut was “I Cried For You.”

He took his seat before a steaming bowl of saimin.

“Wow,” Kenji said, bending over the bowl and the cloud of steaming soup. “Perfect for a rainy day.”

“Careful,” Elsa said. “Hot.”

He lifted the noodles using his chopsticks, blowing on them, before slurping them up, almost inhaling them, heat and all.

“Hits the spot,” he said.

Elsa sipped some soup from a spoon. As she bent her head, Kenji noticed how gray her hair had grown. He wondered about her health.

“Elsa, how’s your mother these days? You haven’t said anything lately about her.”

“She’s okay, I guess. But everything is getting harder. Hearing is getting worse. The eyes bad. And she can walk only little bit.”

“But she can walk.”

“Her appetite is getting smaller, too. But worst part is her memory. It comes and goes, in and out. Sometimes she asks who I am, and then she’s angry at me because I forget to bring her favorite dessert. Can get frustrating. Used to be scary and sad. But now I just accept, things not going get better. And I know soon she won’t remember me.”

“And so it goes,” murmured Kenji, slurping noodles, thinking of his own mother’s dementia. “But *you* remember her, and that’s what matters.”

“Maybe.”

Elsa rubbed the knuckles of her bony right hand.

They fell silent for a while and listened to the hard rain as it

drummed on the roof. *Now this can't last*, Kenji thought, two or three seeds of trepidation taking hold in the dark soil around his heart, as the rain continued to fall with the same relentless insistence, as if determined to drown their house.

“If this keeps up, the tool shed will be flooded,” Kenji said, remembering the duplex that he and Christine, his X, had shared with the Social Studies teacher, remembering the winter storm that knocked down trees, the monkey pod tree that caved in the roof of their old Dodge Dart, remembering the flooded den, remembering the landslide, the boulder that crashed through their neighbor’s spare bedroom. He rubbed his thigh beneath the table.

“Remember Estancia, the woman you met at the gynecologist’s office?”

“You mean your girlfriend?” Elsa said, not looking up from her noodles. Knowing that Kenji was staring at her, she said, before he could express his surprise, “Pretty obvious. Come home late, like that. Smelling like her.”

“Hm.” *Smelling like her?*

“I never saw her at the office again,” said Elsa. “She okay?”

He took his bowl to the sink and stared out at the persistent rain through the foggy kitchen windows. He spoke without turning, his weight on his right leg. “The rain’s slowing a bit. But looks like it won’t end. Estancia has cancer.”

The rain was still drumming the roof.

“Terrible,” whispered Elsa.

He was wrong. The rain was not slowing.

“They’re taking out her left kidney, ureter, and part of her bladder—probably right now.”

“Where they operating?”

“Kaiser Moanalua,” he said, shifting his weight to his left leg, testing the pain, its longitude, its magnitude.

“I hope they get it all,” Elsa said. “It can jump anywhere, like one toad.”

“I know. That’s what scares me. But she was assured by her doctor, insofar as the tests reveal, that it hasn’t spread anywhere else.”

“Hope so.”

There was loud knocking at the front door. Kenji turned and looked at Elsa. “I’ll get it,” he said, hobbling down the hall.

“Kenji, I need a favor,” said Lenny, breathless, shirtless, and sopping, water dripping from his long hair and shorts, nevertheless standing beneath an absurdly small, yellow umbrella. “My back patio is getting flooded out. The water is pouring down the slope and over the retaining wall and pretty soon it’ll get into my living room. Could you lend me a hand? We can sweep a lot of the water off the patio slab onto the yard. The drain, near the house, can’t handle the load.”

“Be right over. Just want to put on some swim shorts,” Kenji said, rushing down the hall, thinking he was lucky his own house was elevated.

The street was streaming along both gutters, rising in places over the sidewalks. He walked barefoot across the street through the cold water to Lenny’s front yard, then slopped through the swampy mess around the house to the rear. *Wow*, the water was indeed pouring over the wall, *Holy Moly*. *Lenny wasn’t exaggerating*. Using a house broom, Lenny was sweeping the water as quickly as he could away from the sliding glass door to his dining room. Lenny tossed Kenji the broom he was using and began sweeping with another. Kenji swept mightily at the middle of the patio, pushing as much water as the broom would allow to the edge of the grass, then backtracking and pushing again. Over and over and over. When, after twenty minutes of

exhausting labor, the rain finally abated. And the two middle aged men, leaning on their brooms, smiled at each other, as if they had finally succeeded in cutting down a blighted redwood tree.

“That two-inch rise to your screen door just won’t do, Lenny.”

“I know, I know. I’ve been meaning to cut a gutter in the concrete,” he said, wet as a country scarecrow.

“Go take a hot shower,” Kenji said. “That’s what I’m going to do. Then come over for some hot coffee. I’m sure Elsa has something on the stove, too.”

“That’s an offer I can’t refuse,” said Lenny, smiling broadly. He had a few more teeth than Kenji did. “See you in a bit.”

After toweling dry and putting on fresh clothes, Kenji walked past Elsa at the stove with his wet clothes, which he squeezed out in the washroom and hung on a line over the sink. *Funny*, he thought. No pain through the whole ordeal. *Nothing. Nada.* But he knew the pain would eventually return, like the moon and the rain.

So it goes.

Kenji could hear Lenny knock and enter and greeted him as he wiped his wet feet on the inside mat. He was holding by the short neck a bottle of brandy and said, “Hear that? The damn bufos are already at it.”

Their gargling, chortling sound was already echoing from the hollows and banks of the stream, toads by the hundreds.

“And they’ll get louder,” Lenny said. “Who’s that? That’s Gillespie! Turn it up, Kenji. The bufos can’t compete with ole Diz. Hi, Elsa.”

“Oh, the piano man. Hope your house okay,” Elsa said, pouring steaming hot coffee into two blue mugs. “Milk, right?”

“Right,” said Lenny, opening the bottle of brandy and lacing each mug with a healthy shot. “And where’s yours, Elsa?”

“Too early for me. Got work to do. I’m not on summer vacation, like Kenji,” she said.

“What’s that on the stove?” Kenji asked.

“Lamb ragout.”

“Well, Lenny, you’re staying for dinner.”

“I should be making *you* dinner. Anyway, cheers for a job well done.” They clinked mugs, sipping their drinks.

“Let me ask you,” said Kenji, “about—”

“Christine,” finished Lenny. “She’s fine. As fine as can be. I haven’t seen her in a couple of weeks, though we email each other, talk sometimes over the phone.”

“I don’t mean to pry—”

“You’re going to anyway, right? No, she rarely mentions you. No, I haven’t slept with her, though I desperately want to. —Elsa, you’re hearing none of this, right?”

“What? You said something? My ears are bad, get it from my mother,” she said.

“Well,” said Kenji, “what slanderous rumors besmirching my good name has she spread? That I date altar boys?”

“Matter of fact, she did mention that you date a woman at work—Esmeralda?”

“Estancia.”

Elsa brought over the coffee pot.

“Estancia. No thanks,” Lenny said, covering the top of his mug with his hand. “I think I’ll stick to brandy.”

“Same here, thanks. So what did Christine say? Did she sound jealous?”

“Jealous? No. She told me that the night we saw you at the PBS wine tasting you cracked your head on the bathroom door. She just shook her head. I meant to ask you about that. Must

have hurt, though I admit when I heard what happened I laughed.”

Elsa.

“Nice. That all? Did she say that I sometimes stay out all night and worry Elsa?” Kenji said, turning in Elsa’s direction, Elsa who feigned deafness, who was turning down the heat on her ragout.

“Matter of fact, she didn’t. She’s incredible. Elegant, graceful, out to save the world.”

“Who?”

“Christine,” said Lenny, topping off their cups with more brandy. “Man, you must have really screwed up to lose her.”

Kenji looked out the kitchen window. The sad gray sky seemed to have squeezed itself dry. Only a few drops were still falling.

“Far as she could tell, at the time, I had nothing to do with it,” Kenji said. “At least that’s what she said. Things happen.”

“She’s amazing. What is she, in her fifties?”

“Fifty-eight,” Kenji said.

“Four years older than me, yet she looks like she’s still in her thirties.”

“And you look like you’re sixty-five,” Kenji said, smiling.

“And she still dresses in white,” Lenny mused, staring down at his drink.

“You’ve fallen for her, haven’t you?”

“Who me? Yeah. Yeah, sure,” Lenny said, as if he suddenly realized the truth. “Why not? Along with the others she’s dating.”

“Was any of them a big Polynesian guy with a black pick-up?”

“Not that I’ve heard. He must be someone new. Why?”

“When I was in the hospital recovering from dehydration—”

“Yeah, Elsa told me about that. You passed out while playing golf,” recalled Lenny.

“Elsa told you that, too?” Kenji said. He turned around, but Elsa had stepped into the washroom. “Anyway, that night I dreamt—it was more like a nightmare--that I followed Christine home from Chinatown, and after she went inside, this big black pick-up pulls into her driveway and a big dark Polynesian guy meets her at the door and they kiss. Strange. Then I crept round the side of her house and was watching them through her bedroom window, until she turned out the light and closed the drapes. Weird. I’m no voyeur. But I kept having that dream for awhile.”

“Seems like you’re afraid of something. I used to dream that I was making love with someone, and my bedroom door would swing open, and my mother would be standing in the doorway. It was so vivid. I’d wake up in a rush and see that my bedroom door was still shut and thank God that it was only a dream.”

“You’re sicker than I am,” Kenji said, snickering.

“Well, here’s to Estancia having a successful operation,” said Lenny.

“And here’s to Christine returning your affection.”

“And here’s to Elsa and her lamb ragout,” said Lenny.

“And here’s to Elsa’s ability to keep secrets,” said Kenji.

“And here’s to the sun.”

“And here’s to the moon.”

“And here’s to the little one who went peep peep peep all the way home,” said Lenny, his finger in the air.

“You aren’t feeling any pain,” said Kenji.

“I’m impervious to pain. Only music gets to me. Can make me cry. Take that away and I am nothing. Nothing.”

“I feel nothing,” Kenji sang.

“I feel nothing,” Lenny repeated, a half step up the scale.

“What about your mother?” Kenji asked.

“About the music? She knows it, too. She comes to the lounge to hear me play. My most loyal fan. Even Christine knows it. Here’s to my piano,” he said. Then suddenly staring Kenji in the eye he said, “I mean, what would you do if you suddenly woke up one morning and learned you couldn’t write any more stories and poems?”

“I’d put on my clothes and go to work,” Kenji said.

“Teaching?”

“That’s what I do,” said Kenji. Lenny looked perplexed, so Kenji said, “One time I was walking back across the field from lunch and ran into two of my former students. We bantered about how things were going, and I don’t remember how I came to tell them, but I said that I hated writing, which they thought was the funniest thing they ever heard, since I’m known as a writing teacher foremost. And it’s true. I hate the whole bloody process.”

“You still do it though, right?” Lenny said.

“Yeah, sometimes. I’m a masochist,” laughed Kenji. “But different from you and your piano playing, writing is not my life. It’s damn sure not my livelihood--I’d be scrawnier than you. It’s not something akin to breathing or other life-dependent metaphors proclaimed upon the stage. So much for sour grapes. Pour me a drink, why doncha, so a fella can quench his thirst.”

Kenji looked out the kitchen window.

The rain, for the most part, had stopped, and the world was dark and dripping. Even Lenny seemed to droop.

“Let’s be maudlin,” Kenji said.

“I thought we were,” said Lenny. “I should have brought my mandolin.”

“My father told me there’d be days like this.”

“There’d be days like this...”

“Days like this.”

“Matter of fact, my father died on a day like this. Only it was night and I was working a gig at the Mandarin, and the wind was blowing the rain sideways through the doorways, only there weren’t any doors; you’ve been there, and the waiters were setting down hotel towels on the koa wood floors so the customers wouldn’t slip and sue them. When this guy comes up to me while I’m playing and whispers to me that my old man just died.”

“So what did you do?” Kenji asked.

“Do? I finished the song, like an old trooper. Besides, there was an old couple dancing, probably older than my father. Then I downed my drink, closed the lid, took up my music, and left.”

“You said your father was a conductor?”

“For twenty years, and a musician for forty-five. Mom played cello. That’s all we had in the house, music, music, music. Scales, study, practice, practice. I mean, if you don’t know the music you sure the hell can’t improvise. Jazz is a learned instinct. For most of us it takes years.”

“Years and years,” said Kenji. “And still you might not—”

“And *your* father?” asked Lenny.

“My father? What about him? Did he play music, you mean?”

“No.”

“. . . though he bought an old upright. I don’t know whose idea it was,” Kenji went on. “My mother probably wanted it for herself but made me take lessons when I was in kindergarten and first grade, and I hated every second of it. Even used to hide when the piano teacher came to our house.”

“No, no. When he died, where were you?”

“I was at school. It was a snowy December day; I was in

sixth grade. And the whole school was let loose to play in the snow in the park across the street. When we were lining up to go back inside, my teacher took me aside and told me to see the cop standing by this idling squad car. I didn't know what was happening until we stopped in front of my building, when the driver turned and told me my father just died."

"That must have been a blow," said Lenny, slurring a little. "What were you, eleven, twelve?"

"Eleven. Off and on, it only took me twenty years to write about that moment. Another five to write something I could share."

Dark outside, the kitchen was in the gloom. They could barely make out each other's face.

"Fathers," said Lenny, "they'll kill you every time."

"Dead or alive, they're what drive us."

"Estancia's operation must be over by now."

Elsa turned on the kitchen light.

"Whoa, woman!" cried Kenji, shielding his eyes, as Lenny did the same. "Give us some warning. My God, my eyeballs!"

"My head!" said Lenny.

"Oh, don't be such panties," said Elsa.

"You know, Elsa, the feminists would take you to task for that remark," Kenji said, mocking his own teaching voice.

"Maybe so," Elsa said, her fists upon her hips. "But they cannot kick my ass."

Lenny slapped the kitchen table, making the cups and bottle dance, laughing loudly. "Right on, Elsa!"

"I'm shocked, Elsa. I have a mind to call, to call, who shall I call, Lenny? I know. I'll call Barbara. I'll even tell her honey Erlene. That's her name, right? I'll say, 'Erlene—'"

"*Barbara*," said Lenny.

“I’ll say, ‘Barbara, you should have heard what Erlene said.’”

“What *Elsa* said,” corrected Lenny, laughing.

“Kenji,” said Elsa.

“Are Barbara and Erlene still fighting?” asked Lenny, finishing the bottle.

“Kenji, are you drunk or what?” Elsa said.

Lenny was laughing.

“I know—shut up, Lenny—I know. I can be pretty dumb sometimes,” Kenji admitted, rubbing his eyes with his fists. “A sixty-one-year-old fool, acting like one of his eighth graders.”

When the telephone rang.

“Hello,” said Elsa. “Yes, he’s here. . . Oh, I’m so sorry, Christine.”

“What is it?” asked Kenji, now standing beside Elsa.

Elsa placed her palm over the receiver and said, “Christine’s father just passed away.”

“Poor Christine,” said Lenny.

“That was Lenny,” Elsa said into the mouthpiece.

“Tell her I’ll be right over,” said Kenji, nearly sober now. Lenny was about to rise when Elsa said,

“Christine said that she doesn’t want anybody to come over. Okay, Christine, I just told them.”

“Well, tell her I’m coming anyway,” said Kenji, as he left the kitchen.

“Kenji’s already on his way,” Elsa said into the telephone.

They heard the front door close.

They heard the car start and pull out of the driveway.

They heard the toads.

The kitchen seemed vacant.

Lenny stared at his coffee mug, one hand on the empty bottle of brandy.

They were silent.

Elsa slowly ladled some ragout into a container for Lenny to take home.

“If it’s not one damn thing,” Lenny said, “it’s another.”

“Amen,” said Elsa.

They did not talk again.

The night, beyond the window, was pitch black.

POETRY

JUDGE'S NOTES: POETRY

Judge: Emelihter Kihleng

Emelihter Kihleng is the Distinguished Writer in Residence in the English Department at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She recently completed her PhD in Va'aomanū Pasifika Pacific Studies from Victoria University of Wellington in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Her first collection of poetry, *My Urohs*, was published by Kahuaomānoa Press in 2008. Emeli's most recent poems can be found in her PhD thesis about menginpehn lien Pohnpei, the handwriting/handiwork of Pohnpeian women from Pohnpei Island, Micronesia.

~

First Place: Meg Eden

“Radium Girls”

The language of this 2-part poem is unassuming and sensual. The author's voice haunts the reader and lingers. The lives of ordinary people disrupted by radiation poisoning and contamination are written about evocatively and with bite. I would love to read an entire collection by this poet.

Second Place: Stella Jeng Guillory

“Chief Joseph's Flute”

There is a timelessness about this poem that works to its advantage. Lyrical and rich with the history and landscape of the Zumwalt Prairie, “Chief Joseph's Flute” is breathtaking. The poem reads like a chant; it is spiritual and profound.

JUDGE'S NOTES: POETRY

Third Place: Emily Benton

“Self-Portrait as a Brown Tree Snake”

Slithery and highly sensuous, “Self-Portrait as a Brown Tree Snake” is a clever personification of this invasive reptile species. A truly stimulating and fun read!

FIRST PLACE: MEG EDEN

Radium Girls

I. December 1923: Waterbury Clock Factory, Connecticut

my mouth is a room that lights up in the dark

the girl who trained me spatula-full of radium in her mouth the corners gritty
and glowing her reassurance that the paint is harmless taught us how to point the
paintbrush tip between our lips

my manager says a little radon puts the sex in your cheeks nudging my ass

some girls hate the taste but i love it it tastes like eternity

no matter how many times i brush my teeth at night i feel that gritty glue

i'm good and quick i get more dials done than the other girls

sometimes i only get thirty dials done a day what will my mother say when she sees my
paycheck

my mouth's been aching my mother blames my sweet tooth

last night a tooth came out i didn't have to do anything it just fell into my hand

other people buy radium soda radium candy radium facial creams but we get it for free
we're the luckiest girls in the world

in the dark we are suns our faces hands glow like the dials we paint

one girl's halfway to becoming an angel her back all the way down to her waist
glowing

soon we won't have to put it on at all it'll be in our bones it'll pour out
from our forever-twenty skin

II. August 2011: Miyakoji, Japan

when we visit our house we wear cough masks we wear suits

at our house the grass is tall and uncut everything is still on the floor where it fell when the earthquake hit

the body of a dog is tangled in our fence it hasn't fully decomposed a patch of fur like a felt block remaining on his right ear

first thing: my father disposes of the dog my mother gets on her knees and begins scrubbing the floor in her gloves and suit she adjusts the family altar and burns a stick of incense

every time we go outside my father brings a meter on good days we can play on the blacktop for thirty minutes

my mother asks me if I feel alright if anything feels odd i think about stuffing my mouth with our flowers eating the expired candy in our kitchen and becoming my own power plant

on the edge of town a cleanup crew fills bags with radioactive waste there are lots of bags they fill up my old school's baseball field the bags get high enough to build a black wall

They say They'll get rid of the bags soon but my mother doesn't believe Them she says They are burying us inside our own waste because no one wants to look at us and feel guilty no one wants to remember what went wrong or change anything everyone wants to go back to work back to their homes and return to what they've always done

my mother's voice gets loud when she says this she's holding a watch her mother gave her when she was a girl like me she drops it and it falls to the floor the glass face cracks with one split sound even so it continues ticking my mother goes silent i am silent—it makes every tick seem louder than it really is

SECOND PLACE: STELLA JENG GUILLORY

Chief Joseph's Flute

(1)

Roaming across the Zumwalt Prairie,
I play my flute.
The Nez Perce know I am coming when
a tune in my key approaches.

I play the flute I carved
from yellow cedar.

The fetish block on my flute portrays a thunderbird
that guards and directs my breath.

I play the flute I carved for myself.
It suits me when my right and left hands are bent
and the distance between
the mouth piece and the finger holes
is according to my own constellation.

It creates the key fitting my height,
my way of slightly leaning forward.

The Nez Perce know I am returning when
a tune in my key approaches.

(2)

The Zumwart Prairie rolls out --
a vast and deeply incised basalt tableland.
It breathes in and out, broad, immense
and moist breaths. Patches of pale white violet
are the most fragrant little things. It awakens
my numbed sense of longing.

Blankets of northwest native yellow violets followed
by the then sweet blue violets.
Before that, the pale blue spring queens
from a tiny principality,
where modesty prevails.

Along the Coyote Trail, that is where
I found the glacial lily, preceded by the harbinger
wave of grass widow, their lance leaves
accompanying satiny flowers of six pink petals.
Lastly, fields of
camas lily, a sea of it.

(3)

I hear a deer running across,
making crisp noises brushing against
bunchgrasses, prairie junegrass and oat grass.
A herd of them crossing the field
in the full moon.

Once a male fawn stood there,
shy, showing his new velvety antlers.
I sampled huckleberry and tiny sweet blackberry with him.

(4)

Last night, a total moon eclipse.
Earth casts its shadowy mantle
inching
embracing
the naked Moon

I, clumsily
snuggle into their
intimacy.

(5)

The tulip opens wide --
bending outward
welcoming you.
Soon I would shed my petals
one after another.
All five.
What else can I do for you?
The tulip asks.
Like a broken conch shell
I allow you to see
my inner construction.

My tombstone says my name,
Hin-Mah-Too-Yah-Lat-Kekt,
Thunder Rolling Down the Mountains.

THIRD PLACE: EMILY BENTON

Self-Portrait as a Brown Tree Snake

All cargo must filter through a beagle's wet nose
though no hound found me in 29-E,

coiled behind a toddler's homesick wail.
Yellow-eyed, I awoke from a non-sleep

dreaming of the edges of things—
the green underbelly of a greener tree,

an untouched earth for my slithering.
I could've crossed in the crack of a ship,

wrapped my scales inside a Christmas gift,
or piped from a barged car's exhaust.

Instead, I rode business class with aloha prints.
I was the apple not tossed

in the amnesty bin, the unchecked customs box.
Lassoing from parking lot to picnic bench,

I moved until I thought I'd left my kin. And there,
in the wings of a monkeypod, I ate

my share and marveled at the lizard's red throat.
For days, I loafed. Then one night

a scent licked the air, followed by a voice
sounding like my own. It told me what

I needed to hear under that great starry dome:
Say what you will about discoveries.

*You're not the last to arrive;
silly, if you think you're the first.*

FINALIST: GABRIELLE BURTON

Memory After A Miscarriage

The summer heat wave hung, heavy on our bones,
and fat flies droned on the windowsills.

Our airedale hid, snapping at our fingers.
She would not leave the cold dark space beneath
our back door steps.

My sister and I watched
from the kitchen window. Three times, she dragged
her rear end hard across the summer grass,
ran back to the cave when we called her name.

We let her.

But as the sun turned pink,
our fear grew brave: we hid our faces, pulled her
from the concrete shadows.

A half-born pup
hung under her tail. We pulled again,
this time at the little set of rigid feet.

She let us.

Thick fluid rushed onto flat
gray stone -- and the black-haired runt: too small to swell
her belly, too big to leave her. We named
and buried it under the large oak tree.

She let us.

We waved away a drooling
mutt who strayed again into our yard.
He sniffed at the hot air again and again,
his dark hair glistening in the sun.
He watched us dig, lazily turned away.

That night, the crickets screamed.

There was no wind.
In our wonderoos, we tugged the thin foam
mattress off our bunk onto the hardwood floor.

Though it was not allowed, she curled beside us.
She pulled the thin sheet off our legs and wrapped
herself in a tight cocoon.

We let her.

FINALIST: KAMDEN HILLIARD

CHNAGE THE NAME TOO FANTASTIC 3 AND THE NIGGA OR 3 FANTASTICS AND THE FLAME MONKEY*

the *Fantastic Four* is tré shitty but tough shit. Michael B. Jordan is already on flame. on fleek. he's ahead of the game's excited red, to the danger zone and beyond. so innanet trolls seem quite non-toxic,

crayola crunchy with their colorism; too trapstarry to be taken seriously under this everlasting *lol yr different sky*. but baby, science don't stop the cold outside, the unchanging aerodrome. everything

is about race except race which is about power. don't these trolls know it? don't they've known it?:
Curvier [with no advisement, trust] *studied* our heroes under his metric gaze. elegant facts await

him, eh, Mrs. Alexander? small things in this world are his--so it blows. so Michael B. knows God gave Noah the rainbow sign no more water but fire the next time. well it's the next time. it's a gamey

time thick with the primordial soup of ash. Terrance says, and don't Terrance always got some shit to say, *whether you consider dogs symbols of security / or symbols of danger depends upon whether / you're*

inside or outside the fence. or if the fence is burning or if you've set their fence aflame or if they've set your fence aflame. come on now, y'all (white boys, Curvier, innanet) are mad just cause

THE SUPERHEROES SHOULD BE WHITE! should be filled with light, and i agree. when i think of God or the *Nordstrom's* manager i hate myself under interrogative sheen-- *what are you*

doing? are you lost? can you afford to be here? like i keep telling my ~*identity*~ to improve is to change; to perfect is to not even give a fuck. but i know, i know, me always with the soapbox

theory and while M.B.J. might be the homie, i hate his open courseware greasy with erasureguts. true story: one time Jordan wrote *maybe in the future we won't talk about [race] as much*.

thank god for as much, thank god for the modifier. not errybody gotta be Madame Lorde, but damn mr. Jordan, not a very fiery approach. let's get stormy, bro! i know we didn't start the fire,

what's wrong with tossing some kindling? throw the comments section, the racist soft-shell science, this light [all known with obfuscation and certain slant]. Stan Lee stoked this up good. if somewhere

in America there is a body perpetually burning-- i mean, the joke writes itself, am i right?

[The title is borrowed from the comments section of article discussing Michael B. Jordan's casting as Johnny Storm in 2015's re-make of The Fantastic Four]

FINALIST: HENRY WEI LEUNG

Sentry Bird

Ask me what I've left for you.
I became by becoming empty.
I left small gods of noise,
entered a wood, never stopped flying.
I left you by a light so near
annihilation you pressed your dark
skin against a wall, peeling.

A wall is a sieve.
You said: *Isn't this all?*
We solve what's divine, God leaves us
limping, we mistake thanks
for love? Ask me why I left you
all this love, this whole
kingdom of useless salt.

I turned course long ago
by a shrug of the shoulders
while our flock went on,
an inarticulate dot
among dots, an impossible
gene, impossible exile,
calling out: fly!

.

By this time next year
I'll have no more face
No more surface.

(Isn't every goodbye mortal?
Wasn't ours a life of postcards
with no person in them?)

One day, I'll face the truth.

But if the truth excludes you,
let me face you.

CONTRIBUTORS

Amy D'Amico is a writer, attorney, and advocate for civil and human rights. She has been previously published in the *Tule Review*, *Return to Mago*, and *Leonard Cohen Afterworld*. Currently, she is completing a young adult (YA) fiction novel. She lives in western NY with her two children and Fishie, the fish.

Emily A. Benton is an assistant poetry editor for *storySouth* and a former editor for *The Greensboro Review*. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in journals such as *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Barn Owl Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Harpur Palate*. Originally from Tennessee, she has lived in Hawai'i since 2012.

A finalist for the 2014 + 2016 MacMillan Awards, **Gabrielle Burton** is a writer and filmmaker who won *Common Ground Review's* poetry prize, SIR's Wilhelmus award (non-fiction), the 2015 Ohio Arts Council's Individual Excellence Award for poetry. Publications include *New Delta Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Superstition Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, and "The Burden of Light." She helms FIVE SISTERS PRODUCTIONS with her sisters (www.fivesisters.com), where her current film is "Kings, Queens, & In-Betweens," a documentary on drag and gender—on which she recently gave a TedxTalk (<http://youtu.be/YOkyc91eY90>).

Meg Eden's work has been published in various magazines, including *Rattle*, *Drunken Boat*, *Poet Lore*, and *Gargoyle*. She teaches at the University of Maryland. She has four poetry chapbooks, and her novel "Post-High School Reality Quest" is forthcoming from California Coldblood, an imprint of Rare Bird Lit. Check out her work at: www.megedenbooks.com.

CONTRIBUTORS

Sam Gridley is the author of the novels *THE SHAME OF WHAT WE ARE* and *THE BIG HAPPINESS*. His fiction and satire have appeared in more than fifty magazines and anthologies. He has received two fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a Wallace Stegner Fellowship from Stanford University, and several honors from magazines. He lives in Philadelphia with his wife and neurotic dog and at the website <http://gridleyville.wordpress.com/>.

Stella Jeng Guillory lives in Vancouver, WA. Her poetry has appeared in *Bamboo Ridge: The Hawai'i Writers' Quarterly* (Summer 1990); *Sister Stew: Fiction and Poetry by Women* (1991); *La'ila'1* (1994); *VoiceCatcher*, the Winter Issue, 2013 & the Summer Issue, 2015; *Just Now, 20 New Portland Poets*; and *America the National Catholic Weekly* (Dec 2, 2013 & March 2, 2015.)

Kamden Hilliard goes by Kam. Kam is the author of two chapbooks: *distress tolerance* (Magic Helicopter Press, 2016) and *perceived distance from impact* (Black Lawrence Press, 2017). Kam has received nice news from Callaloo, NFAA, The UCROSS Foundation, and The Davidson Institute. Check his poems in *The Black Warrior Review*, *Redivider*, *Word Riot*, and other sunspots.

Sam Ikehara was born and raised in Kalihi Valley. She received her Bachelor's Degree in English with Highest Honors from UH Mānoa, and is now continuing her study of English as a first year master's candidate in Literary Studies.

Spencer Yim Kealamakia grew up on the Big Island of Hawai‘i and has lived in South Korea, Spain, Wisconsin, and North Carolina. He earned his bachelor’s degree in English from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His short fiction has appeared in *Anderbo* and *The Greensboro Review*, and has been named a finalist for the Million Writers Award. He’s currently at work on a novel.

Henry Wei Leung is a Kundiman Fellow and the author of *Paradise Hunger* (Swan Scythe Press, 2012). He earned his MFA from the University of Michigan, and has been the recipient of Fulbright, Soros, and other fellowships. His poems, essays, and translations appear in such journals as *Crab Orchard Review*, *Drunken Boat*, and *The Offing*. He is currently pursuing a PhD at UH Mānoa.

Jeffery Ryan Long is currently working toward his PhD in English. His works have been featured in *Bamboo Ridge*, *Hawai‘i Review*, *Marathon Literary Journal* and *Labyrinth Inhabitant*. For more information on the author, visit jefferyryanlong.com.

Scot Lycan: I never thought about Morocco, it never crossed my mind. It was an “add on”. I was on a study abroad in Sevilla. So why then was I so captivated by the region? Because when we don’t expect something, we are that much more transfixed with its result. Your first Christmas, do you remember it? Has there ever been one as grand since? Not likely, but cud’s for those that have had one. I have experienced many Christmas

CONTRIBUTORS

mornings since Morocco, they just were not always in December, and I did not realize what they were until later.

J Jacqueline McLean is a 20-plus year TV journalist. She has been an investigative reporter in a dozen cities across the country, including three years at KGMB-TV in Honolulu. McLean is an eight-time Emmy winner. Currently, she is a third year MFA student in the Creative Writing Program at Hamline University in the Twin Cities. Besides writing, she loves photography. Most of her poetry is linked with her pictures. McLean's life goal is to someday write the great fictional novel or an investigative journalism book. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling. McLean hopes to someday retire in Paris.

Angela Nishimoto grew up on the windward side of O`ahu, teaches on the leeward side, and lives in Honolulu with her husband. She holds a master-of-science degree in botanical science from the University of Hawai`i at Manoa. Her stories have been published in *Hawai`i Review*, *Hawai`i Pacific Review*, *Bamboo Ridge*, *Kaimana*, *Chaminade Literary Review*, *Writing Raw*, *Pen-Pricks*, and in other places.

Joe Tsujimoto has published two teacher texts: *Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents* (NCTE/ERIC) and *Lighting Fires: How the Pasionate Teacher Engages Adolescent Writers* (Heinemann). He has also published a collection of short fiction, *Morningside Heights: New York Stories* (Bamboo Ridge), which won the 2008 Elliot Cades Award for Literature, and was a finalist for the 2010 William Saroyan International Prize for Writing.

Anjoli Roy is a creative writer and PhD student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. She loves *Hawai‘i Review* very much and is stoked to have placed in this year’s annual contest. She also loves cats, the strong winds of Kaimukī that fling the doors open where she lives, and her family near and far who guide all of the (good) things she does. You can read more of her work at www.anjoliroy.com.



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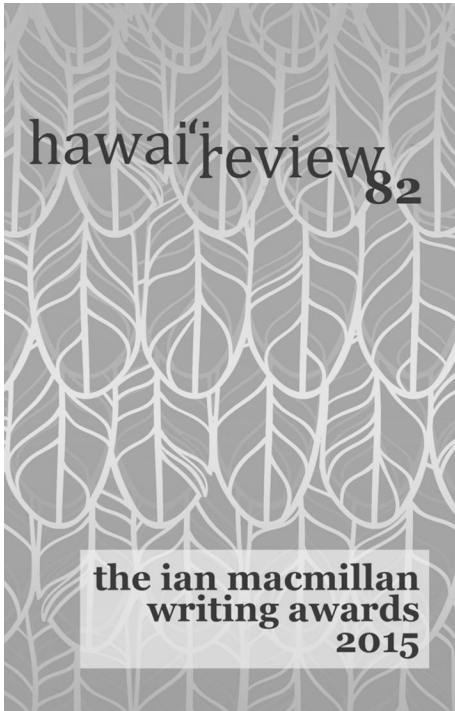
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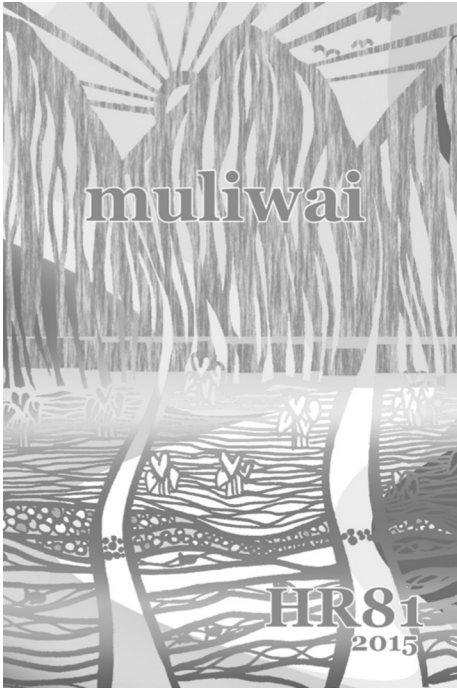
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