
Spring 2012
Hawai'i
Review
76

Hawai'i Review

76

Spring 2012

The Journal

*Hawai`i Review* is a publication of the Board of Publications of the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa. It reflects only the views of its editors and contributors, who are soley responsible for its content. *Hawai`i Review*, a member of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, is indexed by the Humanities International Index, the Index of American Periodical Verse, Writer's Market, and Poet's Market.

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ISSN: 0093-9625

Cover Art: Darren W. Brown
Internal Art: Darren W. Brown

Dear Reader,

This issue of *Hawai`i Review* focuses on the idea of place - rootedness, lived lives, being at home. We've chosen artwork that celebrates our home, here in Hawai`i, and are sure that you will enjoy its natural beauty.

The stories, poems, and nonfiction in Issue 76 all share a realism that grows from daily interactions with close people and familiar places. We hope that these works foster a sense of comfort in the reader. We hope that Issue 76 gives you a sense of coming home.

We'd like to thank all those who submitted to the Ian MacMillan Awards. We are thrilled to celebrate our award winners in this issue. The Ian MacMillan Awards allow *Hawai`i Review* a chance to honor the outstanding work being done in the fields of poetry and fiction, both within our University of Hawai`i at Mānoa community and beyond.

Happy reading!

The Editors at *Hawai`i Review*

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Ian MacMillan Writing Award - First Place, Fiction

Things Blow Up

Jaimee Wriston Colbert

I

In 1955 Kilauea erupts for eighty-eight days sending fountains of boiling lava high into the air, burying twelve homes and evacuating Puna. I'm four years old and attending Howell nursery school where all day long a boy named Carl Craft pulls my hair if I don't show him my underpants. At naptime I jingle my charm bracelet with its little silver bells in his face and he and I are ordered out to the lanai, where stretched out in front on my lauhala mat I slide my sundress up and let him peek, but he keeps pulling my hair anyway. When the day is over my brother and I pile out of the Howell-mobile, a big white station wagon packed with screeching four year olds, into our mother's long arms. She's a vision, waiting for us at the door of our Kailua house in her green and white polka dot halter-top and Bermuda shorts. We are relieved to be home. This is the year the Korean War ends, with over ten million people killed, and a Korean War novel is published called *The Dead, The Dying, and The Damned*.

Three years later, August 1, 1958, night becomes day at 1 AM as the U.S explodes a nuclear bomb above neighboring Johnston Island, a brilliant white flash followed by glowing colors like the northern lights. But this isn't Alaska. This is Hawai'i, not a state yet but they do it, with two more nuclear bombs dropped above Johnston Island. Each explosion is one million tons of TNT, fifty times more powerful than Hiroshima, just seven-hundred miles away from where we sleep in our beds, dreaming of the tidal wave spawned when the earth rocks, wailing sirens and police knocking on our doors

to evacuate, all the while inhaling poisonous sulphuric gasses from the volcano (that years later will be named *vog*), fueled by the nuclear wind. What did we have to fear? It was the 1950s and labor unions were being infiltrated by commies, our father said. Communists are dangerous, we're told, particularly the ones in Cuba and Russia and Red China. We practice crawling beneath our desks at school, head between our legs and our hands over our ears to protect them from an atomic blast. This year Timothy and I are in the same class (we were periodically subjected to conflicting views on educating twins: they should always be together or they should never be together), and we hold hands discreetly under our desks, preparing for our deaths together, though in our above-the-desk lives we wouldn't be caught dead doing this. In 1959 Hawai'i becomes a state and Kilauea Iki erupts with fountains rising 1900 feet into the air, the highest recorded in Hawai'i.

These days you can stare down into the tunnels of former tree trunks the scalding lava burned away, where humans have tossed their litter, cigarette butts, candy wrappers, Primo beer bottles and a Diet Coke can. My favorite is one where a live Ohia tree is growing on the lava rock side of the empty space. Casting its roots all the way down to a soil base, it clutches the rock with its long, willowy root fingers. Moss and ferns grow through the lava sides of another tree mold, and maybe ohelo berry? My grandmother would have known. She could name every plant. But she's gone now and Timothy is too. Mauna Loa above, blue as an ache in the early evening light.

*

2009 and the air abuzz with the drone of insects, heat a white-hot blade. The homeless pick through the garbage leftovers of the open-air markets in Honolulu's Chinatown for slightly bruised fruits, discarded

carrots, competing with the pigeons, the mynah birds, the mourning doves. All night in the airport hotel the jets roar from the runway, and the Inspectress checks for taken things: alarm clocks, towels, remotes for the bolted in flat screen TVs, face cloths, hangers, pillowcases, anything that can't be nailed down. She slips into the rooms like a shadow, like a file through a lock, recording the wrongs, her white-gloved hand inside a suitcase here, a pair of pants thrown carelessly on a chair there, pockets gaping open like a mouth.

This morning I said goodbye to my mother, sitting beside her nursing home bed where she was being entertained by little boys in white shirts, girls in plaid dresses, a woman giving me a massage, supposedly, and her friend, the wife of a lawyer, now dead. Reaching her hands out to them, she saw us sitting in sewing circles, city parks, and restaurants. The waiter is here, she'd say, what will you have? I think I'll have a hamburger, she'd say, and she'd pretend to eat it; or maybe in another world, the one inside her head with its wild uncombed Einstein hair, and her eyes (which can't see much these days anyway) mostly shut, she really was eating it. Timothy's here, she said when I kissed her goodbye. I looked up for a moment expecting, what? My brother floating above her, his big shit-eating grin, a Heineken in one hand and flipping me off with the other? Fuck you! I whispered. I'm not about to let him see any more tears.

Later, on the jet flying to where I live now, something nasty in the plastic container of nuts and dried fruits, a bitter taste, and worried about the salmonella peanuts from that Georgia plant (52 sickened, 7 dead across the freakin' country and Congress drags the marshmallow-faced Peanut Plant President into a hearing where he keeps pleading the 5th; Did you know there were maggots and you let them go anyway into candies, cookies, snacks for kids? I

RESPECTFULLY DECLINE TO ANSWER, he says—about the little blond boy with the million dollar smile, dead from eating those peanut butter crackers), I barf peanut-flavored bile into the metal airplane sink then head back to my seat. The jet lists then rocks like a cradle in the darkening sky.

I call Ruth from the airport parking lot. You were supposed to pick me up! I whine to her voice mail voice, crisp and certain and not there. I tell her voice I may have eaten one of those poisonous peanuts the fat CEO let go into packages because he didn't want to spend the money to get rid of the bad ones, which means I may be dead. A little girl sobbing into the phone, and gazing around the near-empty lot I think how I won't tell her about the loneliness—my mother who didn't recognize me and the jeweler on Maunakea Street who did, who asked me to model his diamond balls, the necklace with nothing on underneath. Later in a soccer dad's minivan, the moon grinning into the window, his hand in my pants and I'm holding onto his like a lifeline, going *come on, come on, come on*.

Before leaving Hawai'i I went to the Big Island to where my grandparents' house is caving back into the land, the land reclaiming its wood, its air, its formerly inhabited spaces, and I rattled the front door knob like there was someone home to let me in, begged them to come back to me, bring me back to a past still hopeful of a future that hadn't happened yet, as certain in its unnamed possibilities as their house being repossessed by the weeds, the birds, screens dangling like broken arms, the window where she used to wait for us, our grandmother, her silhouette with that long dark hair piled on top of her head. Later I took a hike around Kilauea Iki following a Kalij pheasant, its blue-black feathers the lip-smacking color of licorice, that stayed

just a little ahead of me and did not fly away, not even when I approached it, hand out. My grandfather has been reborn as a pheasant, I said, and he didn't deny it.

II

Each time you come back to this island you imagine running into the man who taught you how to give a blowjob—he's been living here for some thirty years now and how big can an island be before one day, in The Volcano Store maybe, you're buying your nonfat yogurt and vegan grainy things and he's got a manapua in his hand, that toothy grin, wandering the cluttered isles. Still the long dreads but, realistically, maybe not so much on top. You feel the clerk's contempt, *ukus* nipping under your skin, her eyes crawling over you—*fuckin' haole*, she's thinking. She's Japanese, not even hapa, not a breath of Hawaiian in her and you know she feels she belongs here and you don't. You can remember back when this was the Hongo Store, can she? It was the only game in Volcano for years. Otherwise you took the old Volcano Road with its collapsing shoulders and puka ferns—hapu'u ferns with their hairy long roots concealing giant tubes in the lava, a rift zone with cracks going down twenty, thirty, even sixty feet ready to swallow you up, for the hour plus trek into Hilo for groceries.

Now there is the Volcano Highway. Now there are several of these little stores—open air style with their wooden floors, dried seed Li Hing Mui and cuttlefish, Naalehu milk, five dollars a gallon—and a lot more tourists these days poking through. You want these tourists with their Midwestern accents, their fish-white jello thighs, to know you are *not* one of them, but you can't speak Pidgin anymore and there's your freckly Scottish skin. You're appalled to find your childhood treat, the Stone Cookies that you could only get freshly baked from the Mountainview Bakery a couple towns

away are being sold here now. It used to be an outing, the family piled into your grandfather's Pontiac, fins like sharks, Tuesdays, cookie day, burning rubber down the old Volcano Road to purchase these hot from the big stone ovens. You include one with your other checkout items—I mean regardless these are not to be resisted—asking her when did *this* happen (while glancing surreptitiously, could it really be *him*)? She just shrugs. You read the ingredients and note they have trans fats in them but you don't mention this, because now you see he's in the beer isle, reaching for a Primo to wash down his manapua. You remember drinking beer with him, hot blue days in his catamaran off Lanikai, sailing to the Moku Lua Islands where it's just you, him and the frigate birds, *Iwa*, man-of-war birds. He didn't know you were only sixteen (he's twelve years older), and when he found out he said don't tell. He isn't the one who shoved your head down between his legs brandishing your ponytail like a whip. Not this one. Patient, graphic, technical instructions like you might find in a manual, Fellatio for Dummies. First, place organ in right hand. Now, insert into mouth opened wide like eating a banana. Caution: do not bite. Tender little licks work best.

Later you'll see his face in the landscaped bank of the rental cottage, two chunks of lava for eyes and the mulch is his beard. You'll remember the tickle of this beard, his head bobbing up and down like one of those car puppets between your own two thighs. You are glad not to care about these kinds of things anymore, at least not with this man, though once upon a time you could've sworn your life was over when he confessed to you he was getting married again, to his ex-wife. For years you were envious of this wife and by association all skinny women with long kelpy hair, until it occurred to you being married to someone who gives blowjob lessons to sixteen year olds may not be such a desirable thing.

You pick her up by the side of the Volcano Highway hitchhiking, long black hair usually so carefully braided or trapped in a bun now flying out on either side of her like bat wings. She's got on a backpack big enough to carry a small house. Bring her up to Volcano and she is Pele, you decide, Volcano goddess minus the little white dog. As the tale goes you pick up either a beautiful woman and her little white dog or an old hag hitchhiking and she disappears the minute you get close to her home, Halema'uma'u crater. It's your lucky day. She's a beaut.

Are you Pele? You ask her. You don't go anywhere near Halema'uma'u, which is erupting, just in case. She smiles her smile, gives you that deep-eyed goddessy look, though maybe it's the vacant stare of a person who lives on the streets. I'm hungry, she says. When you get to your rental cottage you fix her a roasted pepper sandwich and a shot of gin. One must always give Pele her gin or she may play a trick on you, command her lava to bury your house or make it rain for thirty days—although that's if you pick her Lehua blossoms. What's your favorite flower? You ask her. She just rolls her eyes.

Later you watch her strip. Layers of the streets coming off in clouds of silt, smoke and grime and then her bare skin the color of a finely polished wood. You consider offering her a bath, though of course if she's Pele, why would she seek water? Keeper of the flame.

That night you dream you and your grandfather are standing at the rim of Kilauea crater, and he tells you sharks have been known to cannibalize in the womb, the strongest fetus eating the weakest, natural selection at work. The vog is thick, a wind switch from trades to Kona blows it over you in a grey mist only it's dry, stinks of sulfur and scratches your throat. Around you ferns are brittle and curled from its acidy breath. You inhale, cough, the viscous taste of the vog on your teeth, your tongue, the roof of your mouth, turn toward your

grandfather but he's vanished. You wake shaking and empty, a sense of your brother having been here, though maybe not. Maybe you're back in the womb again and you do what the first-born twin must, be alive at the expense of the weaker. The Volcano night in a shroud of fog, a cold wet tongue of it slurping at the hapu'u ferns and you close your eyes, pray for a dreamless sleep.

The next morning is bright and sunny and peering into her bedroom you half expect to see just a pile of ashes—you had checked for your wallet too, just in case. But she's there and you hand her a steaming cup of coffee. You made sure to get it very hot, a spin in the microwave after pouring it from the Mr. Coffee, just in case. You don't offer lukewarm beverages to a fire goddess. The thing we have to do this morning, you tell her, is go up to my grandparents' house. They've been dead for a while and their house is being sucked back into the land. I'm charting its progress, you say.

You drive the three miles or so up to their road and before even turning into their driveway you can spot plants like little trees growing out of the gutter, ivy crossing over the front door stoop, and the window where your grandmother stood and waited for you, silhouette of her big bun in the dining room light, is cracked, its curtains in tatters. Your stomach roils, head hammers, chest aches; you feel like you're being turned inside out with the old grief. I'm afraid of it, you tell her, this dying. She snakes her bony wrist against your cheek, the back of her hand like she's checking you for fever.

That afternoon she's gone and you pack a picnic, put it into your backpack and climb down the Halema'uma'u trail into Kilauea. In the distance Pele's sluicing her fires, a red cloud over the crater and all manner of poisonous sulphuric gasses, and you perch on a ropey piece of pahoehoe eating your pepper sandwich, the wind reeling hot as a breath, and an apapane singing like there's no tomorrow from an Ohia tree that managed

to thrust its way out of the lava cracks, not unlike the weeds waving triumphantly from your grandparents' collapsing gutters.

III

Ruth, the woman I live with knows all about things that blow up. She knows about explosions, eruptions, beyond what even Timothy knew, and at one point he was thinking about being a volcanologist. For instance, Ruth will tell you: December 8, 1941 the day after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor the U.S. snagged Kaho'olawe and the military bombed the island continuously until 1990, for target practice. Kilauea erupted in 1983 and is still going great guns, its lava having added more than 500 new acres of land to the Big Island, destroyed 200 Kalapana homes, caused more than 60 million dollars in damage, and buried Kaimu beach and the Queen's Bath; breathing its sulphuric vog has killed at least 15 people along with acres of native plant life. And in just one day, November 29, 1975, Kilauea erupted spawning the biggest earthquake in a hundred years, causing four million dollars in damage and creating a tsunami that killed two people. That was also the last day she saw her father. He kissed her mother on the cheek, patted Ruth's head and walked out.

We belong to a kind of club, a group of people who get together because they're missing other people. It's how we met, Ruth and me. We're united in our losses, though we have little else in common—just that we can't seem to move beyond what we're missing. After her father disappeared, leaving over 100,000 dollars in credit card debt, their house was foreclosed on and her mother and Ruth became homeless. Because of this she lives in our home like any day she could wake up and it's gone. Her suitcase is packed and ready at the door. Coolers are there too ready to be loaded with all the extra food she

keeps stocked in the fridge, just in case, and four luggage carts are in our basement that can carry this stuff out onto the streets if need be. These are already somewhat packed as well, a sleeping bag for both of us, and two plastic makeup bags filled with such necessaries as alcohol wipes to wash our skin in lieu of a bath, bug spray (you can't imagine the amount of crawling, biting, sucking insects that attack people who have no homes, Ruth told me), and the kinds of containers you get from hotels, miniature bottles of lotion, shampoo, toothpaste, etc. She's got our big beach umbrella ready for when it rains, and various plastic tarps to cover it all, bungee cords and electric tape to hold things down. Boxes of canned goods and a can opener, and even a few bottles of wine. We can trade the wine for other things, she said, bartering is currency on the streets. You only think your home is secure, Ruth said. Only if you're a turtle and the thing is attached to your back. Otherwise like everything else it can be taken away.

Ruth gets the little bottles of hotel lotions and shampoos and conditioners because she works as an Inspectress at the Holiday Inn, inspecting the jobs the housekeeping staff does, going into each room after one of them is done, then rechecking the room after a guest has checked out to make sure said guest hasn't left with anything that's supposed to remain in the hotel. She has a list of items posted on each bathroom wall, with the price that will be charged if it is removed from the room: Wash cloths, four dollars, face cloths, five dollars, bath towels, seven dollars, shower heads, twenty dollars, night table lights, thirty dollars, night tables, fifty dollars, TV remotes, ironing boards, irons, pictures off the walls, bedspreads, sheets, pillows, etc.—pretty much all the stuff Ruth has made sure we won't be without when we lose our home, minus the night tables and the pictures and the TV remote—we won't need those on the streets.

Once when we were driving the Hamakua coast, its

one lane bridges, the twisting, looping road weaving past waterfalls, drop-dead stunning coastline, and the neat little tin-roof houses of the former plantation workers, Ruth glanced up and saw a sprawling McMansion in the middle of what was once a sugar cane field, its panoramic ocean views, and at the side of the road a skeletal cat. She shook her head, her long black hair yanked into a fierce braid pointing down like an arrow, and glared at me like I had done this thing, built myself a house that could shelter a town then abandoned a little cat to starve in the streets.

Did you know, Ruth said, that 90% of all methamphetamine labs are discovered when they explode? A memory, where was it? Not here, not now. The mainland. A pond so scum and trash covered the baby ducks popped their tail feathers up, their heads whizzling in and out of the muck like mini dolphins, needing to breathe. And then the men in the white suits came, all of them leaching out of a big steel truck, masks, eyes to the side like flounders. Breathing apparatus attached to their backs, black trash bags and canisters filled with some kind of spray that sizzled across the water leaving an aqua slime like a line of glitter. Next day the ducks were gone.

Meth cooks dress like this too when they make the stuff, maybe not the white
suits but the gas masks. Pure poison, don't you know. Red phosphorous makes phosphorine gas when it's cooking. A few breaths of that and you don't have to worry anymore about explosions, the environment being poisoned, coral reefs disappearing, the arctic melting, starving cats, animals and plants and all manner of grand and ancient life forms just up and gone.

Across the street from that pond a woman hosed down her yard, her feet anchored to the path in pink

chenille slippers, right arm bracing herself on the handicap railing where a common white cabbage butterfly landed and she shoed it away. The hose, cigarette poised carefully between two fingers in her other hand, the one clinging to the railing, her vacant stare, the dampened grass, each blade shining wetly like little green knives.

Scientists believe over a hundred different species of animals disappear every day. Butterflies among them, fragile, their lacy wings flitting out a story if only we would've listened before it's too late. When Timothy and I were kids we played with them in their caterpillar stage, grazing on the crown flower bushes outside our house. Plopped them when they were ripe, big black and yellow wormy things, into glass peanut butter jars, a sprig off the crown flower bushes inside each. Maybe when I grow up I'll be the guy who studies butterflies! Timothy said. He was always speculating about who or what he was going to be. Me, I just wanted to be a teacher. We punched holes in the tops with a bottle opener, watched the caterpillars spin their cocoons and when they hatched into butterflies we set them free.

IV

Whales grieve the deaths of their own, and strand themselves on beaches after suicidal dives down so far to escape the navy's sonar, the pain of it a jolt in the brain like getting electric shock therapy over and over and over (imagine car jumper cables plugged into your head!), that they rise up with the bends, bleeding around their brains, ears, lesions in their livers, lungs, kidneys, nitrogen bubbles in their tissues. And still they forgive us, gray whales almost exterminated at one point approaching boats in Baja where they birth their calves, snuggling up for a pat on the head, a gaze at us out of huge, ancient

eyes, flukes still bearing scars from the harpoon's intent.

Who was that little girl crying? You, said Ruth.

Ruth's been thinking a lot about death, and she gave me a table with printed out stats, said she got it off the Internet in one of the Holiday Inn rooms. Somebody left a laptop, she said. I noted the sleek black case beside her suitcase, lined up for speedy evacuation at our front door.

Annual Causes of Death in the United States

1. Tobacco: 435,000
2. Poor Diet and Physical Inactivity: 365,000
3. Alcohol: 85,000
4. Microbial Agents: 75,000
5. Toxic Agents: 55,000
6. Motor Vehicle Crashes: 26,347
7. Adverse Reactions to Prescription Drugs: 32,000
8. Suicide: 30,622
9. Incidents Involving Firearms: 29,000
10. Homicide: 20,308
11. Sexual Behaviors: 20,000
12. Illicit Use of Drugs: 17,000
13. Anti-Inflammatory Drugs Such As Aspirin: 7,600
14. Marijuana: 0

I still come across my brother's e-mail, my computer still auto-selects his address when I type in Tim. Even technology will not acknowledge Timothy's disappearance from this world. Last time I looked there were 287,000 websites for fraternal twins. They don't share any more genetic material than regular siblings said one, but there's a special bond between them. Perhaps because they share so many of the same experiences growing up, it speculated.

At a Teacher's Day meeting Michael Donahue, World History Grade 11, collapses from a massive heart attack and his girlfriend Tina Chang, Media Specialist

9-12, pounds on his chest shouting, Breathe, Michael, Breathe! Something so automatic that when we were children my brother and I obsessed over it; what was it we did that made it happen, this breathing, and what would happen if we stopped doing this thing?

Breathe, Timothy, breathe!

Though my brother didn't simply disappear, at least not in the missing person sense, here today gone tomorrow. He dwindled away, that last year of his life, his hair, his skin, his teeth, the weight of him in this world, his heart, his happiness, and then the hemorrhaging in his brain. So I guess he did in fact go missing, a shell of what he was before, a cob, a husk, the beautiful golden kernels of my twin having been eaten away. Crystal methamphetamine cannibalizes the body, so toxic that the body, programmed from the get go to be a survivor, steals from the lesser—hair, skin, teeth—to feed the greater, liver, kidneys, lungs, the heart.

Blood exploding in his brain like a dam released, a rush and a roar and maybe the sound he hears is the whooshing of rain on the tin roof of our Kailua home, or Mauna Ulu when our grandmother took us to see it erupt, the pop and gush of liquid lava. In that moment between breath and none, did he remember our promise, clasping hands under our desks while the world fell away?

Every time "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" comes on, regardless of who's singing I hear Bob Dylan and a grinning, freewheeling Timothy and me in Drew Griffen's old

T-bird, borrowed for this day, with its slick metallic fins like two marlins cruising, radio blasting, spiraling down the highway between Providence and Sturbridge Village where we'll be meeting our grandmother and her friend Hattie. Grandpa's gone and though strike-three breast cancer lurks, Grandma's still feeling pretty good, enough to take this trip. Timothy's hitchhiked from Paul Smith's College in the Adirondacks, his one semester there (this

the year he thought, maybe a forest ranger!) to where I am a student in Rhode Island, working toward my Education degree. For Thanksgiving I'll visit him at Paul Smith's, bleak and snowy, the campus deserted except for Timothy and me, too far from home to go home, and Dirk, the nerdy chemistry T.A. I'm sleeping with, who unveils some homemade acid dubbed Dirk-do-you-good, which we sample, staggering about the frozen woods like maniacs, and back again to scribble poetry all over the concrete dorm walls—looked like a World War II bomb shelter—whose present occupants hadn't anything more expressive to scrawl on those barracks beyond a plaintive I'M HORNY!!! Then into town we'll jaunt to a diner, the only place open for Thanksgiving dinner, where we try hooking up Timothy and the waitress with the peach-colored hair, leaving his phone number on a dollar bill.

But for now it's autumn, the leaves are on fire, and we're spinning down that highway with Dylan, Knock Knock Knockin' on Heaven's door.

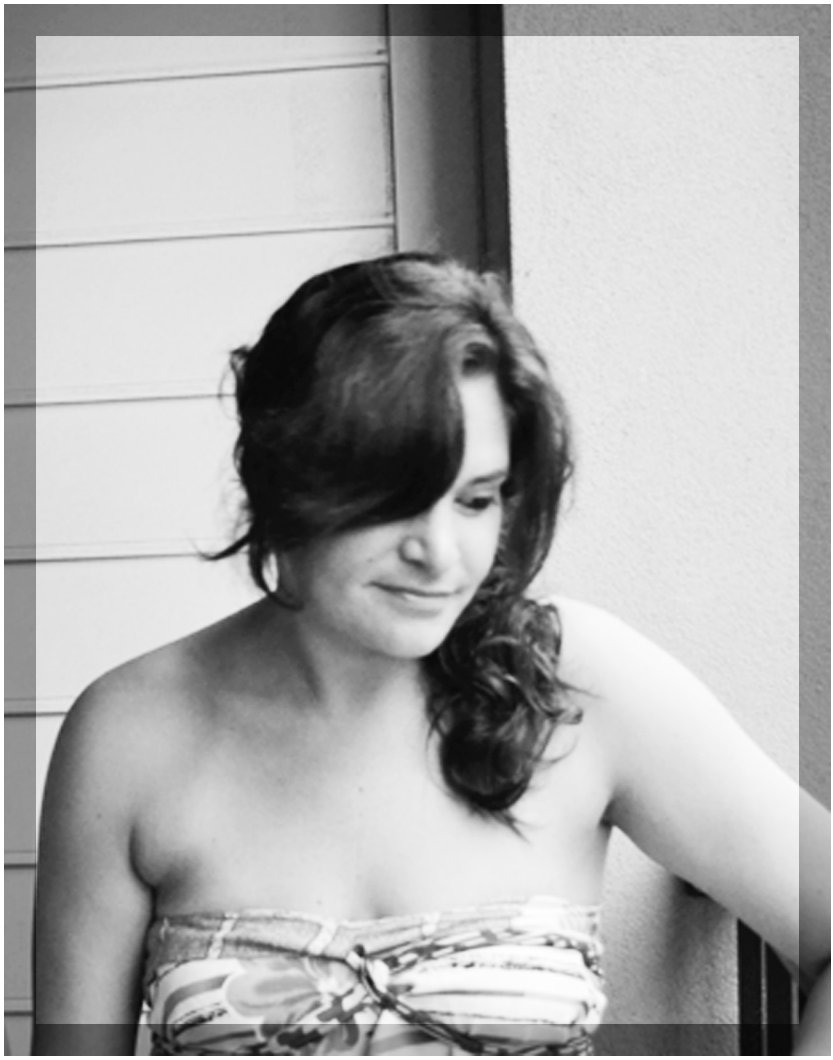
Jaimee Wriston Colbert

Jaimee Wriston Colbert is the author of the novel, *Shark Girls*, a finalist for the Foreword Magazine Book of the Year and the USA Book News Best Books of 2010 Awards; the linked stories collection, *Dream Lives of Butterflies,* a gold medal winner in the 2008 Independent Publisher Awards; a novel in stories, *Climbing the God Tree,* winner of the Willa Cather Fiction Prize; and the story collection *Sex, Salvation, and the Automobile*, winner of the Zephyr Prize. Her stories have appeared in various journals, including *TriQuarterly, Prairie Schooner, Tampa Review, Connecticut Review, Gettysburg Review,* and *New Letters*, broadcast on "Selected Shorts" and anthologized. Two recent stories won the Jane's Stories National Short Story Award and the *Isotope* Editors' Fiction Prize. Originally from Hawai`i, she is Professor of English and Creative Writing at SUNY, Binghamton University.

On Writing

I am especially honored to be published in *Hawai`i Review* through the Ian MacMillan Competition. I met Ian maybe a decade ago at a Honolulu dinner party my cousin gave. I had read his stories before and was a fan, and we kept up an occasional correspondence. In 2007 my collection *Dreamlives of Butterflies* was published by BkMk Press, many of the stories taking place in Hawai`i where I'm originally from. A couple years later Ian's final collection, *Our People*, was published by BkMk, with stories set in upstate New York where he was from and where I live now! Our editor used to tease that we had "traded lives." Sadly, Ian lost his life soon after his wonderful collection was published. I'm delighted that my story, "Things Blow Up," has won in a competition that honors him--more serendipity there!

Darren W. Brown



Jaimie Gusman

Ian MacMillan Writing Award - First Place, Poetry

Messaging

Jaimie Gusman

I open the episode to find myself in it.
(*We all do this* the others assure me.)
At some point, I rummage through a garbage pail
then another. The things I find
never seem to be what I'm looking for.

In this scene I open the basement door, unlocked
but mindful of secrecy. A heavy ocean hides there
with the potatoes, the shovels, the laundry.
I know that this is where we all go for winter.
This is where the others have stored their clothes.

(Confused as to why I am naked:
as in fully clothed but not in my favorite dress
which appears to be hanging up, freshly ironed,
smelling of ammonia and corn husk.) I am aware
that I am also not "put in" any type of skin.

A woman walks in, asks me how long it's been
since I've had a good cup of rosemary-peach tea.
My answer is exact: three years to this moment.
It is cold in the basement, yet she doesn't offer
the drink. She writes something down, walks away.

Certainly, this should be an embarrassing moment.
There are mirrors to tell me so, one stitched to my gut.
I have breasts that fit neatly into my hands,
arms in a fashionable cross-bone, a Third Reich style,
also worn by my high school sweetheart.

But he doesn't visit me here, only women are allowed.
(*Don't worry* they tell me I am not alone!)

There is one in particular who follows me
from one end of the basement to the other,
but refuses to cross water.

I fast-forward. The act is an unexpected emotional experience.
I am digging through the floorboards, but instead of wooden planks
they are books. Underneath I find cloaks and hats.
I try them all on in an obsessive manner.
I break the mirror under my breasts.

Woman after woman comes down the stairs.
They ask me extraordinary questions about simple things.
They say *do you remember skinning your knees on the front porch?*
Can you recall how many stitches are lost in your sister's forehead?
My desire to speak lessens with every entrance, with every insistence

that there is an answer perhaps tucked in the pockets
of some ghost's whimpering lungs, some leopard print
flap cap that spreads its wings across the bricks,
breathing heavy as it expands beyond its extant form.

My grandmother steps in, asks me if I would like to play
Twister, or some other game where your limbs disappear.
We never played like this together while she was alive.
I press *pause*, and she has me pinned down on the floor.
Her hands are on blue dots, which she paints over my arms.

She asks me if I think she is pretty, if her hair is alright.
She is beautiful in a way that is undisputable,
in a way that no longer exists.
I am however a damp and swamp-like sponge

with no features of my own: I am the basement door.

In the morning I discover I am without a staircase.
The impossibility of descent, of how I came here.
The impossibility of ascent, of how I might depart.
We are only what we bring. We never belonged,
only longed to be on a windowsill, full of everything.

Jaimie Gusman

Jaimie Gusman lives in Honolulu where she is a PhD candidate at the University of Hawai`i, teaches creative writing and composition, and runs the M.I.A. Art & Literary Series. Her work has been published nationally and internationally by "Socialism, Capitalism, and Nature," *Unshod Quills*, *Hearing Voices*, *Hawaii Women's Journal*, Tinfish Press, Spork Press, *Shampoo*, *Anderbo*, *Juked*, *Barnwood*, *DIAGRAM*, *DarkSky Magazine*, *2 River Review*, *The Dirty Napkin Review*, and others. Her chapbook *One Petal Row* was published in 2011 by Tinfish Press. She has another chapbook coming out from Highway 101 Press this year titled *The Anyjar*. She blogs at poeticvetanda.blogspot.com.

About the Piece

"Messaging" emerged from a dream I had about a year ago. In the dream, I was searching for my grandmother, who at the time had recently passed away. I try to write when I wake up or in the middle of the night - so I am close to sleep. This way, nothing is fleeting. Everything is on the edge of reality.

Darren W. Brown

Ian MacMillan Writing Award - Second Place, Fiction

Suicide of the Lilies

Cheri Nagashima

I think she died, that lily of mine, with my maggots in her hair. The lieutenant approaches me at the banquet, looking somewhere to the right of my shoulder, and introduces me to her mother. The woman he brings forward has cropped hair and a voice like bone fragments colliding. I look away only to be confronted with the cave dirt smeared across a vision of her daughter's brow. I see the shadows of the makeshift hospital caught in the hollows of her eyes, and those small white flecks falling from the cords of her dark hair. "Erina said you were close," her mother says, the pouches under her eyes sallow and heavy. "She knew my daughter, too." She stares blankly at the ground and throws out the words like she's watching them burn.

It's their anniversary and so we've been summoned to this reception, not too far from the museum erected in their honor, in Itoman. Banners with messages like "Never In Vain!" and "Remember the Patriotic Heroes!" hang in uneven strands around the room. They're making solemn speeches just inside, cups filled with wine and suits pressed at the seams. The man at the podium heralds the innocent dead. *Himeyuri* he bequeaths them, Lily Girls, naming them far after the fact. The ones with all the words weren't there for the living graveyards and the bombs, and the way their pale skin lit the caves that buried them alive, gore and dirt clogging their tiny lungs. They never saw those lily children scooping up blood in the palms of their young hands.

I stare at the lieutenant, this man I knew when the world was rent. He was full of dirty jokes then, and had an easy smile, and a hair-trigger in combat. He's got a bald spot on his crown now, swirling outward like

a galaxy. A touch of palsy blows in his gnarled fingers, dead branches caught in the wind. I nod at this stranger woman whose arm he holds on to and I do not attempt to smile. I make a motion to excuse myself and his eyes finally land on my throat. His brow crumples. I touch a hand to the old scar. I catch a cab home, away from the reception.

I think of her, always.

She had a soft, round face, the smooth weight of childhood still clinging to her cheekbones. One look at the two of us and she'd run a despairing, trembling hand through her thick, black hair. "How old are you?" Tada asked, doubtful but desperate. His legs floundered unsteadily beneath my dead weight. His name was Tadahiro, but I called him Tada, like he'd just pulled off a magic trick. He had been trying to keep my head still, my blood spilling over onto his combat-issued boots from between his fingers. On the way over I'd woken up and he'd had to tell me, "You got shot in the neck, you gotta hang in there." The girl hovered over me, fingers hesitant, eyes wild, and mouth just slightly agape. She kept licking her lips between attempts to speak, clenching her hair at the roots. Our troops had gotten orders to bring the dead and injured to the caves. New medical units had been sent in, our captain told us, the Japanese government had found a way after all.

"Fifteen," the tiny nurse said, her gaze frozen on my neck. Her voice trembled and dipped, and she'd swallowed hard, so I'd known it must have been bad. "I'm from the girls' high school." I wanted to groan, but my neck had gone numb and there was the taste of warm metal at the back of my throat.

Someone had had the foresight to find a neck brace before they'd brought me here, so I could only see dim shapes from the peripheries of my eyes as they placed me on the ground. They were everywhere, a bunch of girls, none older than my attendant, running around with

gauze in their long, white fingers, and dark stains on their navy blue uniforms. They were disorganized and anxiously overeager. Too young, I thought through the pain, then gasped and coughed a spray of blood that hit the poor girl across her chest.

Tada swiped a rag across my mouth with one hand, smeared wet and warm across my lips. He pressed down even harder with his other hand over my throat, and looked down at me and nodded, "It's okay, you're okay," then looked up. "Help him," he'd said, too rough and sounding young. The girl just kept staring at the blood running down my throat and soaking through my uniform, pooling wetly on my chest. She cleared her throat, swallowed convulsively, then began frantically to grab for the medical kit she'd been provided with at the schools. The girl nodded and took a breath. "Okay," she'd said, her hands shaking but her jaw clenched. She had a high, brittle, tinkling voice, a frail wind chime of bones and bells. "Okay. This is --" When she'd looked down at me again, her eyes were frightened, giant, immobile orbs of black. She opened her mouth, maybe in an attempt to reassure us both, but darkness had begun to creep in at the edges of my eyes. My vision narrowing, I saw her body jolt as she gagged, clapping a hand to her mouth. "Somebody!" Tada yelled out, veins forming a pinstripe design down his neck when he raised himself to scan the area. "Somebody!" Going under, I watched her as she heaved and threw up on Tada's battle-worn boots, wet with my blood.

When I woke, it was to a throbbing that ran everywhere, a screaming pain that felt like demolition and disease. Around me, a chaos rushed past that made me shut my eyes tight once again. Outside the boats screamed, but here in the darkness of the caves, shadows cried and reached out arms unattached for water that wouldn't come and mothers too far away to hold. The stench of old iron and overturned dirt clouded the air,

with the rising heated smell of feces beneath it all. “Little girl, little girl,” a voice called weakly, over and over, next to me, before it got lost in the cacophony and stopped altogether. “Water,” I tried to say, but the sound was plugged up with a rush of tightness, a sharp strike like something being severed. My arm would not cooperate in my attempts to flag down one of the darting, skirted figures that stepped over and around our flung-out limbs, the trembling torsos of men on the floor.

Through the din came a conversation that passed over me. “Chiyo,” a girl with a familiar voice cried over the noise of the wounded. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Rika!” came the exasperated reply. “Pull yourself together or go to the supply line.” The voice dropped out for a beat, frustrated and impotent. “Rika!” she hissed.

Rika’s wails of helplessness joined the chorus of dying groans.

It was hours before a nameless, faceless nurse, moving through the inert mounds of flesh, kneeled next to me and held a metal cup to my lips. “Drink,” she instructed wearily, and placed the pitcher she carried down to brush the hair from my face. The water was lukewarm and dribbled off of my lips. Swallowing, I fought a spike of panic when my throat refused to move the way it should, and the girl leaned closer and rubbed her hand roughly over my covered throat, soothing the liquid down. Every press of her touch recalled the moment of that bullet entering, the sick realization of it all. She shouted out into the dark for the others. New girls descended on me with clumsy fingers that unwound and applied strips of gauze, dabbed stinging, icy liquids to my skin. They whispered to each other but never to me, even as the tears leaked despite myself and the ache rolled over into bright sparks of acrid agony. Someone sank a needle deep into my arm. Tendrils of the drug reached out and spread, soft touches of relief in my veins. The two girls hovered over me in worry for a few more minutes before

moving on.

As I tried to calm myself, I listened to the first girl try to attend to the man next to me. She placed the cup to his lips, too, saying, "Drink," in her flat, quiet voice. He did not respond. I strained to watch as she pressed her dirt-smeared ear to his jaw. She touched fingers to his neck, then his wrist, quick flights of assessment and a blank face. Her only response was to reach into her apron pocket and pull out a sheet of something that glowed and reflected faintly in the dim light. She touched his forehead and moved on, leaving a shine of something behind.

The cries in the cave quieted as time passed, echoes dying in the stale air. Bodies shuffled against the hard dirt floor, sprawled from wall to wall, trapped by rough sheets of rock that stretched high and pressed hot air down on our open wounds. The rumble of the war outside eventually settled into an uneasy silence as well. What faint light there had been to see by had disappeared, and quiet dots of electric fire flared up to outline the perimeter of the caves.

"Nightfall," I heard one of the girls murmur and it was a cue that set them all into abrupt synchronized motion. The lilies, those wilting beauties, moved through the gaps in the shadows of our dried blood pools, and systematically picked out the dead. I couldn't understand how they selected the corpses from the sleeping so easily. With giant grunts and scuffled footsteps, they hoisted the bodies themselves, three or four of them for every one man. The tinier of their troops swung lanterns high above the processions, giving firm directions to each girl on her foot placement. "Watch your right, Kaori, there's a hand -- Yuko, careful." It was in this slow, tedious progression that a group of struggling girls lifted the man who had been lying next to me, his head drooping down over a pale, pudgy arm. A gold star sticker gleamed from between his eyebrows. I closed my eyes and waited for the flicker of the lanterns to pass.

The next day, a slim woman appeared at the cave entrance, the curls of her hair flattened into wet ringlets against her forehead. The children gathered around her in the light I could just barely make out, and they blocked out the sun with their tiny heads. They returned as a flock, carrying stretchers with frames rife with splinters and cloth beds hanging from the wood. Under the direction of the older woman, the girls begin to load and separate the men. The woman with the ringlets paused beside me, briefly touched my neck, then pressed a sticker to my cheek. Several girls crowded around me, wriggling their stubby fingers between my skin and the dirt floor. "One, two, *three*," one of them counted, a lisp curling the rounded vowels in her speech. Unevenly, I was lifted, my butt hanging uselessly and heavily where none of the girls dared to reach down and support it, choosing instead to cling to my legs and shoulders, their long broken nails biting into my flesh. The ride was easier on the rickety stretcher, through a system of tunnels that led further into the caverns. We moved further from the light of the battle raging beneath the cliffs outside, just on the shores of the island.

"The doctor will be able to look at you in here," one of the girls said kindly through her panting, readjusting her grip on one of the handles. Her long black hair had started to come undone from its ponytail, splaying strands across her face that she blew back ineffectually. The stretcher jostled when she tossed her head to get the hair from out of her eyes. "Our teacher said she sewed you up several days ago when they brought you in, but this is just in case." One of the girls walking alongside the stretcher reached over and readjusted my neck brace. "She teaches Home Economics," she said reassuringly.

In this new cave, five other men laid on their stretchers in a row, each with a pink rabbit sticker smiling merrily upon their cheeks. Two of the men turned to watch as I was carried past. A man covered

half in shadow and thick bandages that wrapped around his chest raised his arm slightly, called out, "Yuujirou? Yuujirou?" but I am not Yuujirou and I could not shake my head. I was placed at the very end of the line and given some water. The girls lingered a while before an older lady rushed in with hard footfalls and gathered them. I caught snatches of her low words above the rise and fall of the men's murmurings with one another: doctor and wait and need. The girl with the undone ponytail exhaled hard and the girl next to her spoke up and stubbornly declared, "Rika and Erina can do it."

The next time I saw her, the poor nurse who'd admitted me, she was deemed our warden. She was made to watch over us until the doctor got through conducting field surgery on the worst cases in the other cave holdings. The girl she was with walked in with a lantern held at waist-level and started checking on the men closest to the entrance. My lily lingered, carrying a large cardboard box in a hold so tight I could hear the scrabble of her struggle when she readjusted her grip. As she neared, I could see her fingernails were stained the color of sacrifice, wads of deep, solid rust-and-wine spatter caked in the spaces between her fingers. Her gaze caught mine and her lower jaw hardened. She looked away and then helped to unload rations and water from the box before they began to nurse the six of us. Some of the men could sit up, even chew and swallow all on their own. Others turned away the food and sipped demurely at the canteens. Neither girl knew quite what to do with me.

"Can he swallow?" the other asked. My girl assessed me, that wild look I had seen on our first meeting dulled to a dark dread. In that familiar motion, she dragged her hands through her hair, grabbing at fistfuls and taking a long, slow breath. She dropped her arms, said, "I don't know," and looked down at me expectantly. "Open your mouth if you want food, please," she said to

me, those soft, baby fat cheeks sagging stubbornly when she frowned. Slowly, weakly, I undid my lips from one another. She nodded and reached into the box and started tearing the bread into tiny pieces. She pushed a small wedge past my teeth. It lay dry and hard on my tongue. I tried to move my mouth and press down with my teeth, break up the food. "I'm sorry it's not rice," she said, her brows sinking and pushing together as she watched me struggle. "The front lines got that. There wasn't enough." She faltered. With soft fingers, she reached in and removed the bread from my tired jaw. She gnawed on her lower lip, leaving deep, bloodied trenches in the already raw skin. A hand went up towards her head, but she caught herself before it met her black, matted strands. "We'll try again soon," she said, but her voice wavered.

It was always the same. "Open your mouth if you want food, please," she would say, her tone rising in question if I looked any higher than her cheekbones. The stale bread would go in, and just as gently come out. By that nightfall, when the girls in the main caves began to drag out the dead, my girl made up her mind. She said, "Open your mouth if you want food, please," and I weakly dropped open my mouth. Her whole face fell in frustration and this time, when she grabbed for the stale bread, she brought it to her lips instead. It passed through and fell victim to her teeth, and she chewed resolutely. When she leaned down, hesitating against my mouth, her hair fell forward and curtained us off from the others.

The liquid lumps of chewed bread clung to her lips, passing mine in a warm rush. With a push of her tongue flicking against my lower teeth, she emptied her mouth into mine. She pulled back to watch my throat move in desperate, aching bobs. The bread felt like a sandstorm going down, but it passed. I looked up at her and she tore the back of her hand across her lips, quickly, before reaching to grab another piece of bread. "Well," she said in the same breath as a sigh, and set about

repeating the process, piece by piece.

The doctor, as it turned out, was a broad, alert woman with sharp, clipped tones in her voice. Before they'd been called to duty, she had been the head nurse at the First Prefectural Girls' High School. "Don't you worry," she urged, staring down at me while her gloved hands moved gently around my chin and neck, flitting in and out of my vision. "I won't be doing any stitching. They're just keeping me here to make sure the surgery takes." She tapped around the gauze in quick staccato. "No swelling, that's good." Patches of dark brown were splattered everywhere on her once-white coat. "You're very lucky, young man. The bullet only grazed your front. Missed your arteries, never went anywhere near your spine. Chances like that," she clicked her tongue. "Well." She cleaned the wound with a cold, foul-smelling liquid that trickled over my shoulders. There was a moment of discomfort when she ran something soft across my neck, and it became a searing jolt. The doctor passed a quick finger over the pain, her glove coming away wet and dark. "Hmm. Should be okay," she said and smiled kindly, tight-lipped. "Now it's just your vocal cords we're uncertain about. Time will tell, though." She was hasty in her wrapping, the gauze slipping through her fingers carelessly. "You get some rest. Hopefully Dr. Ichiwara will get around to this side of the caves sometime tomorrow."

That night a group of girls came to collect one of our six. The woman doctor had been there to hold his head through his death shivers. She had been the one to stick in place the tiny golden star on the wide, clammy plain of his forehead. We had all listened to the doctor's shushing and gentle murmurs, that man's teeth colliding and grinding, his helpless, terrified moans, and finally the liquid gasps that softened to a blunt croak, rippling off the cave walls and dissipating in the darkness. One of the men held the other nurse's tiny hand in his, letting

her grip as hard as she wanted and singing her silly songs from childhood to distract her. His tears clogged the lyrics and deadened his high notes. *Saa, taihen da, saa, taihen da…* My lily had sat curled against the wall just at my feet, and I stared resolutely at her towards the man's end, as she pushed her fists to her mouth, her eyes shut tight. She'd muffled her sobs against her bloodied hands. When it was over, she brought her face to her knees, hair curling around the fingers she wound deep against her head, and held on tight, crying loudly and openly like the child she was.

When they came to carry us away again, the others left her there asleep on the cave floor, dirt powdering her hair and sticking to the glistening tear-tracks on her face. Her arms trapped tight the shape of her cheeks, hands still lost in her hair, even in sleep. Back in the main area the noises of the living dead resumed and the body count had climbed too high for the exhausted girls to control. Piles of the dead held up the cave walls, white limbs and the thick material of each soldier's uniform weaving together against the rock. The drone of the weak was joined by the whirring of descending blowflies, moving clouds that went unseen in the darkness. The man next to me had been shot in the shoulder. He spent the night with his fingers around my wrist, in a pool of his own cooling urine, telling me that he'd joined the war because he'd wanted to carry a gun. He squeezed so hard my pulse fought against his palm, and he wept until my lily showed up, her eyes cast low, and sat next to me with her box of stale bread. She moved her white hands, almost translucent, back and forth through the air over our bodies, unable to see the flies but doing her best to keep away the tinny applause of their wings as they neared.

So she was there, my lily, when two days later, my wraps were finally changed. Too many girls had been put on grave duty and medical supplies were running low. She hovered over the two girls who nimbly undid

my bandages, only to discover the writhing, white bodies born of a rip in my stitches, sneaked in through the loose folds of the gauze. The girls' wide-eyed disgust was all I had to go on, and one of the girls placed her small hand on my shoulder in a motion of dutiful comfort. "We're going to go find somebody," she told me and they walked away.

"Hold still," my girl said, pulling on a pair of wrinkled latex gloves, sprinkled with dirt. She leaned over and picked out the maggots that had woven their way through my throat, one by squirming one.

By morning, new orders had come in and envoys arrived to cart the remainder of us men away. The girls were to remain to bury the dead, and to continue to do as they were told. We were moved. They were abandoned. The ride there was rough movement and a flood of light that fell freely from endless skies. The trucks manned by loud talking civilians took us to a hospital up north that had held fort with a barrage of hardy nurses and worn but undefeated doctors. Under fluorescent lights, the scent of antiseptic clouded the wards. Groaning men were relieved by carefully placed needles. Our cups were always filled with clean water. Bed pans were lovingly removed from beneath asses wiped clean by matronly women in crisp, white uniforms.

That's where I was when the announcements came in over the radio. A cease-fire had been ordered by the Emperor. We were surrendering. The world had been torn to rock and shadow. We were left to squint into the light and survey the damage. Peace would make the grass grow again, one of the nurses told me quietly, soothing a wet cloth against the cleft in my butt. The Americans stormed the shores to offer help, to save us from ourselves. But the girls had no radio. They could not have known.

I found out the same as everyone else, after the damage had already been incurred, when no one had the

words to fix what we'd all done to them. I tried to imagine how the enemy-saviors must have ripped through the cave openings, their flashlights an explosion like the lost starshine fallen from those girls' eyes. That first glimpse of light, of the enemy, it must have torn their rag doll bodies apart. They must have run from the cave surgery rooms, those shelves packed with dead men and disease. I think about my girl's despondency and helplessness, and am certain that when we left she shuddered away from the men once again, and sat off to the side, running her hands through her hair to remind her of her mother soothing her into sleep. I think about those white bodies she tore from my flesh and how they clung to her fat, young fingers. She would run her hands through her hair a thousand times a day. Those tiny, writhing larva, they had to have made a home there, twining through the strands -- giving her something to care for in my stead. I think of her in this state, fleeing the caves with the rest. How the girls must have crawled from the ruins and rubble, only to see more of the enemy tearing through the shorelines.

We all read about the ones who jumped at the sight, their school girl uniforms fanning out in parachutes when they leapt from the cliffs, so afraid for their honor, their virtue. But she chose to stand. A grenade cradled in her battered fingers, government-issued, placed alongside the dollar-store bandages and pre-packaged syringes given to every girl asked to serve her country in this time of war, she made a decision.

In my dreams, she goes out like a star in the shape of a flower.

The day I left the hospital, the doctor told me he was grateful the orders came to move us when they did. "Especially for you, Mr. Shintaro." He'd been the one to pull the last of the squirming filth from the gash in my throat, to seal shut the gap in my vocal cords. "You were lucky." I glanced at him, knowing disinterest would only

prolong his stay. "The larva ate away at the part of your wound that had started to rot, which is good. But it is fortunate that they were removed before they could get to the skin that was still alive and healthy." I looked away until he stopped trying to get a response out of me, until he left and I could let the hurt at the back of my throat spread through my limbs and down through my chest.

Sometimes I still dream of her and her broken fingernails, and I cannot scream. In the middle of the night, she lowers her head in the darkness and she presses her lips to mine. I wake up to my wife's soft breathing, and a liquid slime at the corners of my mouth that makes me cough, uncertainly. I close my mouth that's opened sometime in my sleep and I am always positive it is the taste of rancid bread at the back of my mouth, mixed with her saliva. I run my hands through my hair, pull it root to tip, until sleep can begin to claim me again. The black of my eyelids so easily becomes the quiet darkness of the caves. I wait, always, for the press of her finger to the bone between my brows that means the cling of a school girl sticker that flashes in the night. Instead, in those moments before sleep, she wraps her hands around my throat and stills the maggots, I can feel, even now, living, thriving, off of my decay.

Cheri Nagashima

Cheri Nagashima is currently a Creative Writing M.A. student at the University of Hawai`i at Manoa.

Nicholas Y.B. Wong

Ian MacMillan Writing Award - Second Place, Poetry

Ode to Objects

Nicholas Y.B. Wong

"Man puts the longest distances behind him in the shortest time."

Martin Heidegger

We breathe into objects & pretend
they have ears, brain cells, thus
memory. Manure allures stories, re-
created, red,
redeeming.

[sketch]

Skeins of tangled lines, chaotic kin-
ship subsides in eyes of a girl
you once had. She knows neither
the pain brought by labor
nor your lack of which when she's ditched
like a labrador. Graphite says
Grill the grief. Paper approves,
awaits a carnal hand to become
a page.

Family always standard to draw: a roof
pyramid-shaped, but this house
doorless, windows barred, her face
inlaid. Contour of her cheeks disrupted
by a speech bubble,
in which, two
words, disjointed –
Mom. Home. An urge
or a denial.

[maps]

Your parents dead. You, an orphan
in adulthood, start collecting stuff: coupons, coasters,
origins.

In the kitchen, you become a genealogist,
busy sketching migration
routes of ancestors on atlas,
hoping to know what they were,
hence what you aren't.

Bits of penne on
North America,
aubergine blocking borders of Indonesia.
An ant traverses oceans & continents
in twenty minutes, claims
your genomes are palatable.

[diamond]

It made your finger existential, which finally
holds rancor in carats, despite
its perfect cuts.
When he put it on for you,
The *I* didn't apply – the rock free
from inclusions, impurities. Years later,

you ask where the letter loops in you.
Perhaps earlobes – Listen hard,
in your commitment, the difference
between finial & final.

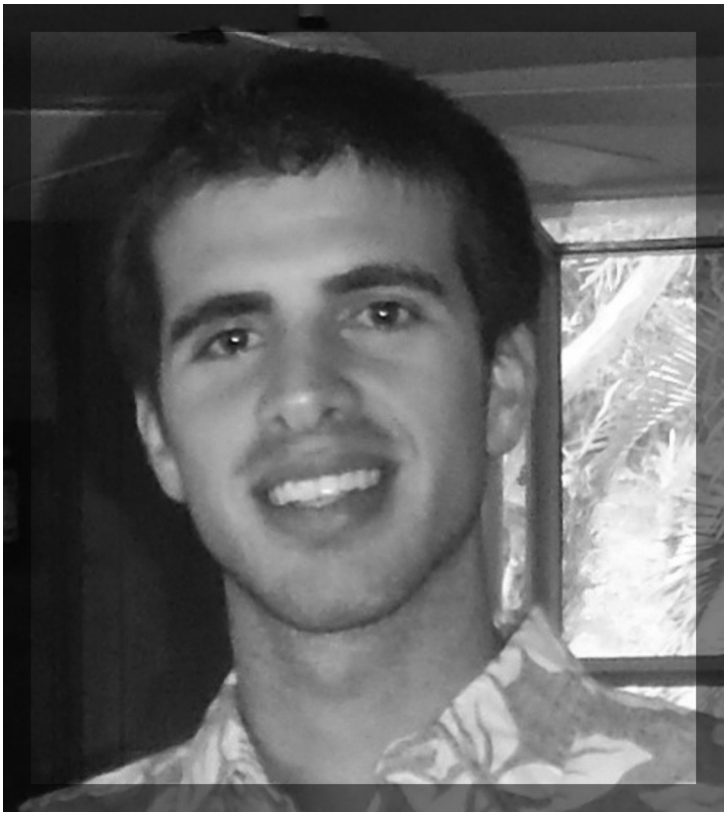
You regret misreading diamonds, their flaw
of being plain carbon, like your cuticles,
hopeless isotope.

Nicholas Y. B. Wong

Nicholas Y.B. Wong is the author of *Cities of Sameness* (Desperanto, 2012). His poems are forthcoming in *580 Split*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Gargoyle*, *Harpur Palate*, *Interim*, *The Jabberwock Review*, *The Journal*, *Natural Bridge*, *Quiddity* and *upstreet*. He is the recipient of Global Fellowship Award at ASU Desert Nights Rising Stars Writer's Conference in 2012. He reads poetry for *Drunken Boat* and has recently been nominated for a Pushcart.

About the Piece

"Ode to Objects" was written after attending a generative workshop run by Tina Chang, before which each participant was told to bring in an object that had a story behind it. I actually forgot what I brought in. It could be a crystal or gemstone. But what I found interesting was how, in the workshop, the participants either revealed or alienated themselves when telling how much that story meant to them. Of course, we could make things up and we were supposed to. I now owe so much to Karla Delgado and Claire Noble for their 'objects', for which I recreated totally different narratives.



Doug Neagoy

Ian MacMillan Writing Award - Third Place, Fiction

Sinking Relics

Doug Neagoy

David calls me every couple years between rehab programs, when my parents stop sending him checks and he needs a place to crash. It's usually the intimate contact policy that gets him kicked out. At Sunnier Skies, the counselors caught him eating magic brownie batter off his cougar-housemate's stomach, and when they moved him to an all-men's facility, they found him straddled beneath his blonde therapist. They had been working together for six weeks. He spent the next summer shrooming and watching nature documentaries, so Mom researched this wilderness camp in Colorado. Actually she just saw it on Oprah, but this time—like every time—was the last frigging straw. So when David called to tell me that ecstasy is apparently frowned upon in the wilderness, I was a little concerned.

"You know you can't bring drugs to my place," I said, laying some chicken breasts on the electric grill.

"How about girls? Oh wait, you don't like them either."

"I'm serious. If you bring that shit in here again, I'm kicking you out too." I drizzled some grapeseed oil, sprinkled a sodium-free pepper mix. Oil splattered between two leopards on my safari countertop.

"Don't worry. I'll be just like the cat on your couch."

"Please don't say that. Where are you?"

"Downstairs," he said, and hung up.

Outside, an onshore squall was rolling in bales of red seaweed, and a cold drizzle fell from the smog. I found David in the garden out back. He was squatting in the tiger lilies, talking to a seagull. His eyes were con-

spicuously clear and he'd grown a ferocious survivalist's beard that appeared breathe with the salty wind.

"What's his name?" I asked. The gull scuttled away.

"I was hoping she'd give me one," he said, climbing out of the flower box.

David looked like body odor smells. An oversized hemp flannel slumped over his weedy shoulders, red dirt stains on the collar and sleeves. Mom would kill me if I didn't, so I gave him a one-armed hug. He smelled of hummus and pot.

"I think your arms got smaller," he said, squeezing my biceps. "Did you forget to bench press today?"

"That's cute," I said, remembering it had been two hours since my last protein shake.

In the elevator, I told David about my interview at the bank in the morning, and he told me how he'd used his last two thousand dollars to fly first class to Port Craw and how the stewardess wanted his balls. The fluorescent bulbs overhead cast him in mug shot lighting, making his face translucent as the surface of a leaf. He almost looked like Dad, before the kidney gave out.

In the hallway, Ms. Zegerman was pruning the rhododendrons again. She smiled, but I didn't introduce David. He had a thing for older women, and she deserved better than that.

"There's good Feng Shui in here," David said, gawking at the vintage movie posters on my walls—*Rocky IV*, *Bloodsport*, *Mars Attacks!*—as though they were towering pines. He dropped his guitar and sprawled on my white leather loveseat. I would have made him take off the flannel, but I was afraid of how he might smell underneath.

I opened the glass balcony door and the ocean wafted in the familiar stew of albacore, sunscreen, and diesel. Down the coast, a rusty crabber honked its way into the docks, and a cloud of gulls hung about the mast,

barking for scraps.

"Really Vince?" On the bronzed coffee table stood a lava rock warrior in a goatskin mask, a little something Mom had sent when Dad was still alive and they were busy shark fishing on the Coral Sea. David faced the warrior in the other direction. "I thought we were past this."

I grabbed a beer and hopped on the counter, facing the warrior. The brew was cold and made the room smell better.

"You still talk to her?" he said.

"Christmas, mostly." Dad had a thing for Blue Label, and when the new kidney didn't take, Mom was in Waikiki by nightfall. We didn't talk much before that, we talked less now. I half expected David to call me a traitorous bastard, but he was already staring past the kitchen where the blue and orange detergent boxes stacked up to the ceiling. His nose crinkled as though he were combating stubborn bowels.

"Royalties," I shrugged.

"You still auditioning?"

"I gave it up when I left LA. Didn't pay the bills."

His nose relaxed.

"I'm working at this club," I said. Which was true enough.

"That's cool." He rolled up his sleeves, showing off the thick hesitation scars that give him the swagger of a seasoned knife fighter, or a lead painter. He'd located a pile of dirty laundry and began to rummage through it. "Have you seen my jeans? You know, the ones with the blue hearts?"

"No." Last time he needed a place to sleep, David had left in the night with a businesswoman from Seattle, and I had quarantined all his things in a big black garbage bag. But after a few days a stale hummus smell began to permeate the plastic, so I launched the bag over the balcony. Jeans in there somewhere. "How long are you staying?"

A stray gym sock slapped the front door and fell with the enthusiasm of a used condom. "Don't worry," he said. "I have friends in town."

"It's cool," I told him, "as long as you find a job."

"I'm still figuring things out."

"What's there to figure out? You need a job to survive."

"Take it easy, princess," he said. "We can't all be survivors like Suds Boy."

A few years back, I had landed this laundry detergent commercial with Suds in the Box. Nothing huge really, but the ad got some decent local coverage. It was a startup venture, and they'd paid me with a year's supply of suds. Six years later I was still getting residuals, and some would complain about a paycheck, but I'd found quicker ways to make money.

I got up to check on the chicken.

"Dude, is this a man thong?" David stretched one above his head and breathed deep.

"It's for my job."

"No way, VD! You never said it was a strip club."

"It's just temporary," I told him. He thought about this for a while. I was glad not to hear him talking.

On the kitchen counter there was a care package mom had sent from her timeshare on Kauai: some macadamia nut chocolates and a vial of Kula lavender oil that I had no idea what to do with. I threw the box to David and opened the grill. The chicken was still pink in the middle.

"So you give lap dances to dudes?" he asked with a mouthful of chocolate.

"It's not that kind of club. Sorry to let you down."

He shot the thong at me like a rubber band. I caught it and checked the waist to make sure he hadn't stretched it out. I had been dancing for a few months at Cali Knights. Good tips and female clientele, for the most part. It beat asking Mom for money, but I'd kept it on the

downlow, especially from David, since I wanted him to get a real job like I would eventually.

I tucked the thong into a drawer with two corkscrews and a can opener.

My Blackberry buzzed.

(9:37 p) Becca: let's party tonight.

I thought of ways to avoid introducing David to Becca. We had only gone out a few times, strip clubs mostly, and I didn't want to freak her out yet. Besides, she was a few years older than me.

(9:38 p) Vince: cant. babysitting.

"I've been doing some yoga," David said when I looked up.

"Yeah? You always were really flexible."

"You know you're being very negative right now?"

"Yoga chicks are hot," I said. "Why don't you just get certified to teach or something?"

"I don't know if that's what I want to do."

"You're gonna have to get a job eventually."

"I've been doing a lot of inner work."

"Whatever." After six years of hearing David talk about Rumi and tree pose and why the 12-Step Program made him an alcoholic, I was done pretending he didn't have a problem. "You need to grow the fuck up already."

"Maybe I'll become a stripper when I grow up."

"Real mature. Just live off Mom's charity forever."

"Now you're projecting."

"Don't give me that self-help bullshit. Mom and Dad and every therapist in California have been holding your hand since you were seventeen." I grabbed a corkscrew from the thong drawer and pulled up a barstool.

"You don't know what it's like," he said, jutting his jaw, pursing his lips, and breathing hard through his nose like he always does when things don't go his way.

"What what's like?"

"The demons, bro. They're real."

David used to have this twisted dream about fur and blood and monkeys, and he was always refining his interpretations of it. I wondered if he still had that dream.

"Like, did you know that spanking is child abuse?"

I dug the corkscrew into the countertop and traced the outline of a zebra. Formica peeled away in pink coiled ribs. "I would have spanked you harder. What kind of drugs did they feed you in the wilderness anyway?"

He grabbed his guitar and stood. That's my older brother, never one to grab his balls when someone calls him out. But when he turned to face me, I saw him at Dad's funeral. Mom was on a yacht somewhere and David and I watched Dad's old hunting buddies reminisce about the time he killed a rhino with his left hand. David scanned for clouds, said it was supposed to rain on days like this, and I wondered how the hell we were gonna make a living.

"Come on Dave. I'm just playing." I got up and patted him too hard on the back. His shoulder blades felt like empty cupboards.

"You may not realize it now," he said, putting down the guitar. "But the demons will come back for you."

"They sure will." I decapitated the zebra and began carving an extra head for one of the leopards. Then David stared at the wall for a while, and I thought about my deadlifts that morning, how I did five sets of four reps at 375. I wondered briefly why I'd never been able to cry on cue. I could make a living with those tears. When I had finished, the leopard's second set of teeth was a hair shy of the nearest gazelle.

"I wrote this new song in the wilderness," he finally said. "Wanna hear?"

"No." I blew the shavings from the countertop.

He took out the guitar, strummed a three-chord progression, and started singing: *Let's plant a seed in our hearts, so we don't grow too far apart…*

I took the chicken off the grill, made a couple sandwiches, and handed him one so he'd stop. He asked for something to drink, something with sulfites preferably. I poured him a mug of lukewarm tap water.

"You know, when I was in the wilderness, I saw this bird with three wings," he said, finishing his sandwich before I started mine. "It couldn't fly though, not in a straight line anyway. So it would glide left a few feet, stop, rotate to the right, then glide left again."

"And?"

"And, eventually it got where it had to go. You're just like that bird, Vince."

I folded my sandwich in half like a taco. The chicken was dry.

David pulled out a forty-ounce jar of instant coffee.

"It's almost ten o'clock," I reminded him.

"I know. I have a lot of thinking to do." He dumped a third of the grinds into his mouth and chased it with the tap water. He stared at the empty mug: two dragon fruits dangling from a mossy limb. "Little brother, is there anything else that needs to come out of your cupboards?"

"Real cute, buddy." The mug belonged to Ms. Zegerman. She'd made me soup when I was sick, and I hadn't gotten around to giving it back yet.

He shrugged and pulled out a magnum of Blue Label. "Preventative medicine," he said. He tipped back the coffee again. The whiskey followed.

Oaky rot wafted across the room. I finished my beer and balanced the empty can on the warrior's little rock head. David put down the whiskey.

"That's seriously bad karma," he said. After the funeral, David had had this idea to purge my place of Dad's old hunting toys. A scrimshaw harpoon, an ocelot

claw dagger, a narwhal tusk sword, an emu feathered bow. Mostly we didn't know where the stuff came from, so we dumped everything into Dad's speedboat, downed a few beers, and set off for an ocean burial. Water was the only way to calm angry spirits, David said. It sounded like some tree petting nonsense to me, but I was happy to see the old man's crap sink. And I had secretly kept the lava rock warrior, since it came with a really sweet mask.

I went to the kitchen and opened the fridge. "Want a beer?"

"You don't have to believe in it bro," David said, taking the can off the warrior. "But why you gotta fuck with it?" The whiskey made him talk loud and grin big, like our first time on stage together in junior high.

The balcony was still open, so I grabbed a box of suds from the detergent wall and watched it sail over the railing, down sixteen floors of smog. Somewhere on the docks below, a few drunks cheered. Gulls and tourists scattered.

"Dude," he said, fighting back a giggle. "What are you thinking?"

I downed the coffee and chased it hard.

*

We had put away a respectable part of the whiskey when Becca called. I had the night off, so we decided to check out the competition. I'd heard about this guy Austin who worked weeknights at Island Men in Chinatown. He'd won three consecutive West Coast Strip-Offs, so I figured I might learn a few tricks.

We picked up Becca and headed down the ridge, six lanes of traffic to the right, the hollow stomach of the valley to the left. Below us, the land plunged for a few hundred feet then leveled out into a smoggy labyrinth of lights, muddled as a spinning roulette wheel. By then, David and Becca were getting real chummy, chatting about compost piles and bat shit. Turns out Becca's stray uncle volunteered at an organic worm farm. Just the

thing David needed to hear.

"I've always thought it would be really cool to become a veterinarian," said David.

"You should really consider it, David," said Becca. "I bet you'd be great with animals."

"He sure is. Know what else David's good with? Hand lotion."

"Vince," said Becca. "Stop it."

"What? He's a pro. Dave, tell her about your practice routine."

In the rearview, I could see that glorious pout coming back, eyes narrowing, nostrils a-flare. "This is so uncalled for," David mumbled.

"I'm just saying, you're gonna have to cut back if you wanna go to college. Because you know how long it takes to become a veterinarian? Eight years."

"Thanks buddy. And this coming from the guy who gives lap dances for a living."

"I could finish college if I wanted to, dickweed."

"And I couldn't, grundle?"

"Come on guys. How old are we?"

"I never said that. But eight years is a long time not to beat the worm."

"You're such a tool. It doesn't even take eight years."

"Why don't you two just arm wrestle and see who's right?"

"Here Bec." I pulled the corkscrew from my pocket. "Be a sweetheart and pop the merlot." She wasn't taking, so I put the bottle between my legs and uncorked it with my right hand.

"The consummate gentleman," David jabbed.

"Eight years buddy."

Outside the club, the air was so thick you could chew the body oil and onion rings. I handed the valet a pocketful of singles, still damp from last night. At the

door, we gave our IDs to a bouncer with three chins and a herd of canker sores crawling across his face like fire ants. "Vincent Damascus," he said, "did you know your initials spell VD?"

David laughed. Turned blue.

"No, it's never occurred to me," I said. The guy had about three inches and forty pounds on me, but he looked soft and I liked my chances if it should come to that.

Becca pulled me inside.

Island Men was a greasy dive with thatched umbrellas on grass-skirted tables. Souvenirs from someone's vacation were mounted to the concrete walls: postcards, palm fronds, scuba gear, elephant tusks, tiki masks, fishing poles, a stuffed alligator. In the corner, some sorority sisters manhandled a twiggy dancer with bad hair and decent abs. Like all Island Men, he wore greenish camo briefs that closely resembled lederhosen. Across the room, a teary bride milked a bottle of Jack, and the bridal party—sloshed on champagne and carrot sticks—spilled onto the stage, imploring the MC to bring out the meat.

"Ladies, put your hands together and legs apart for our featured entertainer of the evening, your very own king of the jungle, Austin!"

David and Becca found an unoccupied umbrella, and I needed a drink. Around the bamboo bar, a herd of frat boys in plum letters had formed silent council, pounding cocktails while their dates scored free lap dances. The bartender was a froggish little man with multiple earrings and boy-band facial hair. I was glad he had a shirt on.

"Hey buddy," I said. "Two frosty ones." He paid me no mind. I tried again. Nothing. The little guy had a few martinis lined up, so I let it slide this time.

When the fog had cleared, I could see that Austin wore a leopard thong—which would've looked tacky on a lesser dancer—and it was packed to carrying capacity.

I was a purist. Never tied off. But it worked for Austin, and he had the quads to back it up. Unlike most dancers I knew, the guy could move. He gyrated, spun, and leapt, rippling every sinew of his flanks. Then, with one final thrust, a penile simulator shot forth from the leopard and hit the stage with a damp thud. Austin reached for it frantically, but the simulator rolled into the crowd.

The crowd converged, and I turned back to the bar.

"Hey tool sack, how bout a beer?" This time I flagged down the bartender with a five. He dropped it in the tip jar and gave me his back. The frat boys' laughter began to simmer on the back of my neck. A hunger rose from below my sternum and I figured I could reasonably take out four of these guys, plus the bartender, before someone coldcocked me with a wine cooler. But before I could square up, a soggy brown projectile slapped the back of the little man's neck. The bartender went down.

When I turned around, David was standing behind me. "No one punks my little bro like that."

I'd known my brother to do some stupid things, but not this stupid. The bouncers out here weren't like counselors at wilderness camp. They wouldn't send you to group therapy or make you write a letter home if you crossed the line.

The bartender came up dazed, simulator in hand. "Who threw this?" The frat boys were surprisingly silent. Some tree-fort honor code involving Greek paddles and secret handshakes, I was sure.

The bartender grabbed the water hose and unleashed a feral spray across the room: "Who the fuck threw this!"

Now David backed away, and the frat boys began conferring amongst themselves, not sure if this honor thing was worth compromising the gel in their hair. Before the little guy could get an answer, Austin had spotted my brother, and he was closing in fast. Part of me wanted David to take a roundhouse to the chin. Part of me want-

ed him to learn about life in the real wilderness, but there was something about his instability that spelled class.

I leapt across the wet sandy tiles of Island Men, lowered my shoulder, and leaned into the leopard. Ribs caved against my clavicle, and we landed hard on the bridal party table. The animal clawed and bit and roared on my chest, saliva in my ears, my head in a red fog. But I had the leopard's back now, his throat in the crook of my elbow, and the animal floundered in my grip. It would have been so easy to put him to sleep. But just when I thought the beast had been slain, Austin reversed, and a heavy fist cut through the mustard floodlights of Island Men.

Things were fuzzy until the car, David behind the wheel. He'd taken Becca home. The sky was caught somewhere between night and a cloudy dawn, and I wondered why I always ended up in the passenger seat.

"Hey big guy," David said. "I got something for you." He opened the glove box, and the simulator rolled out. I had never held a silicone penis before, and this one looked like the misplaced offspring of a bratwurst and a particularly lumpy potato. I launched it into a palm tree.

At my place, the flattened box of suds was leaning against my door with a post-it note scrawled by Ms. Zegerman: *Vinnie, thanks for the suds. How did you know I was out?* I was ready to toss the box back where I'd left it, but inside I saw the shell of a meaty Dungeness, and I figured he'd gotten in the way of the suds.

"We have to bury him," David said.

"No way. That's a twelve dollar breakfast." But when I reached inside, the little shit bit me and scuttled down the hallway. David did a celebratory crab dance.

Later that night, I didn't think of my first time on stage in junior high. I didn't think of how I'd studied my lines for two months in front of mom and every mirror I could find and when the moment came, delivered Tibalt flawlessly. But David—who dropped lines and impro-

vised better ones, who grinned and swaggered and wept as though Romeo was not a character but a ventricle in his chest—owned the night. I didn't think of how we were gonna move to LA together and make a living. Didn't think of the time he got a major callback and I erased the message, or the few roles I went on to land and how none of them really mattered.

I thought of the summer Dad took us elephant hunting on the savanna and the look on David's face when dad told him to pull the trigger. In our tent at night, David would wake up screaming from dreams that he was eaten by lions and reincarnated as an ape. Invariably, I'd tell him to grab his balls and go back to sleep. But I could never bring myself to tell him, not even once, that I have that dream too, and in it, I am the lions.

I got out of bed, went to the living room and turned on the light. Kicked the couch and said, "David, wanna go for a swim?"

"You're giving me some serious déjà vu right now," he said.

We carried the lava rock warrior down to the shore. A south swell was rolling in silver caps, luminous beneath smoggy skies, and wind scattered sea wrack like old nail clippings. We threw our clothes on the sand and dove in. We swam out as far as we could—past the break wall, between a few man o' war, beyond the grey reef, out where the coastal lights resembled eyes and the water no longer tasted like sunscreen—and released the warrior to a crowning sun, unaware of all the things that might be rising beneath.

Doug Neagoy

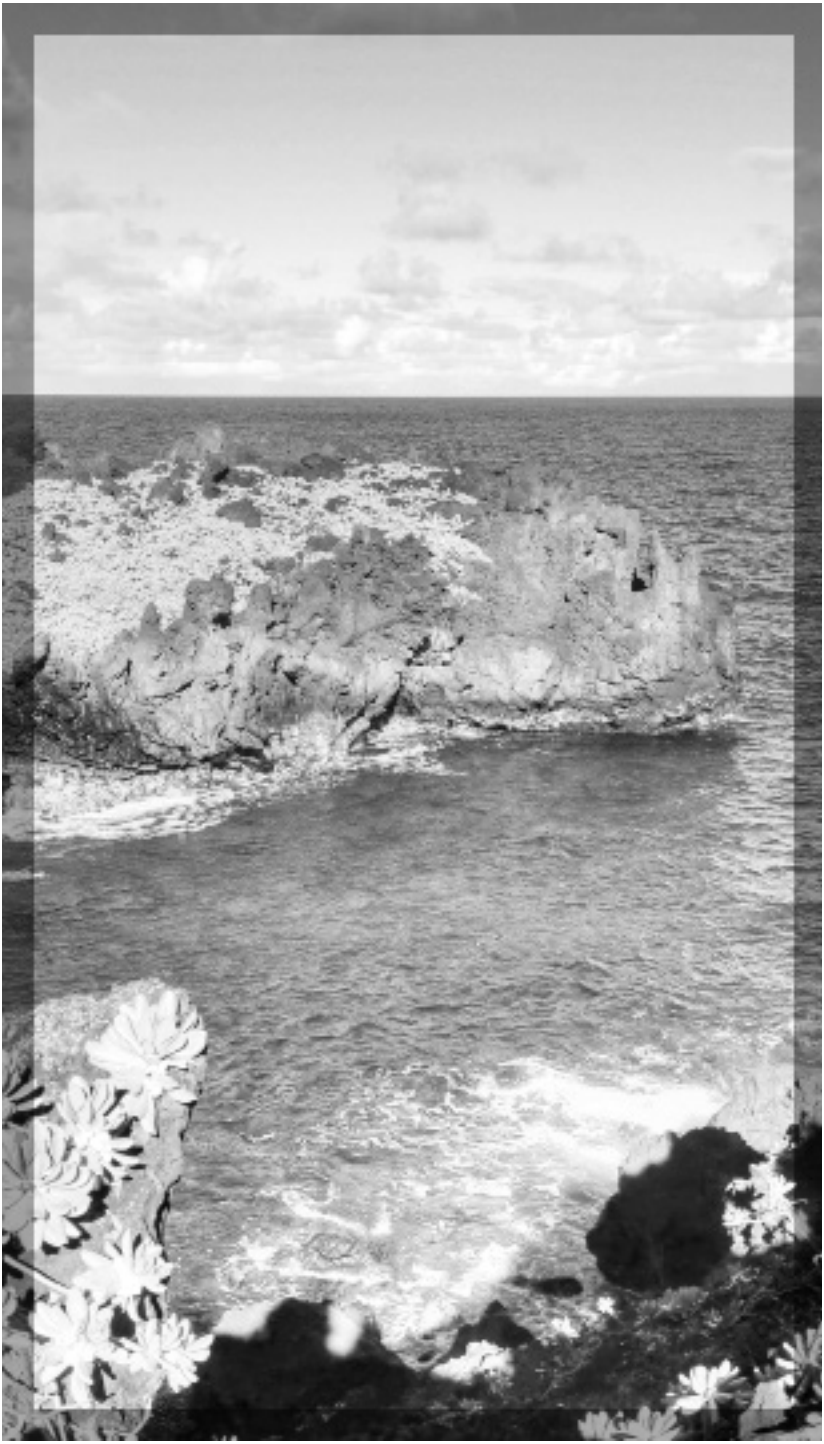
Doug Neagoy grew up in Pennsylvania, Nebraska, and Hawai`i. He is presently a first year MA candidate at UH Manoa where he received the Hemingway Award for undergraduate fiction. His short story "Figs for Pa" was a finalist in *Glimmer Train's* 2011 new author contest and a top-6 finalist in *Black Warrior Review's* 7th annual fiction contest. "Sinking Relics" is his first published story.

On Writing

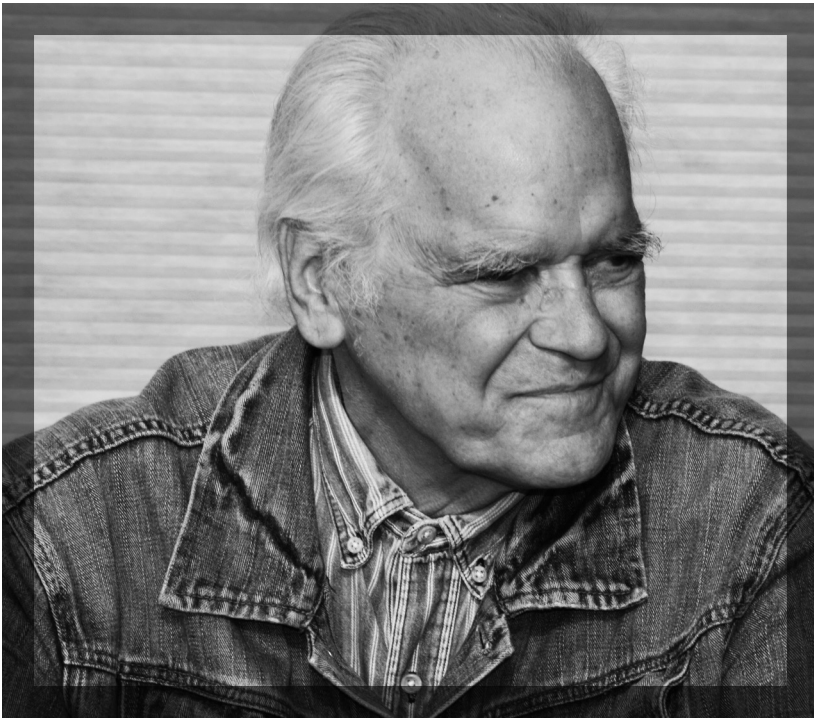
My friend wants to be a writer. I told her the best piece of advice I've heard is "write what you want to read." Even if that means talking banana slugs, grumpy moonshiners, and vintners possessed by grapes. Sometimes your story will need an accordion, I told my friend, and this is okay. Go ahead and put in two accordions. Plus a polar bear. Of course, you should also write everyday, and writing everyday is easier when you have a polar bear in your story.

I told her there are days when you'll want to go into the cave and not come out for a while. And that's okay too. You shouldn't come out of the cave everyday. T.C. Boyle once said, "I don't want to be connected all the time…I think it's not animal."

But you also need solid mentors. At UHM I've been lucky to study with some great writers, and I think this is crucial. Find a mentor who understands that yes, the vintner needs to be bitten down there because GMO's make weird grapes and polar bears don't have sunscreen.



Darren W. Brown



David Wagoner

Ian MacMillan Writing Award - Third Place, Poetry

UP
David Wagoner

She offered to take me up
in a balloon. She showed me
the very small basket
where I could take a stand
as myself under a bag,
and she said, *Shouldn't a poet*
want to go up, up and
away somewhere afloat
like the good Wizard of Oz
and throw all cares to the wind
like baggage for a day
in the clouds? But the wind,
I said, was Aeolus, the part-time Prince
of Chaos, the Great Panjandrum
of Nausea, the never-to-be-
turned-off offspring
of a sneeze in Asia Minor,
but she said, *You'll miss the sight*
of a lifetime. You should see
how beautiful it is
down here, and I looked around
at all us weighty members
of Creation who'd settled down
as if married to gravity
and said, *I already do,*
so she went up and became
a dwindling speck in the sky
like a wizard or a witch.
I waved, then headed home
still heavier than air.

David Wagoner

David Wagoner has published 18 books of poems, most recently *A Map of the Night* (U. of Illinois Press, 2008), and Copper Canyon Press will publish; his 19th, *After the Point of No Return,* in 2112. He has also published ten novels, one of which, *The Escape Artist*, was made into a movie by Francis Ford Coppola. He won the Lilly Prize in 1991, six yearly prizes from *Poetry,* and the Arthur Rense Prize for Poetry from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2011. He was a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets for 23 years. He edited *Poetry Northwest* from 1966 to 2002, and he is professor emeritus of English at the U. of Washington. He teaches at the low-residency MFA program of the Whidbey Island Writers Workshop.

About the Piece

All I can think of to say about the poem is that the incident is true and that I'm very glad I didn't go up in the balloon.

Interview: David Maine Ian MacMillan Fiction Award Judge

When did you first realize that you wanted to be a writer? What prompted this discovery?

I caught the bug a long, long time ago. There was this enormous cast-iron Underwood typewriter in the basement of our house, in the laundry room, and I remember finding it and pecking away at it—teaching myself how to type, as it turned out. I still type the same way. The first story I remember writing was called "Herman the Dragon." I wrote it when I was seven years old. The opening lines were: "Herman was a dragon. He didn't want to be one, though. He wanted to be a knight." My seven-year-old self sat there thinking, "Whoa, this is some pretty heavy stuff," or words to that effect.

So I wrote a couple pages about Herman and his existential malaise and brought it upstairs to where my New Yawk grandmother was sitting in the kitchen, drinking tea. She read it out loud in her Bronx accent which both mortified and thrilled me, and she laughed out loud in all the serious places. I remember being confused as to why she thought it was uproariously funny that Herman wanted to be a knight. Then she told me that it was *very good* and she couldn't wait to read more. So from this I learned both that a.) doing this strange sitting-alone-writing-things-down stuff could bring me a certain amount of approval and approbation, and b.) that I would always be misinterpreted. So yeah, that's been pretty much the way ever since.

But you kept going.

Sure, I kept going. I wrote a *Star Trek* parody in fifth grade called *Scar Trek*, which I thought was the funniest thing, ever. Captain Jerk and Mister Sock. It's pretty hilarious if you're ten. Then in high school I did a nice run of post-nuclear-apocalypse stories, generally featuring mutated domestic animals and heaping buckets of hoplessness and despair. I was reading books like John Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up* and Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley*, along with plenty of Philip K. Dick and Harlan Ellison and Kurt Vonnegut. So you know, I was learning cynicism from the best of 'em.

What inspired your first novel?

That depends on what you're calling my first novel. The first one I wrote was my final manuscript for grad school, when I got my MFA from Arizona. That was in, what, December 1991. I haven't read it in ages and nobody else will either. It was a sort of coming-of-age thing with a woefully underdeveloped stab at dealing with racial issues, and family stuff, and music.

The first novel that got published was *The Preservationist*, and I wrote that in a whirlwind of activity in 2002. About six months from start to finish. As for what inspired it, I couldn't really say. I was sitting in the rocking chair in my study in Lahore, Pakistan, where I was living at the time. It was raining hard, and I was gazing out at the patch of lawn and the mango trees and the frangipani, and for some reason the story of Noah's ark popped into my head. Maybe it was the rain. I had this flash of a scene, of Noah and his family standing there beside this enormous boat that the old man had built, this crackpot that nobody believed, just as it starts to rain. And them all looking

up and seeing it come down faster and thicker and them thinking, *Well it looks like the old guy was right after all!* I liked that moment, the stillness of it before this furious inundation is unleashed. After that I just started writing chapters and it gushed out of me, very fast indeed. The funny thing is, that initial scene I visualized never appears in the book.

How would you describe your writing style?

I should probably let someone else do that. Better yet, let the stories speak for themselves.

Tell HR about your most recent work. What have you recently completed?

I have a novel coming out in the fall of 2012. It's called *An Age of Madness* and it's being published by Red Hen Press in California. It's great. It's about a woman who is a psychiatrist, a wife, a mother, a daughter, and a complete mess. Not necessarily in that order. I wanted to play with the idea of a narrator who's hiding a lot of things, revealing them little by little. The idea of what passes for mental illness and what passes for mental health—or if not health, then at least the absence of illness—fascinates me. I worked as a mental health case worker and as line staff in numerous group homes for ten years, in both Massachusetts and Arizona, back in the 1980s and '90s. These issues compelled me then, and they do so now.

I'm pretty proud of this book. It's taken me forever to write—no six-month wonder here. I first started it in 1998 or '99, and I fiddled with it for ten years or more. I finally got it nailed down aroun 2010, which is when Red Hen gave it the green light. It's gone through a lot of permutations and modifications, and I think the wait has been worth it.

I'm also writing a series of self-published genre fantasy novels these days, one of which is already released as an e-book, called *The Gamble of the Godless*. The second is on its way, or maybe is out already, depending on when this interview is published. It's called *The Rime of the Remorseless.* These stories feature regular-guy heroes, warriors with secrets, talking animals, sorcery, derring-do and copious amounts of danger. Tolstoy they ain't, but they're buckets of fun.

Oh and I have a screenplay with my agent that I wrote over Christmas break. Probably nothing will happen with that, so the less said the better. It ain't Tolstoy either, believe me.

Can you at least tell us the genre?

Low-budget horror.

Nice. What are you working on at the moment (if you'd like to share)?

Currently I'm writing a historical novel about Georges Méliès, who was a French stage magician and filmmaker in Paris at the start of the 1900s. He was an amazing guy who invented countless special effects tricks for the movies, as well as doing other things like inventing the science fiction, fantasy and horror genres in the movies, as well as docudrama, product placement, and cinematic pornography. His life was almost operatic—he was born the son of a successful factory owner, went into show business, struggled at first, became hugely successful, then fell into utter poverty by 1912 as a result of film pirating and his own lousy business sense. He was rediscovered in the late 1920s by Surrealist artists, who celebrated his achievements as ahead of their time, which they were. By the

time he died in 1938, he was the grand old man of French cinema and was even planning a comeback.

I'm someone who likes to have several projects going at once, so I'm also writing scenes for another historical novel concerned with a Puritan named William Potter, who lived in New Haven, Connecticut in the 1600s. He was executed in 1665 for sodomizing a wide variety of farm animals, and what's interesting—to me anyway—is that the animals were executed too. They were hanged by the neck until dead, right alongside Potter, the logic being that they had transgressed. In other words, they were capable of moral choices and had chosen to sin. I find this mindset fascinating.

Then there's the graphic novel that I may or may not get around to finally starting this summer, and the nonfiction book on 1950s monster movies that I've been noodling around with for years, and the post-apocalyptic YA novel I started for some reason a couple months ago. Plus I write reviews for a web site called PopMatters.com—mostly music reviews but also some books and DVDs. All this keeps me pretty busy.

What do you find most challenging about being a writer? About writing itself?

This will sound very mundane, but just the ordinary day-to-day interruptions that get in the way of doing what I need to do. In order to write, you know, I need to forget myself—to shed my consciousness and self-awareness, to become someone else for a while. That's what writing is, it's an act of self-effacement, and it's tough to do that if there are demands on me, making it hard to forget about Dave Maine.

You mean, like work?

Well yeah, that's the big one. One reason I wrote *The Preservationist* so fast was that I took time off to do it. I made a deal with myself that I'd take a year and do the book and then worry about stuff. Which is what I did, and it worked better than I could have hoped. I was done in six months and then started looking for an agent, which took a few more months, and had to be done via email, because I was living overseas. But it all worked out; by May I had a job at a school for the following year, then in June the book was bought by St Martin's and they gave me a 2-book contract, meaning I needed to get cracking on the next one right away, which was great fun. Writing the second one was a very different experience, given that I was also getting up and driving to work every day.

But work's not the only interruption. Everyday stuff can be a distraction too, like getting out and doing the shopping and making food and keeping the house clean and doing the laundry and watering the plants… it all contributes. Checking emails, man, that's the worst. Twitter and texts and all that, it's just designed, on purpose, to disrupt your concentration. Then there's stuff like, I don't know, going to a movie or walking on the beach once in a while—you have to do it for your sanity, but it's all stuff that takes away from the primary focus. After a while you can fall into a habit of second-guessing, which can become tiresome—what should you do during your Spring Break? Go someplaceand relax for a few days, or write another fifty pages? Should you let yourself watch football on Sunday morning, or should you be revising what you wrote Friday afternoon? It's a constant juggling act. If you're not careful you can end up resenting your own need to write, which is absurd but there it is.

All of this speaks to the state of mind needed to settle

in to something for a while and lose yourself. What did Virginia Woolf say a writer needed? A room of one's own and some money. I forget how much. In Hawai'i, it's quite a bit.

Given all this, what do you find most rewarding about being a writer, and about writing?

Well, it's the best thing in the world when it's going well, so there's that. The process of inhabiting another person's consciousness, of essentially living his or her life—that's something I wouldn't easily trade for anything else. I think that's why people read, isn't it? To live lives that would otherwise be closed to them. That's why I read, anyway. The process of writing is like that, only increased in intensity by about a hundred times. The depth of feeling required to occupy another person's experience can be quite intoxicating. It can be a narcotic. When it's going well, it's a state of mind that I don't want to give up. Real life feels like the unreal state, after a while.

Of course it's not always a barrel of laughs—I wrote a book about Samson, from the Bible, who is essentially a mass murderer and sex offender and religious fanatic. It wasn't a great time. It *is* a great book, in my opinion, but it wasn't exactly fun walking around, occupying that headspace for a year or more. You start having dreams of the book you're writing, or I do anyway, dreaming scenes that don't exist in the story, conversations between people who don't know each other in the story and so forth. Sometimes it's exhilerating and great, you wake up with new ideas and insights as to the storyline. Other times, mm, not so much.

But it's something that never ceases to thrill me, the degree to which we can forget our lives and selves and quotidian concerns, and just get on with the business of living

someone else's life. It's why literature matters, maybe now more than ever, now that there are more of us than ever and we're constantly bumping up against each other in often-uncomfortable ways. If there is hope for humanity's future, and I believe there is, it stems from this ability to become one another. Not just to listen, or to respect, or to sympathize, although these things are all important too. But to actually slip into the worldview of another human being—that's unique to us as a species, as far as I know. And there's not much that I can think of that's more precious. Or more enlightening. Or just more *fun*.

DAVID MAINE'S novels include *The Preservationist*, *Fallen*, *The Book of Samson*, and *Monster 1959*, some of which have been translated into eight languages and published around the world. This fall brings his next novel, *An Age of Madness*, published by Red Hen Press in California. He is also the author of an independently-released series of fantasy genre novels called *The Chronicles of Avin*, and a regular critic of books, music and film for the web site PopMatters.com and other outlets." He has written for *Publishers Weekly*, *NPR*, *Forbes*, and the *Washington Post*.

Interview: Janine Oshiro Ian MacMillan Poetry Award Judge

When did you first realize that you wanted to be a writer? What prompted this discovery?

I have kept a journal or some type of writing notebook since I was 14; I'm 37 now. Even though writing was part of my life early on, I did not start writing seriously until I was a junior in college. I was more interested in drawing and painting. I began as an art major in college, and at a certain point I got stuck doing the same type of painting. I started writing more at that time because I didn't have expectations of how something was "supposed" to turn out. There wasn't a magical point when I thought, "Now I want to be a writer!" I just started writing and reading poems more. In painting I was intent upon a particular outcome, but with writing poetry I felt anything could happen. I didn't limit myself in the same way, so it became more and more appealing to write.

What inspired your first book?

When I first started writing poems, I could not conceive of a book. It is still amazing to me that I have one! I was writing in an attempt to make sense of my experiences. The book really feels like the culmination of all of the poems I wrote up until that point. So many poems were written and set aside to get to those 62 pages in *Pier*. The poems are mostly rooted in my mother's death and my attempt to make sense of, in Issa's words, "the world of dew." I dedicated the book to my brothers. We didn't talk very much about our experiences growing up, and after I

looked at all the poems together, I knew it was important to make it an offering to them.

How would you describe your writing style?

This is a tough question. I hope it is continually evolving. I don't want to get stuck writing the same kind of poem again and again, but I do have certain interests. I am very interested in sound, the physical impact of words, how they feel in the body. I am interested in a poem as a structural object as well as an emotional space. I like playing with different registers and tones, for example, seeing the spark between a medical text and a child's voice. Mostly I want to play with language. I don't want to ever stop playing.

Tell HR about your most recent work. What have you recently completed? What are you working on at the moment (if you'd like to share)?

I've been working on a personal essay off and on for well over a year. For the past few weeks, I've been working on a poem that is sort of about Saddam Hussein. I don't know what will come of it. I saw this performer called Red Bastard at Mark's Garage and that inspired abundant scrawl and the beginnings of several poems. I don't have another book in mind. I work poem by poem, and it will likely be another few years before I have enough to shape into a book.

What do you find most challenging about being a writer? About writing itself?

Right now finding a balance between teaching and writing is my biggest challenge. Everything about writing itself is challenging, but that is what I love about it. My students always complain to me, "Writing is so hard." Yes, it is, so get to work. Do you do anything deeply satis-

fying that is not challenging in some way?

What do you find most rewarding about being a writer, and about writing?

One of my classes is reading Daniel Pink's *Drive* right now, so my brain is full of chatter about intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and carrots and sticks. There is no extrinsic reward for writing poetry. In graduate school agents came to talk to the fiction writers—not the poets. I don't write because "I have to" as I've often heard people saying. I choose to write as a way of being in the world. Writing makes me pay attention. It makes me change my mind. It has been a way for me to heal and connect with others. And besides all that, it's such a pleasure to play with language.


PIER
JANINE OSHIRO
Winner of the 2010 Kundiman Poetry Prize

Literary Review: Janine Oshiro's *Pier*

D. Kūhiō

Janine Oshiro creates layers of delicacies in her first collection of poems; thin membranes that reveal the borders between the internal and external. In *Pier*, she tiptoes barefoot over a sea of jellyfish hoods (or "sea squirts"), and as we step with her, we become aware of the beauty in the stings; the squishy moments of life where loss and the coping with it drift into fantasy, confession, memory, and science. *Pier* copes with loss, expressed through a variety of approaches to line, imagery, and narrative.

What gets found in Oshiro's poetry is a means of coping with that loss of a loved one; something that truly has no closure. The simple act of hanging a picture in a hall becomes an opportunity to realize that we, too, "rust," like the nail that goes "*tack, tack*" into the wall of a room that exists only for passing through it. The hallway in "Relic" becomes our hallways, our bodies, as we attempt to "stay impermanence" through remembrance.

Landscapes in *Pier* are internal; invoking the places we may find ourselves, when we are not sure where light and shadow begin. We become displaced, only to find that where we are planted, again, is as good a place as any. To read *Pier* is to experience a hear-felt intelligence that moves through pain and into beauty.

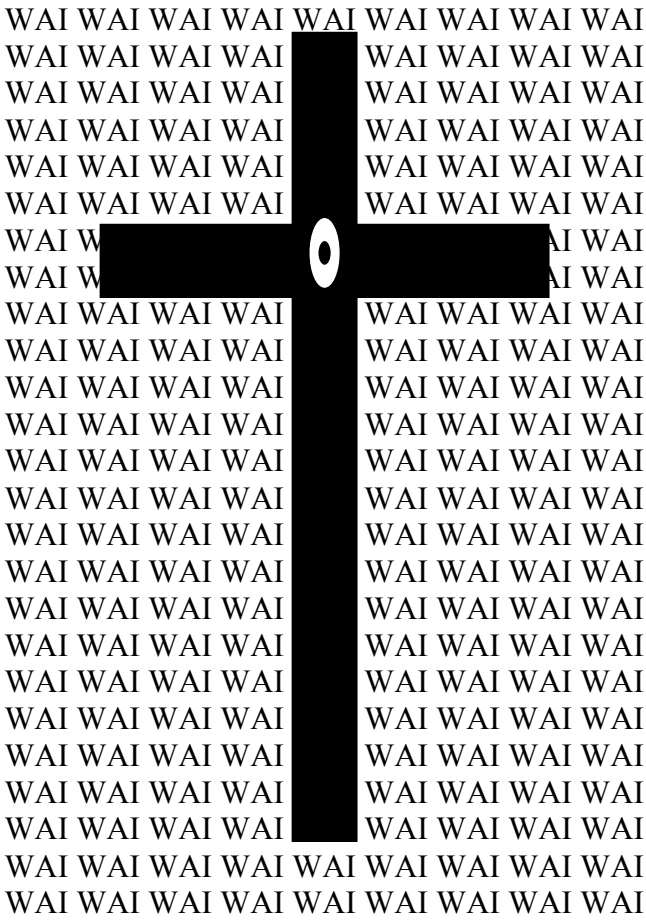
Relic
Enter the slender room
between the rooms
used mainly to hang
the pictures. Hang
her picture with tacks.
Look to both ends of
the room to stay
impermanence. Remember
(will you remember?)
the color reserved
under her picture around
which the sun sets.
An astonishing number of
harmful things can happen
to objects made out
of paper: foxing,
excreta of insects,
lux, that is to say,
our bodies rust.
It may be hard to make
the sound of words: *tack, tack*.
But make the mishap.
There is a crease settling in
the chamber of your throat.

-from *Pier*

JANINE OSHIRO holds degrees from Whitworth University, Portland State University, and the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. She is a Kundiman fellow and the recipient of a poetry fellowship from Oregon's Literary Arts. Her first book *Pier* was the winner of the 2010 Kundiman Poetry Prize and was recently published by Alice James Books. She lives in Hawai`i and teaches at Windward Community College.

Focus

No`u Revilla



Ooka Farewell

No`u Revilla

I.
Rose Pastor is crying with Patti Miguel.
Patti Miguel is crying with Rose Pastor.
Who is wearing a red Ooka shirt.
“It really hurts.”
In her red Ooka shirt pocket, Rose Pastor has
names and telephone numbers.
“They tell me to tell them where I’m going.”
Patti Miguel goes.
To help customers at the cigarette dispenser.
Less popular brands.
On the last day.
“What you see is what you have.”
Crying with Rose Pastor.

II.
In 1941, Kan Ooka opened a vendor stand in Kahu
lui.
Selling dry goods and fishing supplies.
In 1958, Hideo and Barbara Ooka transformed the
business into a neighborhood
supermarket.
The store was relocated to a 1.3-acre lot in Wailuku.
Just off the main road.
Connecting Kahului to Wailuku.
It cost $250,000.
More than a house.
Hideo and Barbara lived in Sandhills.
In the old days.
So did Stella Lau.
“I cut through their yard,” she said.
Cut flowers.

Potted plants.
Lei.
Lida Echala can't decide if she is ever going to do flowers, again.
"I'm the first Filipino worker here."
She is the flower department.
Manager.

III.
Ferdinand Haluber said, "The bosses are nice."
In 1990, the bosses' son became president of the store.
His name is Byron.
Dad died in 1988.
Mom died in 2003.
"Mr. and Mrs. Ooka have been very good to me."
Said Jaye Arakaki.
She met her husband Brian.
Working Ooka's.
Since Baldwin High School.
Never left.
"Over here get good parking."
Tatsua Horita drives twice a week to shop at Oo ka's.
Buddy Igarta, too.
Who lives in Kihei.
Drive 'em out to Ooka's.
Cheap, Ooka's.
Local.
In the Oriental aisle.
Talking story with Jerome Vierra.
"Safeway take your eyeball out."
Jerome Vierra is waiting for his wife.

IV.
In 2005, Byron made a difficult announcement.
In partnership with Wailuku Senior Living LP.

Housing and Community Development Corpora
tion of Hawaii.
State.
Federal.
Funding.
Sold.
From Kahului.
To Wailuku.
The Community Clinic of Maui is re-locating.
Suddenly.
Across Nani Street.
More parking.

V.
Lydia Aglupos is a 55-year-old cashier.
She thinks Mabel Kim is a nice lady.
Mabel Kim is a 69-year-old cashier.
Crying.
All over.
Lydia Aglupos.
Mabel finished her morning shift.
With Jaye Arakaki, who started at 2:30 a.m.
For 30 years.
"When I wake up tomorrow it's going to be a dif
ferent story."
Byron was working.
Since he was 14.
Seven days a week.
Running.
Down.
Inventory.
Home, playground, and kitchen.
Still young.

VI.
In 1996, Ooka Supermarket was listed among the state's top 250 businesses.

Locally produced beef.
Locally produced fruits.
Locally produced vegetables.
Even chicken feet.
Scared, Glo Taasan.
Safeway take your eyeball out.
Hours cut.
Among the nonperishable.
Products.
6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

VII.
Heading toward the beer cooler.
Heading toward the liquor shelves.
Some produce.
Others, frozen meats.
A shortage of carts.
Choose.
Between seeing.
How much they could carry on their own.
Or waiting.
Rose Pastor has to find something else.
Jaye Arakaki found herself.
Back-to-back.
With Brian.
In the old days.
"Seven more hours, we close."

VIII.
The doors did open.
After 20 years.
Roman Baldos is going to rest.
Jerome Vierra's wife is still talking to the clerk.
Jaye Arakaki went bowling.
Mabel Kim went bowling.
People would say, "There's the Ooka gang."
No more.

Old days.
At least Roman's wife is still working.

IX.
The shelves were emptying.
"It's a habit."
Said Jaye Arakaki.
A huge hole.
For good.
Originally planned.
For good.
64-year-old doors.
Planned.
To shut.
For good.
A huge hole.
"It's a habit, I think, already."
Remaining food products will be donated to Maui Food Bank.

X.
Across the street lives Thomas Makena.
His cart is a small load.
Two containers of ice cream.
Hot Pockets.
Kula onions.
Berry-flavored 7-Up.
"I didn't expect to see much."
That's the hard part.
Esther Valmoja-Belena.
Overflowing.
Mayonnaise.
Coors.
"I wish I could have two or three more carts."
Hard part.
Lorna Pagaduan and Chita Rivera are sisters.
They bought apples, spices, and coffee.

It is Lorna's favorite store.
Hard part.
"My mother," said Byron.
Hard part.
Letty Basuel has more food.
Every day.
Than room.
Letty is a Kahului woman.
"I don't know where I'm going to put all this food."

XI.
Over.
The address system.
Perlie Fernandez reads a poem.
"Ooka Farewell."
For good.
"I like this place," said Ferdinand Haluber.
Rest little while.

Before you close.
This place.

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Me and Jurison

Amalia B. Bueno

I was a *Rent to Own* girl yes when I spread the *Colortyme*
on me
and gave him all *Payday Loans* yes and let *Levi's* climb my
thighs
yes but no more when *Hope Chapel West* Oahu found out
as well as *Waipahu Free Will Baptist* who had
heard from another and from my mother
who was worried *Motherhood Maternity* but not for me
I said, not me
even though she knew him, Jurie him
handsome sweet treat like meat him
he keeps going dental on me, and all over me yes
and I mean like *Smile Dental* yes and *Family Dental* yes
and *Gentle Touch Dental* yes darling I told him no worry
about protection I know all about it but finally I
announced
this is where *The Poke Stop*(s).

And no I didn't mean forever
because he was on *Shaka Auto* pilot and I was on high and
Lowe's
two or three times a week I tried so hard not to yes
and did the cold turkey at *City of Refuge Christian Church*
which helped yes
but not for long no because we started up again and got to
the point of no return
I mean all out to the *Max's (The House That Chicken Built)*
so we promised each other to just continue meeting
and pulling each other along so now
we just *Lazy Skate* in time and rhyme,
and Jurie he only want to, he only want to
Highway Inn into me forever and ever,

but in a *Safeway* kind of way yes.

So Jurie yes that's his real name he's like my *Don Quijote*
and *Foodland* forever and is my man for all *Times* yes
he feels my underarms all deodorant *Longs Drugs* yes
and puts his mouth on me like mad yes and breathing so
hard that I need to see
Perlita Lampitoc, M.D. yes who refused to give me
anything because
but I found it on the side streets at *Elena's*, *Thelma's*,
Kristen's, *Jimmy's* and *Flo's*
and even got some from *Tanioka's*
last name last time amen yes thank God.

They and everybody else already heard, but they decided
to help anyway
and did they ever! After that me and Jurie we were okay
for awhile
but we had to *Poke Stop* again
but only for a little bit yes
cause me and Jurie, me and Jurie
me and Jurie can't help it no, no can help
and nine months later I have a boy named *Jurison's*
with the apostrophe in his name
and Jurie, he's not around much now
but I don't care because next time
I want a girl yes.
I already got a name for her
Jurnadette yes for a girl. Yes.

Black Sleep

Connie Pan

I can tell you what a sugarcane field looks like
from the inside. It's hard to see from the cab of a truck.
I witnessed webs thick like cotton which made me dream up
cane spiders bigger than hands, booby trapped plants,
dead bodies tucked under dirt but those images didn't scare me.

I waited for my eyes to adjust, for all of it to disappear.
Fingers had no conscience there. Body parts were just that:
parts. I pictured my bed, cold sheets I wanted to warm.
This is how people forget God.
This is something thirty shovels can't bury.
This is something newsprint will never yell.

There's really nothing to see on the inside of a sugarcane field
when it's dark, but it was the first time I wished for concrete.
The first time I wanted to run from the center, divert attention,
confuse my scent in the stalks, to believe my taut body didn't belong
to me. I'll carry rocks in my mouth that will never want to kiss,
a layer of silt behind my bottom lip.
I'll carry anger like tin. When it rains my limbs ping
and echo, It's not your fault, and my mind washes over like water,
erasing fingerprints but not his weight on me.

On Wednesday, The Pioneer Mill Company burned the sugarcane fields
below the high school. Others gazed at the flakes like snow.
It fell around me like black sleep.

The Dog-Ears Revisited

D. Kūhiō

(excerpt from *The Na`au Files of Curtis P. AhYou*)

the time i returned to las vegas for a friend's wedding to
the spot under the freemont street experience where we
met years ago years after not seeing each other and we
hugged under the electronic f-14s zooming over us in red
white and blue formations and i left my friends at the
strip and caught a taxi to stand there again to remember
the worried look on your face when you saw the struggle
in mine.

Notes from the train/bus from Las Vegas back to San Francisco:

**in the middle
of a field**

-one piano

**-a giant Clorox manufacturing plant
with smoke stacks like a church organ**

**-one torn red felt couch
somewhere in Barstow(?)
with one marbled kitten sleeping on it**

**the bus driver stopped at a diner in the desert
and this family kept staring at me, licking
ice cream cones. (even the baby
had a cowboy hat)**

i drew a picture of a man
fishing in the desert
heat waves.

"You been away too long, Boy," you said.
The medicine chart above your head screamed at me.

the time i went out past the breaks at hau bush four days after you died it rained and plenny pua were jumping out of the water coming towards me reminding me when we saw this once together and you told me it's because a shark is somewhere near by.

> **My mother also had a pet shark out near the entrance to Pearl Harbor . . . Some of the catch always went to Ka`ahupāhau, her shark, which she raised from when it was small until it reached over 25 feet in length.**
> *Change We Must*
> **Nana Veary**

our family god is the shark you told me.

it was
silent out there
on my
fiberglass belly
not know-
ing where
rain ended
or ocean
began.

> **Because our body seems so convincingly to exist, our "I" seems to exist and "you" seem to exist, and the entire illusory, du-**

alistic world we never stop projecting around us looks ultimately solid and real. When we die this whole compound construction falls dramatically to pieces.

The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying
Sogyal Rinpoche

the time right after the mortuary guys wheeled you from your room past the file cabinet and out of the house in that black bag and nana was still talking story with you a giant moth with white circles on its wings slammed into the living room window and t.j. screamed and said something something moths something your spirit.

you would've laughed.

the time i found myself circling the house checking for tears in any of the screens because i found the drawer of bent nails that you had me pull out because you said i did it all wrong and that everything i do should be done well even if it's as small as hammering a nail into wood because this house needs to be repaired when its broken so that the family always has a place to live.

i found a few tears in nana's bedroom screen and fixed it for her.

the time i found the first orange growing from the tree that i bought for you on your last birthday when i dragged it into the house in its green plastic pot and got dirt everywhere and said hau`oli lā hānau papa and you looked at me like i chose this gift wisely while ma yelled because of the trail of dirt through the house.

the time i started eating meat again after living in san francisco for so long because i heard joseph campbell on the radio say that life eats life and it reminded me of you and how you forced me to learn how to kill clean and cook our chickens when they were fully grown and how you knew that i needed to learn how to deal with that.

the time i opened the tool shed and smelled you in the metallic crumbs on my fingertips.

baby mangoes on the tree

baby mountain apples on the tree

baby limes on the tree **baby strawberry guavas on the tree**

file cabinet

baby bananas on the tree

baby oranges on the tree
baby jabongs on the tree

If you dig three feet anywhere in `Ewa, you hit coral.

Red dirt on white
lung barnacles, hiding
in tide pools that grow

good fishermen. Plant
feet where fresh
and salt waters caress
and believe forgotten
technologies, the naked
eye, and the wind
against a wet-finger-
saliva compass.

the times we still sit at the table where you dunked your glazed donut into your hot coffee and how every mug stain on the morning paper recorded your sips.

the treetops will grow
defiant under the power lines
when roots finally realize

they are anchored to reef.

The Body Remembers

Jody Hassel

1. Water

Cold water can't stop me. I'm in the Pacific in my underwear in Santa Cruz. It's October, so no one else on the beach is in the water or in beach clothes. I can't help it. When I get near ocean, I have to get in. And when you're from Alaska, 60 above is summertime. Gray water over clay colored sand reflects a cloud-muted sky around my timid toes as I step from the edge of the shore. Sloshing around till the murky salts are above my knee, the chill keeps me from plunging under so I just stand, the cold numbing down the shivers, and appreciate the fact that I am wearing a dark blue bra and black panties that might, at a distance, pass for swimwear. Something about ice water calls to me. I spent every short Interior Alaska summer of my youth romping about in lakes, ponds and makeshift pools drawn from creeks by bulldozers. Even in adulthood, I can't stay out of the water. And I have that whispering imp of the perverse at my ear whenever I lean over the rail of a boat or step to the edge of a seaside cliff—*jump, jump*. I want to lose myself in aqueous envelopes of weightless suspense, answer calls from the deep that tug at my shins in the sway of waves. But today the water is too dark to dive into. I don't know what rocks lurk below. I'm content to just stand here, in ocean. The Pacific that usually feels like home in Hawaii seems foreign to me in California, and I'm pulled into remembering something a long time ahead, islands, ideas, belonging. Where I normally feel connected and whole, the water around my feet only spells out distance to me now. I am far, far from you. And I wonder, do you know I'm coming?

2. Re-pulse

I often think of blood when I dance. In a group of six women the teacher yells to me, *I see you finally using your Samoan blood!* The six of us wiggle our way up from a deep knee bend. 5 – 6 – 7 – 8. *Ami up!* Ami—the circular swerve and hit of the hips lifts us from floor to standing in time with the knocking of ancestral rhythms: BA-bum, tikkey-tokket. Ba-BUM tikkety tok tok. Tribal. Tahitian. *Turn!* 2 – 3 – 4. *Drop!* 6 – 7 – 8. *Arm UP!* Sweat carves a path from temple to chin then trickle drips to the floor. *Don't bounce, Jody. Don't bounce!* The teacher yells holding my shoulders back with her eyes. The fight of brown and white blood courses through my every move. In my head I'm counting but my instincts say *flow.* In Polynesian dance it is the crash of waves, the blast of volcanoes we match. Hips just two inches above our heels, we duck walk till our faces turn blue. *Figure eight!* As the last call of the drum beats out our final steps, we answer with a stretch, let our hot lungs heave, breathe away our aching legs.

In the car after practice, I ride in the back, run fingers over shins still wet with dance till I trace the curve of a lump protruding below my knee. As big as a breakfast link, some part of me tries to escape—like the innards of sausage seeping through the casing the mound is spongy and thick. I wonder if it's a bulging vein, the alien flesh protrudes. I prop my leg up on the seat, push the worm back in with my thumb, hold it down. Pulse in 2 – 3 – 4. Press 6 – 7 – 8. Hold.

In the 7-11, I ask the girl how much for a cup of ice. *A quarter.* I try to use my credit card. She whispers, *Just leave. Leave!* Blood bursts to break the skin that holds me in, and I wonder riding home, as cylindrical soda-round ice slows the flow, if I'm going to get varicose veins, if eventually my legs are gonna blow.

My legs, for most of my adolescent life and be-

yond, have been a source of varying degrees of shame for me. I wasn't raised with the drive to be on sports teams. In grade school, slow legs often got me picked last for the kickball team on the playground. I can still hear the hollow twang and echo of that stupid red rubber ball smacking into my foot as I lamely failed to make it to first base. As I navigated my way from junior high through high school, my legs were not boyish and model-sleek, nor athlete-toned—a huge failure of my constant body image obsessions. I somehow never understood the concept of women's hips, let alone thighs. All throughout my teens and early twenties I kept pictures of the perfect backs of thighs from anti-cellulite cream advertisements pinned up to my walls as a constant reminder that my fat cells were always careening toward the edge of a blotted, puckering hell.

At age 17, I developed a penchant for weight training. My senior year in high school, I decided I should run track. At the end, I was voted most inspirational on the track team because no matter the amount of limping it took to get me there, I always went to practice. My teammates dubbed me the "Terry Fox Story" after the popular and heart wrenching 80's television documentary on Terry Fox, the one-legged runner. Eventually the head track coach encouraged my weight lifting so I could be a discus thrower and shot putter on account of my terrible running form. Instead of spending any more time on the track, I was turned over to Coach Bosch—the football coach—for training. Running around outdoors after school ceased, I lifted weights on a rotational circuit in a room that smelled of sock cheese and metal. I can still hear Bosch's marching orders as I pushed and pulled piles of clanking iron plates up and down the pulley systems, *HASSEL!! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU HERE FOR?!! NO PAIN NO GAIN, HASSEL!! PUSH!* Weight training was something I was pretty good at, and it didn't give me debilitating shin splints.

I had the hardcore shin splints because of my feet-flattening pronated arches. When the all-day limping at school began to embarrass the track coach, he finally sent me to the expensive team doctors with the Ken Doll haircuts. The only way to cure that malady, said the sports trainer, was chronic use of orthotics: small wedges fit to your feet that stay in every pair of shoes you wear and look ridiculous with heels—my teenage shoe of choice. One problem with forgetting, or refusing to wear, or losing your orthotics is that while some muscles in the feet become exploited and over stretched, others become too tight. Wrapping around the bottom of the heel and reaching forward toward the center of the foot is the plantar fascia—a stringent complex of Saran Wrap-like tissues encasing small muscle fibers that conduct the habits of the gait. Posture and flexibility depend on the suppleness of the plantar fascia and allowing this small, significant strip to stiffen can stop you straight away in your tracks.

So when at age 19 I put almost 80 pounds on the Universal Weight Machine at the gym, *PUSHED* as hard as I could up onto my toes and the blood vessel on the inside of my calf blew up, I never stopped thinking that all my leg veins were one day gonna blow.

Years later, after track and weight training had given way to all manner of dance: tap, ballet, modern, African, Latin, Yupik, Haitian, Cuban, Japanese Butoh, hip-hop, and hula, my legs learned to weather the pronated arch problem. At middle age, two hours of Polynesian dance and screamed corrections from my Samoan dance teacher produced a lot of pressure, but I didn't think it could cause my legs to explode. As I nursed my shin back to order with the soda shop ice in the back seat of the Subaru, I let vanity have its way and fully imagined a set of purpling, engorged blood vessels all across the front of my lower leg. By the time I got home, the bulge had flattened and resolved into an oblong bruise the size of a squashed plum. A few days later a yoga student of

mine, a doctor, looked at the black and blue and told me the alien protrusion wasn't a vein at all but muscle. The fascia that wraps around my tibialis anterior had split and the pressure of duck walking across the studio floor two, three, four times back and forth had forced the flesh out of its own skin.

The body remembers. There is memory in every cell. A story of trauma is told in the daily stance of a caved-in heart or tucked tail. My shoulders slope forward with such regular default that my pectorals have shortened and the muscles that reach across my upper back from spine to arm are all stretched out. No one would notice, because most people carry themselves this way. It's easier to make a cage for your heart if you hold it back from whatever approaches. Pulling my heart deeper to protect it sends ripplets of knots into the muscles that hold on to my wing bone. A knife-sharp clove-hitch resides below my left scapula reminding me what happens when I let my guard down. I'm only free of this gnarl when I do yoga, when I dance.

In yogic philosophy the body is seen as a vessel for energy currents which course through intersections at more concentrated nodes referred to as chakras—whorling vortices of electromagnetic and subtle matter frequencies. There are seven larger chakra centers each associated with a point on the endocrine system, which runs the length of the torso from tail to crown. When balanced and open, the chakras transmit and receive information in the form of energy with a mysterious almost insectoid sentience. The first is muladhara, the root chakra seated at the tip of the coccyx and associated with all things that bring stability: home, family, work, survival. It is said that when the root chakra is out of balance, there is fear regarding the security of family or the essential aspects of living well. Muladhara is seated at the base of the spine, but travels from the torso all the way down the legs and into the feet extending its energetic tendrils into the earth

with each step. I can find home with yoga, especially in mountain pose—tadasana.

Tadasana seems like just standing still, doing nothing, but when well-aligned and deeply connected, it gets me there. I here my yoga teacher voice when I practice: *Take a very deep breath*. I stand, lift all ten toes to feel the four corners of my feet and rock out and then into balance. Side to side, back and forth. Falling out of balance. Finding balance. Weight spreads across each sole and when I relax my toes, I'm standing in water again. My shins spiral forward to lift each arch, feet suction cup and draw the water in. Thighs spiral back, tail lengthens. Roots. Above the hips ribs melt, shoulders open, my heart shifts, and water sizzles into light. Tadasana.

In 2005 I took a photo of my birth father with me to Hawaii to look for him. Clues led me to the Polynesian Cultural Center on the north side of the island of Oahu where I sat in the plumeria perfumed heat and watched a large man in floral print play guitar and emcee the Samoan island show. While he spoke, a younger man demonstrated the importance of the coconut to Samoans, the "happy people," and shimmied up the trunk of a palm to retrieve one. He machete chopped and shred the coconut husk using it as a strainer to milk the meat of the nut and then as a fire starter beneath two rubbed sticks. I sat in the bleachers in my sea shell lei with the rest of the tourists and at the end of the performance showed the emcee the picture of my father. He looked at me and then back at the photo. "This your father?" he said. I told him yes and asked if he knew him. "I did." The excitement in my chest rose only for a breath. "He died."

The Tahitian ami is so fast and so difficult that during practice it can induce trance. When the white blood is winning I lose the fight—my twirl trips off its axis and everything goes spastic. But when I'm brown, I'm always down. Ami is the wide circle of hips when it's slow and the tight almost twitch when it's fast. I've always been

afraid of the Tahitian style because the technique demands lightning quick precision. The ironwood sticks on the toere drum and the pounding mallet of the bass swing my hips into full ami when they hear the first tremble of beats. If I'm not terrified by some too-fast choreography and I'm just swerving into the form, the technique, I take that tadasana for a ride. When the beat is right, and hips catch the moment, the ami becomes a whirling divination. The line between control and release dissolves and spinning like a top I'm centered, balanced, home. In rare moments I look for him in the dance.

Feet planted firm to floor my legs pedal knees: front-back-front, tilt hips: side-push-side. With a tuck of the tummy the whole pelvic bowl goes pendular, round, roots down, shines up, and I feel the eyes of Saimana smiling. Saimana, my birthfather, was famous in the 60s and 70s for his Samoan Siva Afi, the fire knife dance. In the first picture I saw of him he wears only a lei and a *lavalava*—a short wrap of bright yellow, Polynesian print cloth. His legs are sinewy stout, and he holds his machete high above a lady-killing smile. His spiral flames took him around the world, but he was dancing in Waikiki when Diana, my birthmother, first caught a glimpse of him.

Legacies of pain, like dances, have been passed down through the ages in all cultures. Culture is written in secret signifiers in the bones. We pass through innumerable halls, galleries and theaters of identity, each one calling forth a new light of expression, of understanding. We know ourselves by the foods we love, the songs we sing, the stories we tell, the pictures we make, and by the way we move. Sometimes the walk, the wave, the slouch, the dance seem invented, circumstantial, coincidental, temporary. But each gesture, posture and movement reveals legacies of hidden failures, hopes, fear. The body remembers, reacts to the inklings of the mind and records its most brilliant mechanisms of defense. If we are born

into the sins of the mothers and fathers, we have also inherited the ways to resolve our most latent tragedies. My feet, hips, arms, fingers and even my hair know more dances than I can name. Each dance is a solution. Each dance exorcises a certain cultural demon. The body remembers; trauma is lodged in connective tissue, in organs, in flesh and bone. Sequestered away in the organs, secret pain leads to disease.

When I'm scared, my hips clench which inadvertently clamps my sacrum into a traction so tight that sometimes I can hardly walk. In these episodes, to keep the shooting twinges at the tip of my coccyx from surging out of control, I have to tuck my pelvis, which draws my tail right between my legs—an obvious sign. The last attack hit one week before my debut performance as a Samoan Siva dancer and forced me into the healing hands of friends, the Epsom salt bath and four times a day onto the blue gel ice pack wrapped with a white nylon half slip so my skin wouldn't freeze. I had to stop. All stressors—teaching, tests, papers, books—were pushed aside. I was forced to lie around thinking of every move I was scheduled to perform on stage. The more I rested, the tighter everything became. The department secretary said the only way to get better was to lay in one position for three days straight and then, and *only* then after the three whole days of immobility should I get up out of bed and do the smallest bending movements back and forth until I finally got the full range back in another four days or so. The thought of lying still and stiffening into a corpse of cement terrified me, so instead I went to the gym and forced myself onto the elliptical trainer.

At the gym, my inner Coach Bosch took over and I inched my way up onto the machine. I put my headphones on and pretended to be working out like everyone else. *What the hell do you think you're doing here, Hassel?* Slowly I worked my way up to a moderately competitive speed with the guy next to me. *No pain, NO GAIN!!!* But

the normal endorphins weren't kicking in. Even though the warmth in my legs was easing the tension in my hips, I winced with every other stride.

Hobbling home from the gym, I called my Samoan dance teacher. Our show was in less than a week, so when I said I couldn't walk, she texted back "I can heal you!!" I put two blankets down on the rug and carefully lowered myself to the floor. She briefly ran her hands over my back, hips and legs and then got straight to work jamming her thumbs and elbows into my calves and Achilles. Who knew there were so many evil little points of torture lurking in those layers of flesh? With every yelp and shout she told me to "Quit that *aagh*, you sound like *palagi*!" Which means shut up and take it like brown people. Healing Samoan style is no pleasure cruise to the spa. She struck the fear of God into every tangled fiber squashing and straining each thread until she was sure the demons were gone, and when she took her hands away my legs and back released. Silky smooth with relief, I lay on the blankets and let the blood hum through every cell. The show went on, even though the twinges sparked up here and there. They continue to flare. When the root chakra is out of balance, there is fear regarding security, family, home.

#

Adulthood never really changed my misconception regarding the reality of women's hips and thighs. I once caught a glimpse of the puckered hell I so feared as a youth made manifest in a mirror on my way out of the shower. I was at the Omega Institute in Upstate, New York for a yoga workshop. Fatness is not what you're supposed think about when attending a yoga workshop let alone a yoga workshop at the Omega Institute. Omega is a center for wellness that offers workshops and programs for personal growth with a focus on the mind, body, spirit connection whose motto is "awakening the

best in the human spirit."

The whole Omega compound of dormitories, yoga studios, boutiques, spas, classrooms, temples and dining halls exudes a tangible vibratory zeal—the kind of woowoo ju-ju that allows for synchronicities from the micro to the macrocosmic to emerge as omens in caterpillar crossings and portents in the patterns at the bottom of cereal bowls. But even the Omega force of goodness could not block out my critic when the towel slipped as I passed the mirror. I went off to class under a cottage cheese shaped cloud. The workshop was co-taught by two of my heroes: international yoga goddess Seane Corn and political activist superstar Julia Butterfly Hill, they named it *Divine Action: Living Like You Mean It*. As noted in the pamphlet, the weeklong workshop intent was to help us participants "reconnect with our bodies, gain emotional insight, and explore our individual soul's purpose."

Mid-week at the workshop, at the end of Seane's grueling two-hour detox yoga session, I sat up, aligned, luminescent. Every atom of me rose to the surface and sang. I listened to Seane's guided meditation feeling well wrung out and clean. Earlier, at the end of the standing flow sequence—warrior rigors in Surya Namaskara B stylings—we were all face down on the mat in pigeon pose. With my knee bent forward and my shin below my chin on the floor, I felt the lactic acid rage build and unleash. Somehow I had grown to a new level of "no pain no gain". Pigeon pose is not about *PUSH HASSEL!* but breathe, linger, feel, be…in the center of barbed pangs. When the cussing in my head evaporated, the pain began to teach. I know I'm doing yoga when the tears can't be stopped. Most of the time I have no idea why I suddenly sob in a room of spandex clad strangers on sticky mats. My legs took turns somehow squeezing every last bit of snot from my head. We lay there 15 minutes per side, each of us small pools of surrender. At the end, I sat in lotus position and saw that New Agey rainbow rise

through the center of my body, up and out the crown of my head. And then I remembered my thighs. I suddenly saw them as cellular, as millions of cells with tiny faces all crying out, screaming in anger and pain. I felt the hatred of my thighs in the mirror as a hatred of self and something even bigger. A hatred carried by millions of women who bear the same legacy of hating their thighs. Thighs carry so much shame. We collect ourselves in our thighs, stuff our secret sorrows into every curve and cranny. I sat in awareness and listened, let the little rivers rinse out all the years.

After lunch Seane and Julia asked if anyone wanted to share their experiences from the morning session, and I found myself explaining my cellular screaming cellulite to a circle of 35 others. I explained the tiny cartoon faces all agape and the legacy of shame we carry in our thighs to thoughtful, nodding classmates and somehow didn't feel embarrassed at all. Afterward, a woman who I named Angelecca, because she looks just like a cross between my sister Angelique and my friend Laurel (but her real name is Rebecca), gave me a big hug. Angelecca told me that she was really impressed with the way I saw my ancestors in my thighs. I was confused at first. Then I remembered having used the word *legacy*. The small faces came back immediately, but this time they bore familial features. The source of shame grew beyond commodification of body parts, way past glossy glamour ads and impossibly tight jeans into something more like disconnect, or denial and I felt myself a face in a long chain of slack-jawed, silent screamers.

There is a secret pain I've born, without naming it, for so long now I can hardly bring myself to write it. The naming of it has less to do with blame than with liberation. I've carried it in my flesh and blood without knowing for long, long years. There seems no reason for it other than the age old playing out of opposites. A discomfort of the skin I'm in. And I wonder if the dance can work it out,

if when my pelvis froze up with pain it threatened to keep me from doing Samoan Siva in some ancient vice of protection, a mechanism of control. A denial of the skin I'm in. Or, if when my flesh wriggled out of its wrapper it was warning me I'm strapped in too tight. The armoring stasis we invoke to stop the flow of who we are is a legacy.

To be half and half is something other than whole. When I was a kid I never really knew the halves or even saw them. I was raised a homogeneous Scandinavian Alaskan who happened to have very brown features. At age twelve I discovered I was probably half Polynesian and half something else that a blonde woman would produce. This knowledge didn't change much other than to plant an infatuation with all things Hawaii in my brain. Growing up, I was smothered in hugs and kisses, pets and toys so the idea of abandonment was not something I knew. But the body remembers.

3. Sky

Beyond the blue a black swath, deep cut with chinks of flicker and glow, unfurls so much vaster than anything known as night, there's no way I can go to sleep. I'm on the porch under a heft of quilts and sleeping bags. Dot to dot depicting myself in kind, I wonder. If these points of light years past are all we see in the night's firmament, then what is really now? There was a moment somewhere way back when, in the twinkling: celestial stirrings sparked across the sky and looking down upon a planet I imagine I chose all of you to blossom through from points around the globe—sub-tropic, sub-arctic, ocean, snow. Constellations only exist in the way we see them. I see you shining through. I see you.

An Apology
Jonathan Ullyot

Please accept this brief apology for my behavior last night. I rarely meet new people. I thought you and your boyfriend were very nice. I don't really know what came over me. I should begin by explaining what happened to me earlier that day. I had what can only be called a breakthrough in my illustration-technique for *Golfing With Apollo,* a pictorial epic that I have been writing for the past nine years, about the Greek god who returns to the town of Red River to save the world from an alien invasion in the year 3029. You see, I woke yesterday morning from a terrible nightmare in which a wolf pup was attacking me in a locked closet. The dream's meaning was clear to me (despite my morbid hangover): my life's work had been utterly in vain. I had long been struggling within the confines of a "realistic" conception of illustration, meaning that whatever I drew resembled, or at least referred to, something in the world. The problem with this technique has always been that I have absolutely no talent as a draughtsman. In a fit of morbid energy, I grabbed a thick piece of red charcoal and began to scribble and cross out many of the five hundred drawings I had produced in the last six months. To my surprise, they started to look better. So I set about effacing them more diligently. I scribbled over some, re-inked others, sometimes added unrelated pornographic doodles. I smeared some white acrylic paint, then scribbled over that with a 4B pencil and a yellow pencil crayon. (Attached are some digital reproductions. Please do not distribute.) In the heat of inspiration, and in strict accordance with my new Paleolithic nutrition diet, I consumed nothing but an old bottle of wine, a spinach salad, a glass of heavy cream, and several glasses of Christian Brothers brandy.

Needless to say, by the time I met up with you I

was already in a state of inebriated delirium. And I can only conclude that it was the combination of this delirium and (perhaps) my anger after that little scuffle I had with your boyfriend over sections 50 to 100 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* that made me say the things I did. (I must admit that I find philosophy graduate students tiring; they seem to think that they posses a greater understanding of philosophical texts than the rest of us.)

I was also quite taken by your wonderful and refreshing personality. So, let us say, *three* factors inspired my (iterated) proposal of that revolutionary act that would take our little group to a second (transcendent) level of consciousness. A proposal that, our mutual friend Alice was kind enough to remind me on the telephone this morning, was "embarrassing and inappropriate." (Alice just thinks she is *so* much better than everyone else.)

Indeed, I do regret being so candid and lucid. I regret holding the conch and speaking the truth, as it were. My imagination (and let us therefore call this the *fourth* factor) was also kindled by that awesome well tequila.

Suffice to say, I really thought that some sort of group sexual activity would be the perfect conclusion to our little evening.

Of course, you are somewhat to blame. You are a force as awesome as any well tequila. I will never forget those wonderful stories you told. Of your father stealing an Aston Martin. Or of racing kittens in your mother's basement. I laugh still recalling your relentless mockery of the Portuguese government. (And *why* do you mock the Portuguese, I find myself asking. But to ask such a question is to ask the Sphinx why it riddles.)

I have since sobered myself to banal reality. Your boyfriend, however, was wrong to accuse me of "molesting" you outside the bar. I fell on top of you because I couldn't keep my balance. What did he really think I was trying to do? Initiate the orgy on the cold lawn? Anyways, I don't care to repeat the kinds of things he was accusing me of. They

were certainly ill-fitting words for a man who champions reason, who pretends to hold the keys of Wittgenstein's thought in his narrow little brain, who perhaps could never love anything so much as his own opportunity to be right.

His second attack, during the ride home, after I presented my idea on the problem of agency in the immortal *Taboo* pornographic tetrology of late 1980s, was simply belligerent. Has he even *seen* the films?

I am only speaking objectively, of course, and invite you to do the same. Meaning, put your love for him aside, in true *philosophical* fashion, leave the cave of your monogamy and behold him in the cold light of reason. See him for the pompous donkey he is.

But let me leave that at rest. I write to you, not your boyfriend, because I was and still am delighted to have made your acquaintance. Your green eyes burn in my throbbing head. They are fires that I have worked so hard to capture in my magnum opus, *Golfing With Apollo.* Last night, after I had fallen on top of you, I breathed in the smell of your strawberry shampoo and recalled a childhood obsession I once had with my sister's Strawberry Shortcake doll. How I loved that doll! I even stole it from her (she never appreciated it anyway) and hid it in the upstairs closet where we kept the luggage. I would go in there, late at night, and drink in the beautiful scent for hours. This might also explain why I began to weep once Alice had dropped me off at your apartment and then begged you to "be my pony."

You are no pony. You're a mare. Wild and green-eyed, running through a wasted field. If I were a horse dealer, I would give all my earthly possessions to buy you. (Including my other horses.) But I would also know, at the same time, that any attempt to break you would result in my being mauled to death under your hooves. And under the hooves of your (spiritual) children. And, possibly, under the hooves of the horses I also gave away to buy you and who have returned to take vengeance on me. I would, if anything, simply preserve the secret that is you. For you are

both a secret and, at the same time, a very palpable and very metaphorical horse.

Did you know that it is very unnatural for a mare to breed with a donkey? I think it might even be impossible.

You notice how the horse metaphor has exhausted itself. That is because there is no metaphor that can pen you. You buck and rear, then you burn in the night. If anything, you are a burning horse. Or, the God of horses.

This morning I have added a new character to *Golfing With Apollo,* a wild horse god that is always on fire. (In the year 3029, horses have evolved enough to have invented gods.) And who burns whomever rides her. She is the only animal who can satisfy Apollo's voracious sexual appetite. And who can satiate his terror of the world-destroying capability of human imagination. And who understands his secret desire to die.

She also acts as his caddy. Even I am the slave to narrative cohesion.

I wish I could explain all of this to you in person. And, if you would permit me, make a few preliminary sketches of you and try to capture your aura. Tonight I am cooking a turkey. I've crushed five avocados. I also bought a bottle of Russell's Reserve Rye. Please let me apologize to you in person. I hope that this apology speaks to you. I hope your ears are not filled with wax, tied to the mast of your desire, or, rather, tied to the belly of a swine. If you will not, I will try to forget you. I will blot you out. I will drown you in white. I will cross out your eyes with a green pastel.

Yours,
John Hanson

For There She Was

Shantel Grace

Mrs. Ringler said she would buy the cauliflower herself. For my father had his work cut out for him. The windows would be taken off their hinges, Dalloway's men were coming. And then, she thought, Mrs. Ringler,
my mother,

what an afternoon—warm as if issued to spring on its first day in April. What a day! What a steal of sunshine! For so it nearly always seemed to her, when, with a little lift of the window seal, which she could feel now, she had pushed the screen out and left the house open to the world.

How still, how fresh.
How perfectly clear.

My mother was having a party.

She wore a green pair of pants, the color of tea, and a lemony blouse with pearl buttons shaped like half moons. Lipstick was her last and most precious accessory. Always, she would wear lipstick, and when we parked in front of the IGA, I wondered,

what did the lipstick mean?

In the early afternoon, cool, then warm, like the rising and falling of a blanket, a woman of forty-five stood in front of electric doors, in a town twenty miles from where we lived, where cauliflower was a brighter shade of white. Something awful was about to happen. Looking at the flowery cabbage, its tint of yellow, its speckles of brown,

I, musing around other vegetables,
felt that I preferred mud to cauliflower.

My mother carefully inspected the vegetable's inflorescence. She picked the one almost nearly to the back of the cooler, and tenderly pushed some of her hair behind her ear where real pearls remained hidden. I watched her smile at people who passed her in narrow aisles, and I wondered if she'd invite them to her party.

If not them, who?

"Forty-nine dollars and twelve cents," a woman says, and I wonder if that's a lot, or not a lot. By the way my mother inspects her receipt, as we push the cart toward the car, I find my question answered. Forty-nine dollars and twelve cents, the price of one month's electricity bill. The price of driving to town forty times.
The price of my father's best pair of winter boots.

The cost, I wasn't sure.

For having lived in Sylvan Grove—how many years now?—over twenty, one feels this even in the midst of dirt roads, or in front of small town grocery stores, or in the suspense of giving a party. Kansas was in that moment, just before spring, in a time when snow could fall as easily as tulips could rise up from frozen earth. The war had not begun, except for small ones, where nice boys were killed but not talked about. *The King and I* played in theatres, not in my town. I remember tasting the colors of monks' robes, sweet cherries, seeing elephants, watching the way the bald woman smiled when her lover's head was sliced from his neck.
Hers soon followed and I knew,

that that was love.

"Will you help me with the china?" my mother says, staring ahead as if she's already begun cutting her vegetables, preparing the soufflé. A well of tears, courage and endurance, a perfectly upright combination of sensation, would lift me into the sun-lit room where plates were on display like the opening of a bazaar. I would handle them with the late age of ten years experience. Obedience, like the color of my eyes,

was bred in me,

shelved things,

which were unbroken.

Even now, at this hour, still driving, discreet old farmers were shooting their guns, performing errands of mystery. Women in houses were dusting televisions and canning beets and boiling berries for jam. Women with small drawers in desks filled with sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings, love letters and sentimental perfume bottles, scented stationary, and certificates of being born, all tempting us to recognize vanity for what it isn't. How strange, that on this day, after arriving to the house, upon entering the kitchen, the silence, the humidity, the hum, the slow percolating of coffee, what should return to the scene

but cauliflower.

In sticky cabinets she locates minced garlic and olive oil, parsley and pepper and Parmesan. She turns the oven dial to two hundred-twenty degrees on one side, four hundred- fifty on the other. A pad of butter is warmed and spread on glass as if to frost the windows in winter, for decoration. Tenderly, she cuts the flowers from the thick

stalk and gently places them in similar shapes,

on glass,

the flowers blanketed in herbs and oil.

So she would find herself arguing in the aroma of roasted cauliflower, still making out that I would wear the plaid skirt, green tights. And so she dressed me like old-fashioned candy. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little hallway by the stairway, I had to break with her or I would have been destroyed, both of us ruined, I was convinced. Never could I understand how she cared.

I felt very young,

at the same time unspeakably aged.

She sliced a knife through everything. Mushrooms were cut and stuffed with crab and cheese, asparagus split and drizzled in buttery cream, pork was sliced, cubed and seared, crusted in syrup, and I knew nothing.

No language, no history,

only the memoirs of others.

The table would look like Christmas. Small notes, poems on plates the color of champagne bottles, ornamented its empty futility. Baskets of warm bread and lavender colored napkins; she had a perpetual sense of being out, of being far out to sea and alone with her plates. I, in my candy costume held platters of zucchini flowers fried and stuffed with ricotta as a surprise, as filling, as a gift. Its ineffectiveness astounded me. It felt very, very dangerous to live on that day. A few twigs of knowledge, it was ab-

sorbing, all this, the farm trucks passing by, the shiny cars stopping in our driveway, fine china and a poem were my plate, and I would say to myself,

am I this,

am I that?

Then there are the guests, the Dawdys' and Donehues' and the Dorvzacks' covered dishes. There are Mrs. Hand's kolaches and a plastic container filled with frozen icing, Mr. Kempt's pickled garlic, Mr. Tilltotson's lamb skewers, all spread out over the table. Ever so many plates there are, but none, which seem exactly right for the town in which they would be eaten. Nothing would amuse the usual indescribably dried-up women, except interminable talk of Mr. Malgan, his poor wife, Rebecca, and his trip to England, the affair with his student who wore too much eyes shadow,
and a small ring in her left nostril.

"She used to love horses," they say, nodding their "poor thing" heads, sipping white wine.

How much my mother wanted it, the people who looked pleased, never annoyed, and even though it seemed silly to have reasons for doing things—waiting to eat, waiting to wash crystal, throwing half-eaten deviled eggs to dogs—we followed her as if we wanted it too.

Her eyes crumple like soft leather at the sight of my father,

his boots.

Slow and stately, her voice rather large, like the politics of men, with her country house, dignified, asks him to

please “change your shoes.”

His “shoes” belonged on the table, I thought, next to buttercream cakes and the birds of paradise tea set, his shoes belonged there. That he held himself well was true, he was dressed well, considering he spent little, but there was the subject of the boots. The body he wore was not the body of all its capacities, there were no more children now, a son in a blue and red costume, in another country; a daughter in denial, in college and open like air; and then there was me, the oddest sense of being invisible, unseen, unknown, unformed,
but in solemn progress.

“I like his boots,” I say, choosing to participate in a war I didn’t believe in. “That’s what he is. That’s what he does. He wears boots.”

“What does that even mean?” she whispers, beside the stairway, away from the gathering of appropriately shoed people. “Just once I’d like to pretend I didn’t marry a farmer.”

Tears well.

“Why?” I ask.

“That is all,” she says, wiping her hands on a thin, yellow towel. “That is all,” she repeats, pausing for a moment at the window, where outside, thick white snow covers bales of winter straw.

She looks relieved.

My shoes, red leather with a brown button in the center, hurt my feet. I walk up the stairway, quietly, and peek at my father who sits at the edge of the bed, polishing his

boots. I lean hard against the door.

“Honey, will you grab me those brown loafers from the hall closet?” he asks.

I feel defeated,

my knees itch,

I scratch a hole in my tights, and dab it with a wet cloth, as if it were a day for miracles. I walk through the upstairs hallway and open the sad closet door. There, the loafers remind me that the whole house smells of tar. The stuffy smell lingers and I feel sick, inclined to say something. But it is only a phase, I am neither a hero, nor a student. Inside the bedroom, he and his boots are inseparable, and the snow, which begins to fall harder, which I can feel through the window, dulls my inflicted feelings.

“Here you go,” I say, handing him the softly tortured shoes.

“’Did you go to town today?” he asks.

“Yeah.”

“You and your mom get into anything interesting? Did you rob a bank or set the streets on fire? Anything news-worthy happen today?”

“We bought cauliflower.”

I watch him place his boots, in perfect alignment, just inches in front of the bed, his loafers on his lap next to the polishing rag.

“We’re eating!” she yells, from the stairway. “People are

eating!" she says, walking quickly up the twenty-two yelping steps. "Put those things away and get your shoes on. Let's go! You're embarrassing me."

She walks away, wiping her hands on the thin yellow towel. He picks up his boots. He sets his loafers on the floor in front of him. I watch him, and cover my knees with my hands. With his left foot, he pushes the loafers to the side,
carefully,

he lifts his jeans above his knees,
and lifts his legs from the floor, and drops his feet inside the polished boots.

Denim falls around them, holds them in place. He stands and walks toward me, lifts me, piggy-back,

he walks.

Down the stairway, through the kitchen, past plates of cauliflower soufflé, and frosted kolaches and split asparagus, we become the heroes of our own lives. The scene rasps her, though to have stirring about her kitchen in these brutal shoes and torn tights, to hear twigs cracking and hooves planted down in the depths of a dirt-encumbered forest, her soul, never quite content, or quite secure, her illness her empty plates, their power to make her feel, lingers. Our limbs, her hurt spine, made all pleasure in beauty disappear,

quiver,
bend as if
we were monsters,

content in nothing but hatred of soles.

Year in and year out she hated those boots, for it was not her one vice, a slum without a cushion, a room without a rug, a small corner table without a lamp, in time, dissolved. For no doubt, with another throw of the dice, he might've worn polished loafers,
shiny,
visible
refined shoes.

And then, opening her eyes, one April morning, years later, her body limp from the loss of a tumorous organ, how fresh she was, like clean linen and roses, holding her head up. Sweet peas and strawberries in a ceramic bowl on the kitchen table, she looked happy.

For there she was.

Arum lilies in a vase, gray-white moths spinning in lofty corners of the house, my father's boots in the doorway, his sweater warming his shoulders, his socks warming his feet, her smile, neither defeated nor victorious.

I watched from a chair,
tasting plump red sweetness
break open in my mouth. I am this, and I am that.

Darren W. Brown

After All the Fun We Had

Ryan Shoemaker

Last year it was like these kids were just disappearing from our classrooms. Literally. You'd look and there'd be twelve empty seats when there'd only been nine a minute before. They'd sneak out the door, crawl through the windows if they had to. And God knows where they went. Sniffing glue in some back alley. Stealing beer from the Gas 'n Go. Those were usually good guesses.

And it's not as if their parents cared much. Our phone calls irritated them. They'd tell me to go you-know-what and then hang up.

And the few students who managed to stick around? About an hour of consciousness, until the Red Bull and amphetamines wore off, and then they'd be passed out and slobbering all over the desktops. Teachers complained. "We're white noise," they'd shout at me in staff meetings. "We can't break through all the apathy."

"Calm down," I'd tell them. "Calm down. Some decorum please."

These crybabies knew as well as I did that we didn't have any leverage with these kids. Still, I threatened to take away the nacho bar in the cafeteria, to cancel Chicken Nugget Fridays if we didn't see a real change in attitude and a rise in attendance. I drafted an intricate code of conduct and posted one in each classroom, you know, how to sit in a chair, how to properly address a teacher, how to treat a textbook. Students cried oppression and then went elsewhere. We had too many empty seats. There wasn't enough money coming in from the State. We barely made payroll the last half of the year. We couldn't afford to lose another student.

The problem was these kids hated school. At

best they tolerated it. They couldn't wait to get on the streets again. I'd hide behind the oleander in the parking lot and catch them crawling under the chain link. I'd lecture them on the value of education and quote statistics about unemployment rates for high school dropouts. They'd stare at me with those dreamy, molasses eyes. "We're bored." That's what they'd say. Bored! I was incredulous. It's not like they were headed down to Chase Field to catch the last innings of the Diamondback game. They wanted out of school so they could smoke a joint under a freeway overpass or tune into some stupid daytime talk show where people brawled and disputed paternity results.

Something had to change this year, or we wouldn't have a school. What the hell, I told the teachers, if all the oppression and the rules and Chicken Nugget Friday aren't working, then let's make it fun. Let's sink some money into it. Let's give these kids a reason to come to school. We had our naysayers. I'll admit. We had some teachers who quit outright. But that was all right, because if school was going to be fun, it had to start with the teachers. We had to have some cool teachers.

First, I hired Mr. Dingus. He taught carpentry. A hulk of a man. A jaw like a steel trap. Thighs like tree trunks. He oozed this heady bravado, had a palpable masculinity I thought our students needed. He'd be the father figure, the kind-hearted uncle, whatever, an alternative to the men in these kids' lives who'd never shown up for their birthday parties. He wore dark shades in the classroom. He spoke in grunts and clipped phrases. He could lift the backend of a Ford Fiesta. He was the cool teacher. That's what all his students said with a kind of puppy dog look on their faces: "Mr. Dingus is a cool teacher."

And then there was Miss Beauchamp. She taught biology. Her resume came a week before school started. We were in a pinch. It was serendipitous. I

mean, I knew it during our interview. I kept thinking as I looked at the chiseled contours of her tanned calves and the soft slope of her jaw, kept thinking that such a beautiful specimen was perfect to teach our bored students about homeostasis and cells and photosynthesis and reproduction. Maybe I'd never heard of her alma mater, some tiny liberal arts college in Manitoba. Maybe her grades weren't stellar. But she was a breath of fresh air, a stark contrast to Ms. Leverkus, our biology teacher last year, a frail woman who wore ascots and hideous pastel polyester pants, so old and dried out, so boring and blanched of life, she eerily reminded me of the geriatric corpse I poked and prodded way back when in an undergraduate anatomy lab. No wonder our test scores in the hard sciences plummeted last year. These kids were scared of her. She smelled and looked of death. That gravely smoker's voice, those spotted, veiny hands. She bore a striking resemblance to Cromwell's mummified head. Ugh! Anyway, she passed away suddenly in early August from some kind of blood clot or aneurism, which really saved me the inconvenience and awkwardness of firing her.

So we had some cool teachers. Now I had to worry about the first day of school.

I envisioned a party, an event, a beginning of the year celebration these kids would talk about. Not some hot dogs and balloons. Something huge. A Festival. A carnival. We had to get the word out, form an identify as a school where education is fun. I hired a place off Camelback called Got Party to handle the finer details. I told them to spare no expense.

So on the first day of school these kids trickled in, late as usual, eyes glazed over from a summer of excess and debauchery, stinking of reefer and cheap malt liquor. They stopped at the gates, gaping, taking in the blazing carousel in the back of the parking lot and the full mariachi band trilling near the school's entrance. They

were dazed. Some, helplessly enchanted by the carousel's melody, reached into their pockets and pulled out greasy dollar bills and offered them to me. "No need for that," I whispered, leading them through the gates. "Go. Eat. Have fun. This is only the beginning."

We had a hundred students that first day, a hundred and fifty the next, and by the end of the week we'd maxed out our enrollment. I mean, we didn't have an empty seat. We were turning kids away. For the first time we had a waiting list. The money was pouring in, sixty dollars per student per day from the State.

Unfortunately, about a month into the first semester I got a phone call from Phillip Begay's mother. I guess he'd come home from school pretty upset. She wanted to know what happened. She thought Harris Mitchell had been pummeling her little boy again behind the Gas 'n Go. I wished it was that. No, Phillip told her that Miss Beauchamp, at the end of a lecture on the human reproductive anatomy in her all-boys biology class, had drawn a number of life-like figures on the chalk board in various sexual positions. I was shocked. Horrified, really. I mean, I was speechless. What could I say? I told Ms. Begay we'd look into it immediately, that this was a serious matter, that any harmful contagion would be rooted out—my exact words.

Miss Beauchamp didn't deny it. She cried, she wrung her hands, she wiped at her streaming mascara. I volunteered my handkerchief. God, she was beautiful, like a woman in an old painting taken in sin. Anyway, she was frustrated. Students dozing off, smarting off. She wanted to connect with her students, have a laugh together, be the hip teacher. So when Vincent Lobato shot up his hand at the end of the lecture and asked how to do it, and everyone giggled, she got caught up in the moment. It was a lapse of judgment, a mistake she told me. This was her first teaching job. You know how it is. That first year is tough. Lesson plans, classroom

presence, classroom management, and let's face it, most of our students are rude and ungracious. So she drew a few figures on the board, nothing hard-core, really as a joke more than anything else, you know, to get a laugh from the kids. And that was that. There was a rumor that she'd mounted a desk while unbuttoning her blouse and told the class she'd make men of every last one of them before the end of the period. Totally false and ungrounded. Well, be that as it may, we had to let her go. A real shame. Really.

So we had that little problem with Miss Beauchamp, but our attendance was steady. Students were excited. They wanted to be at school. We had pizza parties, raffles and giveaways, a carnival with clowns and an inflatable castle, a concert on the basketball court by some local rapper who called himself Captain Boolicious.

Well, it got expensive. I won't deny that. Yes, we had to adjust our budget. Not everyone was happy, especially our cosmetology teacher, Ms. Hardu. Last year I'd promised her a new classroom with recessed lighting and sinks and fancy chairs for cutting hair, some place she could open to the public so the girls could get their hours. She wanted a Zen-like feel to the room, a bubbling fountain, potted bamboo. It sounded expensive. I tried to reason with her, to show her our attendance, to speak to the greater good. She wouldn't have any of it. And then it hit me: have Dingus and his advanced carpentry class do it, you know, save a few bucks and let the kids build something bigger than a jewelry box.

"Cool," Dingus said when I told him. He stared at me over his shades. A toothpick hung from his lower lip. "Cool, cool."

Well, they finished in mid December. Ms. Hardu was ecstatic. She'd planned this big party, cookies and punch and a cheese platter, and even invited Sterling Couples and Rhonda Felski from the city council to give some prestige to the event, you know, make the kids feel

they'd really accomplished something. It was wonderful, all of it, the cheese and the punch and the cookies, right up until the entire interior wall dividing the cosmetology classroom from the salon area came crashing down. You should have seen the chaos, the spilled drinks, plates of cheese and crackers flying through the air, the screaming as students clamored under desks and into doorways. We thought it was an earthquake. Thank God no one was hurt.

Superintendent Flinders was irate, understandably. "Somebody could've been killed," he said. "Somebody could've sued." There was blame to assign, heads to roll. He wanted to know what happened. You know, why the wall fell.

What could I tell him? He knows as well as I do how these kids are. They get excited for about ten minutes when you let them hammer some nails or use the band saw, and then they're bored and want to destroy something.

It turns out some of the boys got hold of the nail gun and started firing it into the roof. I saw the damage myself, hundreds of little holes up there. Looked like an enormous constellation. And of course they pulled all the nails so they wouldn't get caught. And then we got all that rain. That's how the water got in. It was that second week of December. Three days of rain. Buckets and buckets of it. My laundry room leaked. My wife found black mold growing in our bedroom closet. Anyway, the water got in and saturated the wall.

The rain was understandable, but the real issue was the wall. Superintendent Flinders sent out this inspector to look at the broken mess, and this guy said it was miracle the wall hadn't gone over sooner. He'd never seen anything like it, two by fours, two by twos, bailing wire and wood glue, a few nails here and there. In fact, he was surprised the wall had stood at all. Superintendent Flinders wanted to know why Dingus

hadn't checked his students' work. He wanted to know if Dingus knew anything about carpentry. Dingus blamed his lazy students and the sub-par materials he'd been forced to use because of the limited budget. We questioned Dingus' T.A., Marvin Sanders, who was tight-lipped about the whole thing and answered our questions with a lot of head scratching and incoherent mumblings, until we gave him a twenty-five dollar gift certificate to Applebee's. That really perked him up.

"And why hadn't Dingus checked his students' work?" we asked.

"Well, how could he if he wasn't in the classroom?" Marvin said.

And where had he been, we wanted to know. Marvin said Dingus and Miss Lorraine, the message therapy teacher, had been doing some repairs in the utility closet behind the stage. Lots of repairs. We found a mattress in there, some personal lubricant and a container of whey protein. Nasty business. Unconscionable. Yes, we fired them. The students took it hard. As I said, Dingus was the cool teacher.

These kids circulated a petition to reinstate him, and then a petition calling for my resignation, because I'd fired the guy. They didn't get it. They live by a different code. Dingus was having sexual intercourse with Miss Lorraine in the utility closet and in their minds that elevated his status to that of a minor god. For a whole week they grumbled about the injustice of it. But then that Friday we had ice cream and pizza, you know, to smooth over some of that angst. They forgot all about Dingus when they saw the Domino's Pizza guy. Thank God these kids have short memories.

Well, we had a few setbacks, but the school year went on, better than expected, I should say. In January we brought in Randy the Reptile Man, and then there was Sprit Week, and then the petting zoo, and then the Valentine's Day dance at the Hyatt Regency. There was

the Zapato Family Acrobats in early March and then Miss Boyle, our world literature teacher, complained that our students weren't getting enough culture and decided to bring in a troupe of Irish dancers, who the students quickly booed off the stage. We made up for it the next week by bringing in some street dance team from Los Angeles called Epidemic Crisis. The kids loved them.

And of course every Friday during fifth and sixth period we watched movies and ate pizza. I'd bought a bunch of crap action movies from the discount bins at Walmart: *Quarter to Dead, Killer Piranhas 6, Pirates and Aliens.* But these kids weren't interested in action movies. All they ever wanted to watch was this saccharine Hallmark, made-for-TV movie I also pulled from the discount bins, thinking my wife might like it, some low budget piece of drivel about a dysfunctional family who befriends Bigfoot and learns to love each other again. These kids couldn't get enough of it. They'd watch it again and again, eyes riveted to the TV, wiping away the tears with grease-stained napkins. That's how these kids are. Just when you think you know them, they surprise you.

Anyway, all said we were having a great year. That I know. Kids were in class, maybe not doing much work, but they were there, they were attentive and courteous, and that counts for something. We finally had leverage. School was fun, a party, and nobody wanted to be left out for some bad behavior. They wanted to be here. They were excited. I could see it in the way they twiddled their cotton-candy stained fingers and smacked their lips. They were always asking me what was next, who was coming to entertain them, when they would eat again. That's why we were so surprised about what happened at the end of April.

It was a Friday afternoon, all these kids gone for the weekend. We were having our staff meeting in the library, hashing out the final details for the school *Cinquo*

de Mayo celebration. Ms. Lipton was reporting on the Ferris wheel and big top we'd rented for the occasion, and then suddenly we heard a hundred voices out in the hallway. And then these kids started pouring into the library, shouting at us, their faces pinched and angry.

"We've barricaded the school," they said. "No one goes in or out until our demands are met."

I stood there and faced them, and said not so gently: "What do you have to complain about? We're planning a party for you. Aren't you having fun? Don't you look forward to coming to school? Last year. Remember last year?"

"We're tired of cotton candy and fire eaters," they said. "We want you to hug us. We want to be a family."

"There are rules," I said. "There are laws. I can't hold you, I can't touch you. I could be fired. The State could shut us down."

They pressed in on us. A raw, throaty vibration filled the room. I hadn't seen it before, but you know how these kids are: they had baseball bats, knives, and long pieces of chain looped around their hands.

"You'll be the father," they said, pointing to me, and then they pointed to Ms. Lipton, who looked ready to cry. "And you'll be the mother. And you'll both sit in these chairs, and we'll be your children."

So Ms. Lipton and I sat there like stunned fish, staring at the wall, our hands resting on our thighs.

"No," they told me. "Put your arm around her. Rest your head on her shoulder. Yes, like that." And then Alex Escobar came forward and taped a piece of poster board to the wall, a hand-drawn brick hearth with a blazing fire in it. And then he put up another poster, a New England winter scene, leafless maples covered with snow, a serpentine lane threading through dark woods to a quaint log cabin with glowing windows.

"We're frightened," they said. "Hold us. Tell us everything will be all right."

They dimmed the lights and sat at our feet. Someone passed around steaming cups of spiced apple cider. They sipped pensively. They sang Christmas carols. I sat there clutching Ms. Lipton's cold hand. Her eyes were pressed shut, her lips moved but no sound came out. If I so much as loosened my grip on her hand, I heard a chain rattle behind me. The hours passed. Above the school I heard the low whir of news helicopters, and from the parking lot the commanding baritone of a police officer shouting into a megaphone.

"This can't go on forever," I told them. I was getting impatient. I had to use the bathroom.

"Shhhhh," they said, their heads resting against our knees. "Just a while longer. We'll be good, we promise. Shhhhhhh."

Suddenly there was an enormous boom and then a blinding flash of light. The ceiling tiles collapsed above the doorway and twenty members of the city swat team dropped through the hole. The students ran for the door, screaming, vaulting over chairs and tables. The swat team was ready, strafing them with pepper spray and bean bags. They crumpled to the floor, squirming there like blinded newborns just pulled from the womb. I watched them with a stunned satisfaction as they rubbed their burning eyes and wept loudly. I took a step forward. I don't know why. I wanted to lecture them, say something about gratitude. But then three members of the swat team lifted me off the ground and whisked me away. My throat burned. I looked back at all those writhing bodies. These kids. So damn ungrateful.

Well, that's what happened, a quarter of these kids gone just like that, doing three to six months in Durango. I can't believe it. After all we'd done for them, after all the fun we'd had.

The school will survive. I think. Back to the basics: reading, writing, math. Nothing extracurricular, no pizza parties or carnivals. We'll probably lose another fifty

students. Maybe seventy-five. I can already see their bored faces. Who knows, most of them'll probably be in Durango within a year anyways.

I've been to these kids' arraignments. I've seen them in court, lost and angry in those silly orange jumpsuits and black canvas slip-on deck shoes. I've heard what goes on in Durango, the bland food, those long, bored hours, lights that never turn off. God, I want to shake them, ask them if they're having fun in there. But you and I both know I can't touch them.

Darren W. Brown

The Church of Carl

D.J. Thielke

He had never been good with women, which made going to jail the best thing that ever happened to him. Not because of the men – he wasn't into that – but because women suddenly wanted him. He was like a reversed Rapunzel: below his tower stood crowds of women, swinging their locks like lassos, begging to be dragged up and into his barred window. He was untouchable and, as untouchable, desired.

He hadn't been in the cell three days before he started getting the letters. Women in at least a three-state radius were sitting down at their kitchen tables or computers. They glanced over their shoulders as they pulled out flower-print stationary, or dimmed the backlight on the monitor so it would not shine off their wedding rings.

Dear Carl, they began. Or Hi, or Hello, or sometimes just Carl and a dash, as though they were calling his name across a crowded party. And then the passion spilled out. Some called him brave and daring; others commiserated and sympathized. Some of them seemed to be yelling, but yelling on paper was like playful scolding, and the bad names they called him took on the involuntary affection of orgasmic outcries. All of the letters asked questions, but he didn't mind. Theirs weren't questions like the lawyers asked – straight-backed and hungry questions, questions like acupuncture needles diving for a nerve. Their questions were soft and gentle. Their questions came prefaced with baby talk and pet names – oh, honey – and – why, sugar? Their questions felt like a smooth hand on his forehead, riffling through his hair as he wept into their pillowy laps. He poured over the letters in his bunk, memorizing each one bit

by bit. He repeated the words to himself as he walked, keeping time with the prisoners' marching step along the cement-floored halls and common rooms.

***

Dear Carl,

Your picture came up on the news again. Seems as though they can't get enough of your round little cheeks on that screen. I know how they feel. Every time they put you up there I can see the newsman's face getting a little tougher like an old grapefruit. He squints up at you Carl probably because he knows next to you he looks like the old liberal windbag he is with his weird chin. I imagine I'd be jealous of you too if I were a man. It makes me angry thinking about all those men in the jury box who must have been jealous too I think because otherwise why did they do this to you? When anyone like me can take one look at those puppy eyes and know that no one with a face like yours could have done it. If I had been on that jury I would have told them what was what you can count on that. No sir I would have said not Carl. And even if Carl did it I would have said he probably had some good reason for it. I've always believed people get what they deserve and if that woman got what they said she did well then she must have deserved it. Don't you let the newsmen and jurymen get at you because there are plenty of good people who know better or even if there aren't plenty of people I just want to tell you that I know better. I know I know better.

***

The only woman to ever physically visit Carl was his sister. She was probably the only one the guards let through. He didn't care to see her too much. One of his letters had called her "pedestrian" and that was how he thought of her – like the little white glowing man on the walk symbol; the stiff little figure making fast cars stop.

His sister wore neat suits of different colors but normally with pin stripes. She had her hair short now, curling at the edges of her ears. He had liked it better when she was younger and always wore a ponytail. He guessed all women cut their hair short when they got kids. His sister brought him books and magazines and sometimes some muffins or something she had baked. At first he had squeezed the cookies and cakes over his sink, crumbling them gently in hopes of finding a nail file or a penknife, like in the movies. Now he just ate them.

His sister would ask him how he was doing. He would tell her if he had had another nosebleed or a bad cough, or how his job was going in the kitchens. Sometimes he would just tell her he was fine. He would ask how she was doing. She would tell him about her sons – the older one now going into the second grade, not much of a runner but knew a lot about dinosaurs. The little one still got away with going to daycare and playing with blocks all day. The little one liked being held up to the kitchen counter, she said, so he could push the bread down in the toaster. She didn't say it, but Carl could tell she loved the little one best. When she ran out of things her boys had done, she played with her hands on the table.

I should be going, she would say, but wouldn't leave until she asked him – again and always – if there was anything he wanted to tell her.

No, he would say, again and always.

Her lips would press together, turning the edges white and wrinkling the space under her nose.

OK, she would say. Take care.

She didn't say I love you, anymore. But that was a relief. He didn't think he could stomach saying it back.

***

Hi Carl,

You don't know me but I feel like we're good

friends. I bet everyone says that. Sorry. My mother-in-law drives me crazy. She's a bad person. She was over again last night. She didn't like dinner. I made dinner. That was why. It was hard too because the chicken takes two hours to fix so it's right. I had to get off work early to make it in time for her. She's old and eats early. She said she didn't like it right there out loud at the table. She said it though she had eaten both drumsticks which are my favorite. My husband just sat there. My husband loves my chicken but he didn't say that to her. He's a big baby. Then she left and he had no problem yelling at me. I wish he could see what a bad person his mother is. I wish he could be more like you. I hope you are well. I hope they feed you well. I would send you some of my good food but I don't think it would be good by the time it got to you.

***

The other inmates didn't talk to him a lot. When they did, they called him Babyface or Frankie. Stubble took days to appear on his cheeks, and his eyes were the same raindrop blue as Frank Sinatra's. Sometimes some of the men called him Sugar Tits, but he was not into that. He had never been into that, even though that rumor had gone around in high school. A rumor he suspected his sister had started.

His sister was three years older than him, a senior when he came in as a freshman. She was pretty and popular and smart. He remembered seeing her across the hall at school, standing by the lockers, her head thrown back in a laugh. The red, wet horseshoe of her throat had been visible, her gum propped on her molars like a rat dropping. He had walked by, not knowing if she saw him and refused to say hello or just hadn't seen him. Not knowing which was worse.

The summer before Carl started high school, his mother had given his sister a car as a reward for good grades. Every morning as she pulled out of the driveway, his sister would honk at him where he stood waiting by

the mailbox. Waiting for the bus. He had not gotten good grades. He had never gotten good grades. He had never gotten a car, and his mother never missed an opportunity to tell him that he would never get one and all the reasons why. He was stupid. He was worthless. He was a weakling like his father, only worse. Carl had tried out for the basketball team to prove his mother wrong. But he hadn't made it. And she had told him why some more.

***

Dear Carl,

I am a mother, and up until I read about you in the newspaper I thought I was a pretty good one. But I know that my son hates me. Do you know how hard it is to know that? I did the best I could with him. His father left when he was only six years old and moved to California. His father got remarried to Tracy and they had a little girl named Susanne. I think it's hard for Jon that she got a father, a real father, and he didn't. It was hard for me at first too but honestly, I had stopped loving Jon's father a long while before he finally left. You can't always help it, sometimes love just dies. Anyway, I did the best I could but it was not good enough. Jon is angry or sad, one or the other, all the time. I know he is in a bad crowd at school but what can I do about it? It tears me to pieces because, no matter what, I'll always love Jon. When I saw your story in the newspaper, I got scared and started to cry. Maybe people would call you evil but I just don't know. I thought, what if that's Jon someday? You two don't look alike or anything but I still thought about it. Maybe he hates me that much, but I don't think any mother should be hated like that. Do you know how hard it is to be a mother? To love someone that came out of you? To love someone so much it hurts? Can you really hate someone who loves you like that? I wasn't really right when I said love can die. I mean that sometimes love dies towards other people, like for a husband or a wife or a friend. But a mother's love for her child cannot die.

It is just not possible. I know this, because I know I will always love Jon. What I want to know is, can a child's love for his mother die?

***

The letters kept coming. Carl piled them neatly under his bed in stacks of fifty. More and more letters came, and the stacks kept getting taller until they looked like little pillars holding up his mattress. He went to sleep one night and dreamed he was in a tabernacle. He had turquoise and gold on each finger and lounged on purple plush velvet. His eyes were caked with the thick black lines ancient Egyptians used and he toyed with a peacock feather, making whispery tickles across his belly. When he woke, it took him a full minute to remember that he was in grey cement and not a gold temple. He knew the letter writers had given him the dream. The letter writers had seen the invisible crown perched on his glossy brown curls. The letter writers knew him as he was really was – a displaced king.

He named them the Church of Carl. Their letters were prayers, dripping with repentance, begging for forgiveness. He imagined raising his jeweled hand before them in a gesture of wisdom and acceptance.

He thought that when he finally got out he would spend the rest of his life visiting each and every one of them. Their doors would always be open to him, their tables always set, their bedspreads always turned down. He would hear the voices behind the letters that had caressed and fondled him in his dank cell, match the faces to the curling or blockish or skittery handwriting. If they were lonely or their husbands were away, he would accept their couches or guest rooms and stay the night. He would accept them, as they crept in at three in the morning, radiating heat from inside the lacy shells of nightgowns. He would make love to any of them who asked. He would do it in part to make up for all this prison time with its sudden, shaky thrills of shower

grabs. But also as part of a larger task, a mission of sorts. He would do it to fill the void he felt in each of them and in himself. The void of disappointment or dead love. They were lost or unwanted mothers. And he was poor motherless Carl.

***

Carl –

I had a dream last night that I kissed you with our mouths full of sand. You poured into me. Your parted lips left a desert on my tongue. The grains overflowed and dribbled down my chin, crusting over into a new layer of skin. Later in the dream – or later in the night in another dream – you started to shrink. You got smaller and smaller. You came up to my earlobe, then my shoulder. I reached out to hold you and you tucked yourself into the nook of my armpit, hiding yourself there like a child. By the end of the dream you were an infant I swaddled in my arms. I eased my shirt from my shoulder and I suckled you and it was beautiful. In the morning he was on me before I had even woken up. I had to bite down to keep from crying your name. I kept yelling a hard "KAH!" sound before I caught it with my teeth. When we were done, he said he liked that sound. He wants me to yell more often.

***

His sister told him that he didn't look good. She said he looked as though he were freezing cold. No, he wasn't shivering. No, it didn't look like he had a cold. Just, was he all right?

The night before some men had cornered him in the back pantry during a break from his kitchen duties. They had held him down, salt crystals from a spilled shaker gouging into his knees. He got through it by imagining the Church of Carl drawn to their knees, their knees and their backs, and doing these things to them. He imagined it as instructive for his future mission with the Church and managed not to cry until after it was over.

It was his first time for anything like that, and it left him feeling fibrous and gristly, the last rubbery bits of steak clinging to the bone.

He told his sister that he was fine.

She nodded and looked away, her eyes glazing over.

She had looked the same at the trial. She had testified like the lawyer had asked her to, after he had explained to both of them that an insanity plea would be better. Carl had understood the plan when the lawyers said it, but hearing his sister up there, calling him crazy, brought up old angers.

Carl is stupid. Carl is worthless. A weakling only worse.

He had imagined his mother in the courtroom, her hair spiky short, hair-sprayed into a helmet. He had seen her point a long magenta fingernail in his direction. It was that nail he hated most, the throbbing pink color just a shade more electric than blood.

As his sister's punishment, Carl had refused to testify in court. He had refused to answer their questions or offer an explanation. He didn't care if it meant prison time. He didn't care if the lawyers were angry. He would not put the story into words for his sister to hear, which is what he knew she wanted more than anything.

Anything you want to tell me? his sister asked, again and always.

He shook his head and stood to leave before she could ask him if he was sure.

***

Dear Mr. Jeffries,

Hello! My name is Anita Stanton (MS, PhD candidate). I'm part of a team of psychologists from the University of Minnesota currently performing studies in the neurological impulses that stimulate violence. On behalf of the UM medical research team, headed by my doctoral advisor, Dr. Claire Benevenue, we'd like to

extend an invitation to you to act as a test subject.

I assure you, Mr. Jeffries, this is not nearly as alarming as it sounds. As a test subject, we'll ask that you make yourself available for a series of interviews. In these interviews, we'll ask questions concerning your childhood, your life experiences, and, in particular, the crime for which you were found guilty. You'll be asked to answer honestly and openly while, with the help of a "helmet-like" device, we'll be able to monitor your thought patterns and brain activity.

Please be aware, however, that your answers will be strictly confidential and you'll be assigned a pseudonym (a fake name) in the publication of the study. Your answers will, in no way whatsoever, influence any possibility of upcoming parole or appeals.

Dr. Benevenue is entirely sympathetic to your case and situation. With the help of this study, she hopes to prove that certain crimes are committed "innocently" inasmuch that the perpetrator (you) was given brain stimuli over which you had no control.

On a personal note, I truly hope you'll be willing to participate in our study. My own thesis research is primarily focused on murders committed by and against members of the same nuclear family. It is vital that your story – one that has spanned every era and still cannot be explained or understood – be recorded and analyzed for future generations. What we are looking for is some sort of understanding, Mr. Jeffries. This is your chance to tell your story. Please know that we are willing to listen.

Thank you for your time, and yours most sincerely –

***

Some men recruited Carl for their white power movement. Carl was fine with it when it mostly meant following behind them in a group in the hall and making angry eyes at the Blacks or the Mexicans or whoever, but he didn't like the weight lifting. He couldn't lift as much as the other men, and when they said things about it, he

didn't think he could keep being part of their movement. He followed the group around until they weren't paying attention, and then slunk off to be with the Church.

The letters were slowing down some, but probably just because he hadn't been on the news as much. There were still women who wrote him multiple letters a week, and, as the weeks went on, these were the women he gave his full imagination to. He thought about them as he worked in the kitchen, trying to guess whether they were blonde or brunette as he defrosted French fries. He chipped away the dried crud on the griddle and hoped one of the letter writers had brown eyes. He sort of loved the kitchen, especially when he was alone there with his letters. It was funny how safe it felt now; a home he had never felt at home.

After high school, there hadn't been many choices. He had taken a job at a local chain restaurant, McTuffy's, the sort of family dining place where the wait staff wore funny hats by mandate. It had been a good job, he knew now, and why he was able to work in the jail's kitchen instead of the laundry. But at the time it had been agony. He had been too shy to speak to the customers, and so had worked as busboy until he could be dishwasher.

The worst part of the job was that he hadn't been able to afford rent of his own. His mother had been lonelier after his sister had left for college, which meant angrier at Carl. She would drink more when she was by herself but had tried not to be by herself at all. When she had brought men back to the house, Carl would stay in his room, pretending it was his own apartment and the sounds he heard through the wall were those of strangers.

He had tried to get another job, a better job, one that would let him answer phones or make copies. He had gone so far as to go into a placement office and ask for an application. He had filled out his name and address, wrote down his work experience in the restaurant. When he got to the personal section, it had asked him to write

three adjectives about himself. He had written "helpful." Then stared at it. Then he took the application, folded it into quarters, and stuffed it into his back pocket. He hustled out of the waiting room, trying to avoid the receptionist's stare.

***

Carl Carl listen, OK? I love you. There, I said it. I love you! No one here wants me to say that. No one here lets me say that. No one here believes me when I say that. They say it does not help my condition. They say that writing you does not constitute recognizing a higher power. I say Ha! Because Carl. I do. I love you. You have to believe me you have to. I know if you do you can save me. I know nothing can stop you from breaking out of there, coming here, and breaking me out too. I'll change my name! I'll change it to Bonnie! So then we'd be Bonnie and Carl! Unless you wanted to change your name too and then we'd be just whatever. But you don't have to change your name! Just if you want to! OK? You don't have to! I like your name Carl! I love it Carl! Carl listen Carl, I get it, OK? It's kill or be killed. You chose to kill. I like that – I love it! But me. I tried to slit my wrists once and then took some pills too. Sometimes it's just like that, OK? It just makes you want to I don't know. But you are stronger than me. You are not jealous. You are not discourteous. You are not selfish. You are not irritable. You cover all things. You are long suffering. You won't let me be a be-killed. I know it! I love you! And you can love me! You do love me! I know it! Carl, listen let's love. OK?

***

Her oldest son had broken his arm, his sister said, and the youngest was mad that they wouldn't go to the pool anymore. The oldest got a blue plaster cast – did Carl know that they can make casts blue or any color now? Not like when they were kids and had to have plain old

white?

His sister seemed to be talking to him from far away. The table had the flat, stretched look the ocean had in photographs, as though it went in too many directions at once. She kept looking up at him and looking away and fiddling with her hands.

Alright, she said.

I should go, she said.

They both waited.

Is there anything you want to tell me?

And there was. He felt tears leaking out the sides of his lids. He pulled his arms tightly across his chest, trying to form the words, but he couldn't think of any. There was something in him, a vacuum, sucking him into its wordless screams.

His mother had brought someone home. Carl had waited until they were quiet to go into the kitchen. He thought he would be alone, but there was a man standing against the counter. The man had a very red nose and a cap pulled low over his stringy, straw-colored hair. He looked at Carl in a way that had made it seem as though Carl's guts were full of something sharp, something shredding. Very carefully, the man unzipped the fly of his pants, drew himself out, made himself hard. Carl tried not to look. He tried to count the tiles on the wall in front of him, to organize and pattern them into squares, then bigger squares, then squares within squares. The man moaned, and it felt as though it came out of Carl.

Then Carl's mother was in the doorway. She started screaming and ran at the man. She struck any part of the man she could find, still screaming, chasing him out the back door. Even after the man had disappeared, his mother kept screaming. She turned her screams toward Carl, her magenta nails raking the side of his face. She screamed names at him, names worse than sissy and weakling, and he had felt the something inside him cutting bigger and deeper holes, the something stretching

wider and wider until it was its own wound. The louder and longer she screamed, the wider the wound gaped, the more he hated her. He couldn't help it, he had hated her hated her hated her.

Carl? His sister reached across the long, flat table. He could tell she wanted to take his hand but the guards were watching.

Carl? Is there something you want to say?

Yes! Carl thought. Yes! He thought of all the words in all his letters. He thought if he could just cut them all up and rearrange them then maybe, maybe the Church of Carl could explain it for him. Maybe these women with their repentance and forgiveness, their faith in him, could tell the story the right way so that his sister would know who he really was, know him as he was meant to be.

Carl? Carl, what is it?

The Church swelled before him like a storm cloud. It rumbled with words long since written and waiting to be said. All the words in all the letters came to him at once in a spasm of blurred light, an eruption of understanding.

Yes! He knew, he understood, he could say, finally: I am love!

Darren W. Brown

Call Me When You Get There

Soon Wiley

The heat was oppressive inside the bus. Frank's hands moved over the worn edges of his black briefcase as he looked out at the river. Tugboats pushed barges stacked high with rainbow colored garbage against the current, parting the Hudson into swaths of liquid hills, rolling away in either direction. The bus hummed down the West Side Highway, gaining speed, as if pulled by the glass and steel magnets of the city skyline.

Three black teenagers got on at Chelsea Piers. Frank could hear the music in their headphones as they shuffled past, their shorts rubbing against the shoulder pads of his heavy suit jacket. Then they were moving again. A woman in a nightgown was running beside the bus as they pulled away from the curb, pounding her fists against the door. Frank watched the woman give up running and stand on the corner, waving her hands in the air, her nightgown billowing around her bare ankles to the gusts of traffic-buffeted wind.

Frank got off at the Port Authority. It was still early but the sun was beginning to bake the city sidewalks. The smell of urine mixed with cool subway air, pushing its way up through steel gratings underneath Frank's feet. Traffic languished at intersections, shedding waves of heat and exhaust. Jaywalking to the next block, Frank hopped over a manhole cover for fear of electrocution. Three people had already died that summer due to faulty conductors. Holding a hand to the glare, Frank weaved his way through the pulsating mass of business casual.

By the time Frank got to the office he was drenched. Slipping into the bathroom, he took a clean

shirt from his briefcase and changed. He was already five minutes late when the elevator announced his arrival with a ding, and Frank's boss called him into his office and told him to have a seat.

Abe resembled a massive barrel covered with thick gorilla hair. Not one of those small barrels, but the kind people would cram themselves into when going over Niagara Falls. His skin shone like polished bronze and oozed the smell of success. His shirts, always purchased a size too small for maximum arm bulging, were consistently unbuttoned at the neck to expose a healthy view of his black Brillo pad of chest hair

"Frank, baby, I've been pulling your numbers," Abe said, flipping through a pile of manila folders on his desk. "You've been doing some pretty good work for us."

Frank attributed Abe's constant use of the term "baby" for both sexes to his Greek upbringing and subsequent failure to fully grasp the more subtle aspects of the English language. Abe pulled a knee closer to his formidable stomach: "Didn't you work for Empire Health Care before this?"

"Almost fifteen years," Frank said.

Abe nodded, looking at what Frank could only assume was his resume. Then again, the temp agency might have sent his entire file. Grazing on his lower lip, Abe lowered his massive head towards the folder and moved it back and forth as he read. Frank's entire employment history was there, right in front of Abe; he was sure of it. There were probably detailed lists of his accomplishments, his fuck-ups, maybe even a note about how he was a terrible team player who drank too much at holiday parties.

A formidable hand landed on Frank's shoulder sending seismic shudders down his arm, as he found himself standing up and holding Abe's hand. "Just keep those numbers up baby, just keep those numbers up," Frank heard Abe say, as he pushed the frosted glass door of the

office open and walked down rows of gray cubicles, half-conversations and clattering keyboards melding together into a symphony, parading him down the aisle towards his desk.

No one said good morning.

There was a peculiar bliss to being a temp. No one knew who he was. No one wanted to know who he was. He would be gone in a few months and the next batch would be shuttled in for slaughter. The only people Frank talked to in the office were the other temps, one of whom was his cubicle mate. From what he had gathered in their first week of work together she wasn't married, her favorite nail polish color was black, and she absolutely loathed being a temp. Her name was Ryoko.

It was 8:30 when Frank started with the "priority" folder which remained full no matter how productive he was. That was the maddening part about working for a health insurance company. There was never a time when something couldn't be done. There were always more claims to adjust, more points of service to alter, more pre-existing conditions to excavate. Frank's first project that morning was a man who had just been diagnosed with colon cancer. He'd been a low-risk patient his entire time with the company, but this new finding would change things. Frank placed him in the high-risk category, made a note on his pad of paper and continued. Next was a woman with high blood pressure named Irene. She hadn't had a heart attack yet, but her medical history seemed to be trending towards that outcome. Frank moved her to high-risk.

This was how most mornings went for Frank. He was tasked with finding any information that would allow the insurance company to move a patient from low to high-risk, and subsequently drop them from the company's plan. Frank was very good at his job. History of depression, past drug, alcohol or tobacco addictions, asthma, sports injuries – Frank found it all.

At 12:30 Frank unpacked his homemade sandwich and ate. Ryoko had soup every day for lunch and today was no different. It seemed unfathomable to Frank that anyone could have soup during the summer. He wanted to make a joke about the coinciding temperature of the weather and her meal. He wanted to hear her laugh and see her smile, but nothing came to mind. As he took another bite of his sandwich someone appeared above the walls of his cubicle.

"Did you really work for Empire?" It was a guy from a few rows down.

Taking a few moments to chew, Frank nodded, "Yeah."

"Why'd you quit?" the man asked, looking back over his shoulder, as if to gain reassurance from a party invisible to Frank.

The office was suddenly very quiet and Frank was waiting to hear the steady slurp of Ryoko eating, but it never came. "Just got tired of it," he said.

"I heard you got fired for stalking some chick," the man said, his voice rising into a half-laugh. There was a chorus of chatter from another section of the office: "I heard you're some kind of pervert."

There was another round of laughs and Frank could feel his ears turning colors. Before he could say anything Abe's voice was booming out of his office. "Stop bothering the temps, Jason." There was the lumbering of footsteps and Jason scurried back to wherever he'd come from. Frank took another bite of his sandwich and chewed. Abe came into his cubicle and blew stale tobacco into his ear: "Don't you let these little pricks intimidate you, Frank. You just keep those numbers up."

Frank finished his sandwich. His mouth was dry and it hurt to swallow but he forced it down, rubbing his chest where something felt lodged. A few minutes passed and the room fell back into the dull roar of productivity.

"I'm gonna get something to drink. Do you want

anything?" It was Ryoko.

Frank turned around slowly, making sure to rub the crumbs from his mouth. "Uh yeah, some water would be great. Here I have money," he said.

"It's on me."

Frank had composed himself when Ryoko came back with two bottles of water. She cleared her straight black bangs out of her eyes and pulled her pencil-skirt down an inch or two and flipped one leg over the other.

"So are you gonna tell me or what?"

"About Empire?"

She rolled her eyes and turned back to her soup.

"I wasn't stalking her."

Ryoko spun back around, unable to hide her giddiness. "Details," she said, slapping Frank's bony knee. He wasn't sure where to start the story – so he started from the beginning.

He told Ryoko about how after five years at Empire he was considered one of the best insurance adjusters in the business. It was estimated he'd saved the company over a million dollars in just four quarters by filing uninsurable claims. He was a shark. Any amount of evidence that could cast a client's medical history into doubt, he found. But he didn't just find it. He painted it, decorated it – made it so unavoidably obvious that even the clients agreed they were a liability. Soon he was promoted. He got a bigger office with windows. It wasn't a corner office, but that would come later. He went to important meetings with important people and talked about future purchase options and medical loss ratios. He switched to Egyptian cotton sheets and only wore Italian shoes. Management began to take notice, and there was talk of him being groomed for corporate.

But then something happened. Frank got bored. So when his boss wasn't around, which was often because he was having an affair with the secretary from Human Resources on the second floor, Frank would grab a handful

of folders from the high-risk cabinet and read them while he ate lunch. But he didn't read about their medical histories. He knew all that already. Instead, he read about their lives: where they lived, how much money they made, whether they had boys or girls – or both – or none. He started looking at what kinds of cars they drove, where they vacationed, whether they were in debt, or financially stable.

He started bringing the folders to the bathroom. Sometimes he brought them home to read on the train. Sick days became a necessity just to keep up on the new clients. Whole work days were consumed with looking at who owned indoor pools, who sent their kids to private college, who had been divorced, who had remarried.

When Frank's boss caught him reading a personal history file at the urinal one day, he was promptly fired.

"So that's why you're here?" Ryoko said.

"The only reason Abe hired me is because he's desperate. He knows I'm good at finding things."

"I've always wanted to look at those files," Ryoko said.

That night, after everyone had left for the day, Frank led Ryoko downstairs to the fifth floor. They started alphabetically, taking each folder out and reading the contents to one another. Frank watched as Ryoko lay on her belly, chin in her palms, stockinged legs bent upwards in some yoga pose, reading the black and white photocopies like a kid in a library. Frank got them some coffee and snacks from the vending machines down the hall and they sat under the bright florescent lights and read.

They quickly developed a routine in order to leave themselves an hour after each workday to look at the folders. Skipping lunch became a necessary sacrifice, so as to provide Abe with evidence of their productivity. Once the vending machine offerings grew unappealing, Frank and Ryoko ordered takeout from Chinese or Thai restaurants in the neighborhood. They took files up to the

conference rooms and sat in big leather chairs that rolled silently across carpeted floors. After eating, they balled up napkins and tried to toss them into empty to-go containers lined with grease or coconut milk. Sometimes Ryoko would cry over a particular person whose wife had died in childbirth, other times she stamped her high-heeled boots with laughter over how many houses someone owned. "Who needs all those houses," she would say, her hair swinging in front of her shining black eyes. And after Frank had taken the bus across the George Washington Bridge to his apartment in Hoboken, he would think about Ryoko's eyes and the way she craned her neck upwards when she laughed.

It was late September and Frank's three month contract was almost up. Abe had complimented him on the work he'd done, but Frank knew there was little hope for an offer. He was sitting at his desk listening to Ryoko slurp her way through another bowl of ramen.

"Frank," she said, turning around in chair, "let's read some files at my apartment tonight. I'll cook dinner."

"They might offer you a position here."

"I hate this place. Besides, we won't get caught."

Ryoko's apartment was in Astoria. Frank hadn't taken the subway outside of Manhattan in almost twenty years. Young people jockeyed for position while Frank stood with his back to the doors and held his briefcase, checking the subway map at every stop to make sure he hadn't gone too far. A man dressed in a white leotard and angel wings walked between the cars, asking for money in exchange for eternal salvation. Ditmars Blvd was next and Frank disembarked to the smell of fall air.

Making out Ryoko's name on the apartment nameplate, Frank pushed the buzzer and waited. A moving truck beeped with a fading urgency, double parking itself in the street. Men in blue jumpsuits hopped out of the cab and dropped the tailgate. Thinking he heard the

buzzer, Frank pushed the door, only to find it still locked. He looked down at the next apartment building to check the numbers when he heard someone coming down the stairs. Frank let the man pass and slipped behind the closing door.

There was music playing and he had to bang on the apartment door more than once before he heard locks and chains moving. Ryoko stood in the soft light of her doorway dressed in black leggings and an oversized gray shirt. She kissed Frank on the cheek and beckoned him forward with a large wooden spoon. She said dinner was almost ready and poured him a glass of wine and commanded him to sit and relax. The apartment was dark and cozy. Long silk drapes hung from the ceiling, covering lampshades and bathing the room in quiet yellow light. Ryoko explained from the kitchen that her Moroccan roommate had decorated the place. Frank watched her make trips from the cutting board to the wok, where she dumped handfuls of vegetables into the gurgling oil. She turned up the flame and flipped the contents with her spoon, smiling down into rising steam. Frank tried to get comfortable on the couch but found himself only sinking further into the shapeless pillows. There was incense burning somewhere and he suppressed a sneeze.

After dinner, Ryoko brought out the folders she had taken from work and set them on the coffee table. She opened another bottle of wine and sat down in what looked to Frank like a giant beanbag. Even in the dimness of the apartment Frank could see the rosiness of her cheeks. She giggled and showed Frank the people she thought were the most interesting. He joined her on the floor and sat cross-legged, his feet pressing into the hardwood floor through his thin cotton business socks. They talked about the names in the folders and the lives they lived. Frank could hear the neighbors arguing next door and somewhere in the building the music started up again, filtering down through the floorboards and lead

paint-cracked walls.

Ryoko almost knocked over the bottle of wine when she jumped to her feet, shaking a client's information page in Frank's face.

"We have to go see this man," she said.

"What man?"

"Frank, we have to go see this man," she was saying, pulling him up by the armpits. "He lives in Westchester. Oh Frank he's the saddest file I've ever read. We have to go see him."

"Tonight?"

"Tomorrow. We'll rent a car and drive up. Frank you can't say no."

"Okay, okay. We can go," Frank said.

Ryoko showed him the file and they fell backwards and held their stomachs, laughing at the idea of going to see a ninety-year-old stranger dying of cancer with no surviving relatives. It was pure insanity and would most certainly get both of them fired. The mascara rolled down Ryoko's cheeks as she held her sides. Frank lay on his back and looked up at the red and yellow silks hanging from the ceiling, his chest heaving with every new fit of laughter.

Ryoko could barely contain herself on the drive up. She tapped a black boot against the floor mat and chewed her gum loudly. It was early Friday morning and the roads were empty. Frank marveled at the infinite procession of cars going in the opposite direction on the parkway. Out of the city the air was clean, and the trees swayed with the wind that blew uninhibited by metal skyscrapers and endless grids of streets. Frank put the windows down and breathed in the scent of freshly cut grass and cold cucumbers. The car engine hummed and a perfect silence stretched out ahead of them, filling the expanse of clear blue sky.

They turned off in Mamaroneck and rolled down quiet streets with fenced yards. Big trees hung their limbs

over shaded streets as they idled along in awe. Ryoko counted off the house numbers that gleamed in gold lettering from mailboxes. They stopped outside a large property surrounded by ivy-covered brick walls.

Frank stopped the car: "This can't be it."

"It is," Ryoko said, checking the address on the folder she had brought. "This is his house."

"It's huge."

"Let's see if he's here." And before Frank could stop her, Ryoko was out of the car and ringing the bell and waving into the two surveillance cameras rotating back and forth. Frank turned the car off and waited. Ryoko rang again and motioned for Frank to join her. "Maybe he's not home," he said.

Ryoko pressed her face against the bars of the metal gate. "He hasn't got anywhere else to go," she said, pushing the bell again. Frank got out of the car and joined her by the gate. A gravel road stretched to the end of the property where Frank could see a white mansion in a clearing surrounded by fountains. Ryoko put her hands up to the gate, rattling it back and forth. She jumped backward when the gate began to swing open with a mechanical whine. They went to the car and drove up the path lined with tall immaculate pines. A maid was waiting for them on the steps.

"Who should I tell Mr. Harrison is here to see him?" she said.

"We're from his insurance company," Ryoko said.

"Very good," the maid said, going back into the house and shutting the door.

"Oh isn't this exciting, Frank," Ryoko said, taking his arm.

They were led through a foyer and down a red carpeted hallway lined with black and white photos. Frank had never seen so many chandeliers. A row of French doors stood open to the crisp breeze, their white curtains billowing inward. Mr. Harrison was sunbathing in a

chaise longue. He wore white swimming trunks and dark sunglasses. His silver hair was slicked back on his skull. Frank and Ryoko stood on the back steps of the mansion, staring out across the Olympic sized swimming pool and lush green grass that seemed to go on forever.

Ryoko was still holding Frank's hand, but she let go now, walking towards the pool, as if mesmerized by the clear blue water that shimmered and sloshed in its marble basin. She stood at the edge, staring down into the deep end.

"Bathing suits are in the house. Why don't you kids get changed," Mr. Harrison said, motioning towards the house with a hand.

"Can we Frank?" Ryoko asked, stepping back from the pool. "Wouldn't it be nice to go for a swim?"

"You go ahead," Frank heard himself say.

Ryoko went back into the house, shedding clothing as she went. The maid followed her, picking up a pair of mismatching socks, a blouse – her black boots. Frank approached Mr. Harrison and sat down in the chair next to him.

"Drink?" Mr. Harrison said, producing a cocktail from his side table.

"Sure," Frank said, letting the old man put something cold and wet in his hand as he looked out from his seat.

He took a sip. It tasted good. It tasted like bitter limes with ice cubes made from a mountain stream he'd never see. The liquid slid down his throat, and the cool sensation spread to his stomach and into his hips. The heat was dissipating and he swore a cloud must have covered the sun for those brief moments.

"Sorry to barge in like this Mr. Harrison," he said.

"Oh it's quite alright," the old man said, "it's always nice to have visitors this time of year."

Frank took another drink and nodded, shading his eyes against the iridescent glare of the pool. The old man

turned on his side and looked at Frank. His skin was tight and dotted from years spent in the sun. He wore a gold watch that seemed even more golden against the white hairs of his thin forearm. Ryoko appeared in the doorway, dressed in a 1920's white and navy blue polka-dotted bathing suit. She was beautiful – with her slender body, toned legs and coal black hair, falling straight down to her pale shoulders. She pranced nimbly up to the diving board, took a running start and propelled herself high into air, her body's shadow silently breaking the surface of the water.

"Beautiful, isn't it," the old man said, rolling onto his back and putting his face to the sun.

Frank finished his drink and unbuttoned his shirt. He lay back down on the chaise lounge and closed his eyes. He listened to Ryoko doing laps in the pool – the slow slap of her arms against the water – the methodical breathing of her breast-stroke. The sun pushed in through his eyelids and there was no darkness. The old man offered him another drink, and Frank accepted. He drank it with a bent straw and felt the refreshing taste cleanse his body once again.

"Nice isn't it."

"Marvelous," Frank said, "absolutely marvelous."

Girl Watching

D. Brian Anderson

I'm not paying attention when the girl falls.

Gloria says I never pay attention, but that's not true. It's just that I pay attention to the wrong things sometimes, like when she's talking and I'm watching the vein in her neck pulsating to the sound of her voice.

Right now I'm looking on as she has her face sketched by a sidewalk artist. It seems like a touristy thing to do, but it's impossible not to feel like a tourist in Waikiki, a glass terrarium set down between the crooked streets of Honolulu and the azure carpet of the Pacific. The millions of glass windows that crowd the towering high-rise hotels project shimmering reflections of sky and concrete, trapping the human tourist in a sphere of light, glimmer, and carefully positioned palm trees.

I'm relaxed for the first time in three days, smoking a cigarette and letting the setting sun and thick, warm air wash over my face. Just two hours before, I'd been sweating in a hotel conference room, sneaking gulps of ice water to stave off the dry-mouth as I gave a presentation on the similarities of the "girl-watching" motif found in the works of Henry James and Homer Winslow. The presentation had gone well, although only six people showed up to hear it, and two of those were the other presenters on the panel.

"It's an academic conference," my friend Walter had shrugged afterward. "Nobody comes to listen to papers. That's why the conference is in Hawai'i. Do yourself a favor and go to the beach."

Instead of heading to the beach, though, we ended up on Kalakaua Avenue, so Gloria could window-shop at Cartier and I could look for a good sushi bar. But then she

spotted the artist perched on the sidewalk just outside the banyan-tree marketplace.

I was surprised she wanted to sit for a sketch, since she doesn't even like it when I photograph her. But I didn't argue, because she's been annoyed with me since that morning, when we toured the grounds of the royal palace and I said the bronze statue of Queen Liliuokalani reminded me of her.

"She's kind of big, don't you think?" Gloria had said, holding up her hands as if to stop me from saying anything else.

"That's not what I mean," I responded, reaching out to touch the fresh lei draped on the Queen's forever-still fingers. "She's regal. Powerful."

At this, Gloria had rolled her eyes, or at least I imagined she had rolled her eyes behind those squarish, dark sunglasses of hers.

Now her sunglasses are perched atop her head to push the hair out of her eyes, which for some reason I've always found alluring. If I were poet, I would say I like the way the sunglasses open up her face like a full moon rising. But actually I think it reminds me of the lifeguard girlfriend I had in 11th grade, all tan skin and summer smiles.

"How's it look so far?" she asks without turning her head, as if moving would cause the artist to blur the image.

The truth is the artist, a shaggy, older man who looks like a Japanese Neil Diamond, doesn't seem to even need the model. He glances Gloria's way every couple of minutes, but it seems to be more of a professional courtesy, so she feels like she's participating in the fun. He's memorized her face and focuses on the sketch, his lean hand gripping the graphite pencil like a paintbrush, pinched between forefinger and thumb, and fluttering across the easel like the hand of a student writing a timed essay.

Her face emerges effortlessly from the white space underneath the artist's hand, the liquid Pacific air blending with the pencil to reveal the portrait hidden beneath. It's supposed to be Gloria, of course, but her eyes are unnaturally circular, her face bizarrely symmetrical, and the clean white skin makes her look ageless, a paper doll with dark eyelids and pursed lips.

"It's looking good," I say.

Just over the easel, maybe 20 feet down the sidewalk, a "living statue" is setting up for his evening shift. He unfolds an aluminum pedestal and opens a suitcase. His body and clothes are painted a thick, messy gold, and from the suitcase he pulls a golden lariat and holster with a gold pistol. A red bandana tied around his neck provides the only splash of color. It's weird to watch a statue get ready for work, sort of like hearing a mime talk to his mother on the telephone.

I put out my cigarette and swing my camera up to get a few shots of the cowboy, figuring I'll drop him a couple of bucks when the sketch is done. He's assumed a fighting position on the podium, his gun drawn and pointed into the air and his back hand bent dramatically behind him as if holding on to a horse.

In the viewfinder the cowboy looks like a cheap bauble against the backdrop of high-end shopping boutiques and rented Mercedes buzzing down Kalakaua. I snap a shot anyway, and the flash goes off, which I'm sure will ruin the final image.

I lower the camera when two girls, maybe 18 or 19, approach the cowboy and drop some money in his can. One of the girls, a dark-haired beauty wearing a long white t-shirt that just covers her shorts, aims a digital camera at the cowboy and he quickly changes poses, bringing his legs together and moving his pistol down to his hip, a silent-movie ham. The girl laughs in mock-uncontrollable fashion and takes a moment to reposition the camera. She brushes her hair out of her face and

snaps the photo, and the girls start to walk off.

The cowboy breaks his pose to trot after the girls and pulls the dark-haired girl back toward the pedestal. The second girl, who wears a brown "Community Chest" t-shirt, emblazoned with a picture of a Monopoly board, takes the camera from her friend and nods wildly in encouragement.

The cowboy urges the dark-haired girl to take the pedestal, sweeping his arm dramatically to usher her onto this sidewalk stage. The girl demurs, a modest Hollywood actress who cannot believe she has won this unbelievable honor. She laughs, steps back, and pats her chest in disbelief.

The girl finally climbs on to the pedestal and the cowboy hands her the gun. She looks at it, grimaces and breaks into another helpless laugh. Then she strikes a pose, kicking up one bare leg backward and sweeping her long hair around her head. I look down at Gloria's portrait and see he's put down the pencil and is smudging a few spots with his thumb, to achieve a natural look on the cheeks, I think. Gloria's paper-doll eyes stare back at me with the same blankness from the portrait, but the slight twitching smile seems to have flattened.

I look back toward the pedestal and the girl is laughing again, unable to decide on another pose even as the statue and her friend urge her on.

Then something goes wrong. The cowboy grabs the girl's arm as if to brace her or protect her from falling off the pedestal. The girl's hand covers her mouth and she looks to her friend for some kind of assurance. She takes her hand down and I can see her mouth the words, "What was that?"

Then I realize the artist has stopped sketching and Gloria has turned around to grab my leg in a tight grip. The shoppers and pedestrians, too, have slowed, their voices broken into strange whispers and gasps. Many of them have turned their heads and raised their hands

to shade their eyes, looking for something in the hotel balconies that fill the westward view of the sky.

"Did you see that girl?" Gloria asks breathlessly.

"Girl?"

"Oh my god. You didn't see it," Gloria says, gripping her chest. "A girl, a woman just fell from somewhere. One of the hotel rooms, I think."

"What?"

"I don't think she had any clothes on," the artist says in an even tone, tapping his brush on the easel and rubbing the back of his neck.

"She was naked?" I ask.

Gloria doesn't answer this. The artist offers to finish the sketch for free, but Gloria just wants to leave, so he gives us what he's done, rolling the sketch up in a cardboard tube. He won't accept any money.

"Just tip the cowboy," he says to me, not winking or smiling.

We can hear the sirens moving in a few blocks away, and Gloria decides we should go for a drink in downtown Honolulu, somewhere dark and smoky where they won't push the mai-tais. I drop a $20 bill in the statue's can, and he nods a thank you without looking at me. He's standing on the pedestal now, no longer in cowboy character, trying to get a view of the commotion down the street.

The dark-haired girl is gone. I don't know why, but I look down the avenue both ways to see if I can see them walking away, but they're nowhere in sight. People are still looking skyward, questioning each other in hopes of finding out the real story.

The real story, as we found out later, is this: a drunk college girl fell from a 10 story balcony of the Waikiki Marriott, and nobody is quite sure why she was naked. They tried pinning it on the older guy whose room she fell from, but there just wasn't enough evidence of foul play. The hotel management issued a statement to

the press saying that while the accident was regrettable, they wanted to reassure the public that the hotel balconies were secure and the railings of appropriate height to prevent falling.

The travel guide books always say to get your film developed on the islands, because the processing guys are more familiar with Hawaii's colors and will take care to get the best possible images. So on the day before we leave Honolulu, I take the film to the World Wide Camera place on Kalakaua, and the clerk, a grim overweight man, tells me it will be ready in two hours.

I pick up the fat envelope of prints while Gloria is getting a massage. I buy a cup of coffee and sit on a bench near a banyan tree to look at the photos. In the single image of the statue, the gold cowboy shines in the light of the electronic flash, a golden space alien divorced from scene and context, floating in the darkness of space as he points his pistol into the sky. The girls on the sidewalk are invisible, lost in the blackness created by the perimeters of the flash.

That night I dream of the girl falling from the hotel balcony, her naked body arched backward and letting go of thin air, her fingers grasping at nothingness. I dream of other women falling, girls falling from ladders and stages, from moving cars, from cartoon airplanes and sketchy cumulus clouds. A Victorian girl, her white fingers clutching a parasol and gripping the folds of her dress, falls forward from the perch of a cliff into a rocky ocean, not leaping but falling without hesitation and without flailing or shaking, closing her eyes and falling forward with a full trust in God's providence. I dream of Alice falling down the rabbit hole, spinning into an imaginary dreamland of where clocks move forward and backward, and I dream of Gloria slipping off a steep gabled roof. She's staring at me with pleading, fearful eyes but there's nothing I can do.

The Swan

J.T. Ledbetter

Pisaller Moult prodded his bear claw with a thick finger. "This here's yesterday's bear claw." A cat stared at him through the window. "Rosacia did you hear what I said? This here bear claw is yesterday's bear claw. What do you think of that?"

"That's interesting, Pisaller." He tilted his head to read the back of the magazine she was reading. "What's ezombia zones, anyway?"

"That's *erogenous* zones, Pisaller. But never mind that. You haven't managed to find any of them in years."

"I'm thinking of enlarging my business enterprises," he said to the cat. "I'm going to have business cards printed up that say:

Pisaller Moult
Venture Capital
On a truly International Scale

"What do you think?" He looked at the cat curled up on the hood of his car. "Rosacia, are you listening? I just told you about my new business cards. I could say something about my drain-cleaning business on the back."

Rosacia Moult toyed with her BLT and watched the cat uncurl itself in one long languid and very fluid movement. "See that cat, Pisaller? That's the way I want to look when I move around. Do you think I look like that? Be honest now."

He looked across the table at her and tried to imagine

her getting out of bed in one long very fluid movement. It was hard to imagine. But then, he could not imagine cooking his own breakfast either, or washing his own underwear. "The way you look when you climb out of that bed of a morning would put any cat to shame." He hoped that would serve. He waited, not looking so much at her as through her, lest his eyes reveal his soul, as someone suggested they probably did.

Marriage, he opined, was not what it was cracked up to be. He rolled that unspoken sentence around in his mouth with a bit of stale bear claw. Rosacia had been ready for a man who stretched like a cat and made love like Bolt Upright or somebody. He had failed in both categories, not from a lack of interest, but from a short stubby body used to bucking bales of hay in Southern Illinois.

Rosacia put down her *What's Happening Now* magazine and studied his face. It's a quick study, her mother said as she ironed her nightgown before her father drove her to the wedding in his pickup with a Redbone hound in the back. Try to show some interest in what he's going to want tonight, her mother said, and if he's wearing an asaphydia bag, ask him sweetly to remove it before surrendering yourself.

Rosacia thought about the sweet surrender she had read about in the movie magazines. But after Pisaller had milked four cows on their wedding night and cleaned out the silo before he came to bed, she was half asleep and dreaming about a muscled man ripping her bodice off, his castle rising out of the sea behind him. But it was only Pisaller pawing at her nightgown. It was not a night made in heaven.

Their life on the farm was a life on a farm, she wrote her mother. And when they celebrated their 50th, she made

him turnip pie and put on the red nightgown she ordered from St. Louis, hoping he would forget the silo and conquer her just one more time. She knew she had lost her youthful looks and that she was not the dying swan they saw on TV that night. But she could not flap her hands up and down like that, what with the arthritis in her wrists. And Pisaller would not fit into those tights, and would wonder what the little bulging cup was for. Marriage is what it is, her father said about everything from a calf still-born to his W.W. II memories in the prison camp. The farm was not a place to exclaim.

Pisaller Moult watched the cat rise up, hinder end first, then stretch and curl itself down again. Time was he could just about tie his shoes without passing gas, remembering their wedding night in the Brite Spot Motel in Elsah, where tankers sounded fart-like noises far out in the channel when the fog covered the Mississippi from St. Louis to Cairo. It was a time of inching their way together, he remembered, each move memorized from the pamphlet Rev. Nobs of The Rose of Sharon Baptist Church gave him as a wedding present. In it were hints on how to inspire the loved one to action (Hezikiah 3:12), and what to do immediately following. Prayer was urged.

Pisaller Moult regretted saying I'm no Barys Kov, and you're no dyin swan that night. He had drunk too much, and she had danced with the Havilke boy just back from Iraq and had fallen, throwing up her skirts, allowing all and sundry a long look at her new step-ins. He regretted it mightily, and glad they turned from the fallen swan to a TV therapy program where couples threw chairs at each other.

Still, they were a couple, he thought. There was much to be said for that. Now with #55 coming up, he thought he might join the gym and tighten up what had slipped and

fallen. Maybe a husband and wife discount. She could join the ladies in the shallows he had encountered in his one and only trip to the pool. It was like swimming through dancing hippos, he told his wife. She looked away from him and into the mirror, then walked upstairs and brought down her new bathing suit and threw it into the trash. Pisaller was chagrined (a word he had come across in a magazine featuring Prince Charles) and ashamed. He would make it up on their 55th. He would buy one of those new Speedos. Maybe fashion that little cup out of some leather harness.

That night she waited in bed for his coming, and when she heard the creak of stairs, she slipped the new nightie down and kicked it across the room. Pisaller wore a red thing that looked like a girl's bandana. The abnormal bulge could be some rare kind of hernia, she thought. Their toes touched beneath the covers as friendly night covered them. "You are my swan," he said, very softly. "And you are my Barrys Kov," she cooed. Then they laughed and rolled against each other. He hoped the roast pork would not cause gas, but it did. When he woke in the night, he turned over, feeling his toenails tearing the sheet, then he sat up and stared at the window where his wife stood naked, etched against the moon, flapping her arms. He wanted to tell her to come back to bed, but he could not stop watching her shoulders, arms, hands and fingers moving up and down, up and down as if she were swimming into the moon, slowly, easily, until there was just one bright shimmering swan swimming into the center of the moon. He couldn't stop watching. He just couldn't stop watching.

Recursive

Lisa Batya Feld

In the beginning, it wasn't about picking locks.
It was about me, at thirteen, picking you,
trying to find somewhere private in the sharp
July heat where two teenagers could leave
good sense at the door and fall in love
or whatever you call that first rush of hormones and
hands

in places no one has touched you before. I had to hand
it to you; the neighbor's root cellar down the block
was the perfect retreat. Awkward, endearing, even lovely,
necking on the cool cement steps with you:
the crackle of my hair tangling with dead leaves
your braces tangled in my mouth and cut my lip, sharp

pain, but good, real. Too soon, my mother's sharp
voice would call me home, where I'd dream about your
hands,
and wonder at the monsters you'd doodled in the leaves
of my notebooks. Then the neighbors locked
the cellar, my family moved away, and you
became a phantom of my first love.

At twenty-six, different choreography to love,
more traditional, more respectable, the sharp
bite of wasabi at an upscale sushi restaurant where you
ask about my job (can't stop watching your hands)
and I confess that after I moved, I learned to pick locks
in hopes of going back to the root cellar. You laugh, we
leave,

and talk endlessly by the subway steps. I don't want you

to leave.
I've been alone too long. I've been afraid of love.
I could never be afraid of you. On impulse, I take you
home, three blocks
from the subway, quick stop at the pharmacy, the wild,
sharp
joy that this is really happening, flurry of clothes, kisses,
hands,
a moment of trepidation, but the way that you

look at me leaves no doubt in my mind. You
smile at me like you can't believe your luck, leave
your glasses on my bookshelf, cradle my hips in your
hands
and spend the night reminding me that love
shouldn't mean pain or indifference, it is sweet, sharp,
warm, safe. In the morning, I yawn, smile. Our eyes lock.

I shouldn't hint it's time for you to leave. I'm not ready
for how lovely it feels, watching you stretch and smile on
my bed. I don't know
where to put my hands when you kiss me. Soft goodbye.
Fingers pause on the lock.

Almost

a mini pecha kucha

Connie Pan

for Terrance and Martina

[Faking it]
On Plainfield Avenue, the first night you came over to Kate and I's for drinks after closing Friday's, Kate and John left us for her bedroom. We left blue post-its all over the apartment and jumped on my bed, hands over our mouths, to make them think we were having sex. The Johnnie Walker Red wore off. We turned the radio on.

[Thrills elsewhere]
In Maui, we stepped over the rope barricade, careful not to trip, all drowsy legs, with our cups of coffee—black. It was early and, still, I took you there. At the edge, we stuck our feet over the cliff to kick, drink and look. Where did that silence go, packed on the backs of birds?

[Silence]
In the two-roomed tent, we had noiseless sex on a cot with my grandma asleep on the other side of the canvas, thick like construction paper. I felt a drop on my chest, thought it was sweat. You were crying. I was amazed two drops so different could both be salty.

[Blanket night]
On New Year's Eve in Key West, we sat on the dark beach, drinking from a warm bottle of Vanilla Stoli. It smelled like perfume I wore in the sixth grade, Vanilla Mist. We could hardly make out the sea and the sky. There were no birds. You fell asleep before midnight.

[Desperate steps]
For my birthday, you paid for dancing lessons—Tango. I kept turning the wrong way. I kept leading. We got handfasted for a year and a day. You swore you'd take my name. When we jumped over the broom, I saw your weakness, how I could bend you any which way, thought one year and a day too long and asked to jump back.

[I don't think I've ever been in love]

You called to see how I'm doing. Remember, I spread as far as blue does. I'm insatiable. You think I live on the west side of Virginia. *What does it feel like?* Does it feel like someone sweeping up the loose strands of your ponytail? Like getting every drop of soup? Like listening to the ocean in shells? *No, I don't think that's right.*

Glade

Carly Gates

He asks me what I do
as he presses his gloved fingers
into my abdomen, into the flesh
where we learned to make
tiny triangles with our thumbs
and pointer fingers in grade school,
his other hand buried
in parts of me I'll never see.

When I say I'm a writer
he tells me I look like one,
like I belonged in Boston
with those smoldering women
smoking cigarettes and lamenting
life with the dry breath
of martinis. As he rolls
his chair closer to my openness,
he tells me he was the doctor
who pronounced Anne Sexton dead.

I want to tell him that I'm
not like them, that life
is an infant opening its eyes,
the circinate fronds of a fern unfolding,
but as I lie there on the table,
my feet hooked in stirrups,
listening to children scream
through the clinic walls
as paper thin as my gown,
watching this man peer into me
while a rigid nurse stares
over his shoulder, I admire

Anne's exit into open space
wearing nothing but a mink stole
and lipstick, a smear
of martini and carbon monoxide
on her lips, and wonder
if she looked on with smug
satisfaction as he touched the body
she could no longer feel.

Stories from Strange Lands

Susan Rich

I tell you my lovers never last –
I'm serious, but my sincerity

sparks laughs. You read me
over the telephone lines

reportage from tonight's bath:
If God = love (+ 1 yogic breath)

then it's best to locate our days
fucking in a feather bed.

This is an ecstatic theology
we heartily agree on,

a praxis that's not half bad.
But what I really want

to offer, my beloved,
is news from another land.

When a good man, a worker –
a trapeze artist or Cleveland dad

becomes injured – the French believe
it merely deepens his craft.

Artistry entering the body
with a dangerous leap or a fall.

The story makes of mistakes
something holy. My first near miss

of your kiss, your undisclosed desire
for talking trash. Our skill set working

as we continue our lives
over a landscape of scars and of mishaps.

Darling, This Relationship is Damned

Susan Rich

Dear Fire—

how you flirt and flicker,
you scat along

this Spanish seaside town;
hot lover, tango

dancer, who insists
on playing around.

Yes, I fear you— home
wrecker, double-crosser,

fickle fool made of gasses

and tongues.
Of course you persist

with your side of the
story: chemistry,

cigarettes, the late night
pleasure of coffee with whiskey.

Am I wrong to even write?

Wildfires hugging
the roundabouts, the hillsides—

Count them: eight hours
before the little trucks appear.

It's not my fault, you'd pout
and yes, you could be right.

Certain unforgivable elements conspire—
intense heat and dust and whim.

Natural for a flame to grab
what it wants, whether

sagebrush or school bus or skin.

Apogee
Brad Johnson

You said I was a genius who wrote beautiful poetry
but you were from Florida and never read Auden
or Stevens or Larkin. Then you said I was the best
you ever had but you only slept with two before me
and one was from Tallahassee and the other ended up
being gay. Before I had the chance to forget your face,
I met a woman who would talk over me; interrupt
my daydreaming with demands for money; refuse
to read anything I, or anyone else, wrote. She noticed
every wrinkle in my shirts and had me cleaning
her bathroom within a week. She was such a lazy,
inconsiderate lover. She looked at me with about the same
interest she read ingredients labels on pasta sauce jars
in the organic food aisle of the local supermarket.
We married in December, divorced in June.
If only I could recall which highway off ramp is yours,
I would empty the moon to deliver its contents to your
door.

When Homer Roams

Cynthia Atkins

It's pointless calling, my thin voice
caught like gossip gone missing
from the laundry-line of home.
I'm in no position
to give advice—You have all the knowing
ahead of me. Ears tipped into a tarot card
of portents—Oracle of scent and ethos—
drawn to the outskirts of puddle, leaf,
carcass, anything decayed, snowflake.
This is your work,
it's serious business! With every breath,
willing to face death. You hear the sounds,
the vibrations once removed from
where I am not—like just missing
the bus from the bus stop.
You'll wait for the kill,
steady, patient as a slow drip
in the well. That carefully made
lining and rill of your jowl flutters
with the nuance of butterfly wings.
The extra flap of skin always expecting
company—the way we keep
a roll-out sofa for guests. Excuse us our
patio furniture, safe anchors—the area rugs
where you've kept vigil, hold the habits
of our remorse. We know how to hold
a camera, we know how to visit
the sick with soup and gifts.
We're only human.
Dog of the hearth. Wolf of the wild.
That long yowl is an anthem
unto itself. Stretched out, a rambling train

after the rains. Short days to night.
My voice calling, beyond the doormat,
the smoke-plumed town, where the lights
are shutting down, and your prints
pander to us—We have no clue.
Phantom warrior showing us
how to bring the words
back to their bones.

deathday

Bryce Emley

every year
there's a certain grey
that resides here
plops itself down
and sleeps in the spaces
between branches

the tired red paint
on the tenant's pickup
has never looked
brighter as he rolls
through the maze
of paved paths

it's your deathday
again
the anniversary of your passing
your expiration date
your deathiversary
whatever

and again i'm squatting here
a month late
eye-to-eye with your granite
epitaph embossed with a tree
and for the fifth time
in as many years

i paint the portrait of your
'97 Chevy Lumina nestled
in a tree
tires slowing as your eyes swallow stars

and your chest ceases rising from a bed
of wet grass and glass dust

i display this great disasterpiece
in the cedar frame of imagination
i often confuse with memory
until i remember the burning in my bent knees
or the acupuncture of wind pricking through
the sweater i've worn too thin for November

Shell Game

Mark Smith

How provocative those petals
dropped from a white rose
he mistook, from where he stood
outside the bed, for three seashells
scattered on the soil. Sweet,
chalky soil, he reasoned, turning
to the smell of coffee—oho,
a waterside cafe. Or maybe
fossils the gardeners forked up
to the surface. By the time
he counted out his coins into
the waiter's saucer, he was
guessing they were what any
enterprising gardener living
by the sea might use to lime
a patch of soil too acid for
bringing out the best in roses.

Later, on a garden bench,
still fascinated by his shells,
he shaped them in molds
of metaphor, comparing them to:
three salt-encrusted coins, three
white saucers of bone china,
three foaming cups of cappucino'
three waiters in white aprons,
three naked Irish gardeners
until, in a fillip of lyrical
delight, he happened on three
fragrant petals loosed from
the heavy blossom of a rose
as white as any limestone.

After Watching a Nightmare at 20,000 Feet

Jonathan Barrett

Shadows swallow our bedroom wall
as our son grips his stuffed animal
tightly to his chest,
orbits our bed like a ghost.

He tells us he sees a gremlin
when he closes his eyes.

There's sleep, and then there's sleep—
we search for it under his bed,
in the laundry basket overflowing
with cartoon briefs and blue jeans,
on the desk next to the Ray Mysterio
figurine that winks and smiles at us
while flexing its muscles.

We search for the glowing
star-stained-ceiling-of-it,
the-unfinished-laundry-of-it,
the-fish-bowl's-fecal-film-of-it.

My wife tells him there's no such thing
as gremlins, to imagine the gremlin
baking wedding cake cookies:
apron tied around its waist,
fuzzy hair frilled with flour,
fur spattered by white frosting.

Our son smiles, squeezes
his stuffed sea otter,
climbs back into bed.

We go back to the lexicon of sound.
The digital hum of the alarm clock.
The whir and wheeze of the box fan.
The growl of the furnace.

We become tuft and tangled bed sheets again
translating mumbles—the muddled
metronome of *I love you*

I love you swinging back and forth.
We pay no attention to dust
falling from the ceiling fan.
The toilet gurgling. Water-drops

dribbling down into the sink:
the *bloop-bloop, tap-tap,*
bloop-bloop, tap-tap
like a gremlin tapping at our window.

Like a Nest

Jonathan Barrett

A suet cage hangs
from a dead tree—chunks
of missing bark pockmark
its trunk. Sparrows hop
on thin limbs,
their conical bills cocked, poking
through a cobweb of wire
and light. The shrill chirps.
The monotonous flight.

The birds speckle
the ground with suet and seed,
drink water from a mud hole
full of sump-pump water.

A small congregation waits in line
while a squirrel squirts
and squirms through grass
gobbling up seeds like a child
grabbing candy
from a split-open piñata.

My wife tells me there's a nest
in the gutter, that after church
the pastor's wife told our son
a homeless woman was living
in the shrubs and bushes
behind the church sign.

She pointed to piles
of belongings
on a pink camouflage blanket:

bra, boxer shorts, T-shirts,
a rolled-up sleeping bag,
a holy parka, a backpack
full of tampons, toilet paper,
deodorant, lip stick.

She told our son it was like a nest
and I imagined the homeless woman's
pink tongue in a gutter puddle,
tearing at a plastic wrapper,
pecking at suet and seed scattered
among milkweed and hyacinth,
flitting here-and-there
as if no one was watching.

Garbage Song

Peycho Kanev

The music lifted my sheet, and the fingertips
of the sun brought me scraps of the soul
of Sibelius. The next question is: *Why do you*
love your loneliness so much? I just grinned
to the body lost inside the notes next to me.
Saliva and staves are meant for each other.
And while the sounds choked, we sink back
into sleep. Outside the garbage truck hums.
Inside the room is empty.

The Whale

Peycho Kanev

I met you by the shore. Your enormous body
was left for the sharks and the Japanese tourists.
You were taking sun-baths with a book of poetry
in your hands. Rimbaud or was it Verlaine? No
words were spoken. No need to. The seagulls flew
above us as usual, captivating our thoughts. The
eternity crept up between us. I lit my cigarette,
broke off a piece of your beautiful fin and went
back to where I came from.

Fording Kidron

D.C. Lynn

Soul claps its
hands and
sing, and
louder sing
For every tatter in its
mortal dress…
William Butler Yeats

my tattered coat hangs on the stick of a laggard psyche
it sags like a used-up
run-on sentence fused and desperate
longing for a waylaid semi-colon in the prosody of
redundant end-rhyme
no one will publish
the creaking of previous cartilage in my right knee
re-assures the insistence of my aged blue-lipped best
friend
my soul is fixing to ride the canine bitch across the river
and into the dark and foreboding trees
like a mounted
baying questing beast in the medieval forests of ominous
rejoinder
the dilapidated pooch
slurs the lyrics of my paltry finite refrain
through the metal of the mouthpiece
the determined hound yelps-out the melody
i can no longer utter
no longer articulate
trivial libretto lends itself to loss amidst
the sting of the bit
the burden of the bridle
as
we enter the icy stream
my threadbare garment flutters in the breeze

Conventional Raindrops

Matt Cook

You're a conventional man walking down
An ordinary street with a questionable haircut.
An ordinary woman broke your conventional heart.
Questionable skies are giving way to conventional raindrops,
Thoroughly average raindrops, raindrops that are hardly worthy of your attention.

You're walking home right now because
You were attacked by black flies at the punk rock coffee shop.
You found yourself taking the black flies personally,
Which is always an important signal.

The bread factory is making below average bread but it smells fantastic.
People from nowhere who used to live somewhere have decided to live here now.
All they talk about is somewhere and they never mention nowhere.
Dirty little birds the size of doorknobs are living above the drugstore.

You're a second-rate man living under an assumed name in a first floor apartment
But it's a nice apartment and the windows look out on the park.

Other than the windows looking out on the park,
Things are generally wrong everywhere.

Your shoulder is malfunctioning.
You're running low on contact lens solution.
You have a full head of hair and you're unemployed,
But you could pass for a bald man with a job.

An unsophisticated man approaches you and you feel momentarily superior.
You feel sorry for him and yet you don't feel anything and it feels good.

Leaving Lombok

George Such

When the Lembar ferry blasted its horn
and pulled away from the dock, young voices

screamed and feet scurried on the decks below.
Soon, a boy about ten, scrambled up the stairs

and climbed the railing next to me, on the top
deck. He stood on the second rail, his legs

clutching the vertical pole, and called to friends
on shore -- his ribs stood out as he waved,

his arms flapping overhead like wings. Other boys
yelled from the deck below, their Sasak words,

birds that flew to the edge of the bay,
to the coconut palms, with their green limbs circled

like Shiva's arms. Then the boys jumped.
I held my breath. Forty feet of air, their bodies

clenched into stars. Then four splashes, four fists
in the belly, a momentary constellation,

the great square of Pegasus,
as if a winged horse had found its way home.

For the ones who smash their heads into windshields

Jaimie Gusman

If you think the door is open
Look over your shoulder for the crow.
Yellow-tipped feathers; I want to fluff pillows.

Who made you, or said God's image
Wasn't shoddy (a night after heavy drinking)?
If you think the crow won't ever forgive

A door, listen to the pain of a hinge.
What do you think this metaphor leads to—
Miscommunication, an interpretive mistake?

What do you think of your name, as it shuts?
The door might as well wallow, the eyes
Are a boring window for poetics.

I beg, bore me with what happened to the crow!
After she tried to get her fat body out
The crease closed in like the walls of a melon.

How she felt like a failure in those moments
Of freedom, which meant something
Driving through each dark layer of black.

For the ones who have to wait outside until the surgery is complete

Jaimie Gusman

Mother isn't it bright out, like smacking your eyes with sunflowers
Then rolling into a yellow mist like so many other patients describe it?

Mother, if we were truly all animals, don't you think the cage should expand
Or, at the very least, offer up bars that we could scratch our backs on?

There is no other way to describe the companion of a sick human:
A flaccid law with no mouth, only a small whole with minor songs.

I don't have to say anything you sing. Is this your way of maintaining
Control, or is there a sign over the audience that permits silent prayer?

I imagine what's appropriate: holding hands only as tight as you would
Grab a hat or cigar. There should also be many unwilled smiles, backrubs.

Mother, you say, *if I live long enough to see your children grow up*.
They haven't even grown inward. Who am I supposed to talk to?

It amazes me that my feet have grown larger than yours,
That I have to squeeze into your shoes and let my toes
imagine more space.

It's typical to worry about your children, even when they're adults,
You say, when my sister packs her bags for Vermont
without a job, a coat.

You want to know that she will wear gloves in the winter, keep her limbs
Covered from mounds of snow and her lungs close to a telephone.

Mother, if the sun is larger than the soul, why do we talk about the dust
And how and where it will settle, even when the hospital forbids it?

A child never stops wondering what her mother is thinking at the end
Of the night, when dim light from the television reflects off her paper dress.

For the ones who rip the heads off their Barbie Dolls

Jaimie Gusman

We turn the sink on and get a good lather going in our hands.
Imagine we are the hairdressers of the future, I say very seriously.

But I let you hold the scissors. I am just the shampoo girl.
I am also thinking that we are the dumbest kids in the world.

We lock ourselves in the bathroom with some dolls,
Stale Sweet Tarts, and the lamest weapon anyone has ever seen.

I am only here so I can hide the soap after we use it.
I'm not sure if parents still threaten their daughters' dirty mouths.

It only really happened once or twice. I was crying loudly,
The sound of slipping off the edge of my own sounds.

We have many dolls because we are both so particular about speaking.
Sometimes I think my sister gets her ideas from the way fur

Falls over an animal's face, or the way tail-hair is all different lengths.
I get the brunettes, and she gets the blondes—we line them up and decide

Which will get a pixie cut or long layers, and which will lose her virginity first.
This also applies to how we get rid of real bodies and come into our own.

My sister is really talented at getting those heads off—
I knew the heads popped, but she showed me the thumb trick.

Her record is .3 seconds, and suddenly, all her thoughts are gone.
We aren't allowed to create a story, go through with a narrative.

My mother tries the knob, and threatens us with something else.
I forget fear because I am so excited to open the door and show her

All those heads floating in the sink, my sister holding a pair of purple-handle
Scissors, and me, getting ready to submerge my own face in suds.

[metabody]

Adam Walsh

hands

if only they were god
condensingfaith into these vines
surrounding your
deadmother a radiant red
your shadow
honeyed
skin
held by the walls
please don t lose mother s palms
store them
make a steeple with fingers
semblance to your communion
grape juice and cakes

hands too
for rachel toor

make a t with thumbs
fork in the road of balance
your fleshlessfingers gorgeous when
holding this orange star its blackspots turn
into lines as it rises and
falls from the cosmos
rotating away from your palms
blueburrowedvessels of ichor
dryvalley its creases skin
that seals in heat compresses oxygen into
rubbersouls bouncing spheres looking for
their metallic red halos and fine white nets
to catch the star hold it against time

until a swoosh breaks the sound
a wrist in its wave

eye

arrow through prism
breaks white
this e lec tro mag net ic mirror
copperwire
optic chasm
reservoir
floods rods cones of color to impulse
why do our eyes always deceive us
misinterpreting luminosity
the angel her
fine veins that surround
iris its blackhole
capturing particles reflections
dancing on the light

nerve an analogy

a shotgun blasts through
endings
nerves
this fever
the red arrow of a firing pin
from axon to muscle
electric tensile d tendons
pulse rust pain into
small chambers of blood
these two charged almonds below
the mind
sear in memory
a feeling

nerves selective serotonin another analogy

the analogy part

a warm redcoat
now temperate iron
wrapped around the body
innocent
primal
fear
complacent as songbirds
this electric response
perdition spiralingstair or is it
a stare found in
dna spindled over
cracked figures of faith marbledeyed
embers condense split
an acrid taste of promise
a premised lie

the other part

he calls it
medicine
i call it
screws
molly bolts and temples
mother calls it fixer
father necessary
but we must give up
our names
hum i n g won t quiet
the ripping thought
of nervestring spun in
gold stretched between finger
tips like children in
making a cat s cradle

spine

a neck
a valley
crackedcolumn
fastening the mind
bolts through cerebralstem
liquidcells
restrained
inhibitors
reuptake serotonin
redfever
sterilizing
the genetic disposition of
a child

breast

after the knife cut
this lovelymilkfat
he kisses her
flatness even though she objects
they took some muscle tightened skin
o how couples try to make light
from pressed hands and holy sayings
he slept on
the washer dryer
set to tumble tumble down into dreams
cheap massage
she chose a quilt for warmth
if only wishing a child into
her belly would make them come to bed
with without
breast penis
just fall asleep with
the dog between them

feet
for linda

let me wash them
these souls you keep
hardened alabaster stones
brittle as your feet
arches swollenveins bloodrivers maps bled dry into landscape
wornworld of toes
callused topography dead discolored terrain
i promise to give them back
when you re ready
because child god wants
you to have
your sixty years
small blessings of time to
w a l k clean

vulva

brittle sea star its ampullae
vertical spines enclosing the mouth
aphoticlips
rufescent tongue
cannot kiss my appetency
your eclipticmoon
cratered nerves hollow from father
your hymenaeus
splitting legs breaking breast
to die under clear
don t worry sky
let the moon come out
from the clouds

penis
for d a powell

a pillow
for the leg
possibly this sad face
to rest on kissed foreskin
softnerve with foldsforeverfolding
lovers gone when
smooth elasticity runs
into veins washes pigment
from blood to center
leaving the scrotum
even darker now
clay not quite hardened
pressed by fingers
into lovely shapes
alapdog
cookiejar
acocktaillounge where
we may sit and pass
a few drinks through
our livers

liver
for caitlyn

how it falls into pieces
crumbledash in hands
always finding
the hour
to resist cysts swells holes
pockets of time
like pines
concentriccircles scarring sap
until it puckers weighs heavy
with blood and at last
sighs
floods the body

drowns flushed kidneys
rapes the daughter
breaks her like itself
away from wholeness
away from this vicissitude
awayintoworry

arms

lever of three
bones that push pull
a life away or toward
your breathing
elbow hinge
welcomes in closes out
the living
while fibers lengthen down forearm
contract from shoulder
to lower ligaments
white stretched silver
flex strain thread the body
with gravity

button

mother breathed dark blood
through your belly
kissed crown with cervix
brought a death to
you
all within one moment
they cut lips to open
the gate of welcome
for you to abandon
your liquidlife
eventually oxidize appendages including
the stem

a bulbinyourbutton lost in christening
when you sleep tonight
i will kiss
your button
its oval disposition
with nose lip head finger
until you happen to wake

skin
for a harlequin baby

mother s faith fails like immunity
your petridish bacterialgarden
of a body
i cannot see
your lifelines to read
coalescedfingers hooves
that attempt to position
a fat brown nipple to suck
whiteblood with inverted lips stretched
to absent nose
i am not sure if
you can hear me while
i speak into your eyes
ruptured sacs of red rececedlids
your soul is not in
your eyes
i m not even sure
you have one
i m whispering so mother
doesn t hear that
you cannot leave this world

torso

aclaybird hollow from ass
to beak holds water
streaming into pores
        the corolla pollentongues
to taste by
        the lemonbees rind
 in color their   blackcores
   stripedskeletons with thorns
you calcium deposited limbs spurs
however your elasticbones
sternum rib eventually succumb to
                age   deplete to pottery
            your trunk
            my longing

nose

hollowbone from organ
incomplete palate
cleft hunger hole
filter mucuscoatedhair
        trapping   the inevitable
some disease failsafe for
                the intrusion of others
twice over perforated skin
an entryway to this emptiness
a situation where
you don t want it filled
bridge for vision
        separating   the body
anothertongue

skull

porcelainjar your jawbone
with bloodswollenstem leaking through fibers
            the kundalini spins fluid around

the chakras a child s hand occipital eye
reaching toward
the magnetic your disillusioned life
like the mind torn by electrons
atomicnumbers
listening for the whisper of how
did you get here
meditation only gets you so far
but you see me
why do you stare
haven t you seen
a man without a face
hamlet saw many mostly dead many faces
i would like to think of me as living
just without breath housed in your mind
i tried to hide somewhere
between your medulla pons
no wonder you couldn t sleep
those dreams were mine
your just a cinema
i ll play you when i like until
who will see who
hopefully we won t see
each other across
from a fire

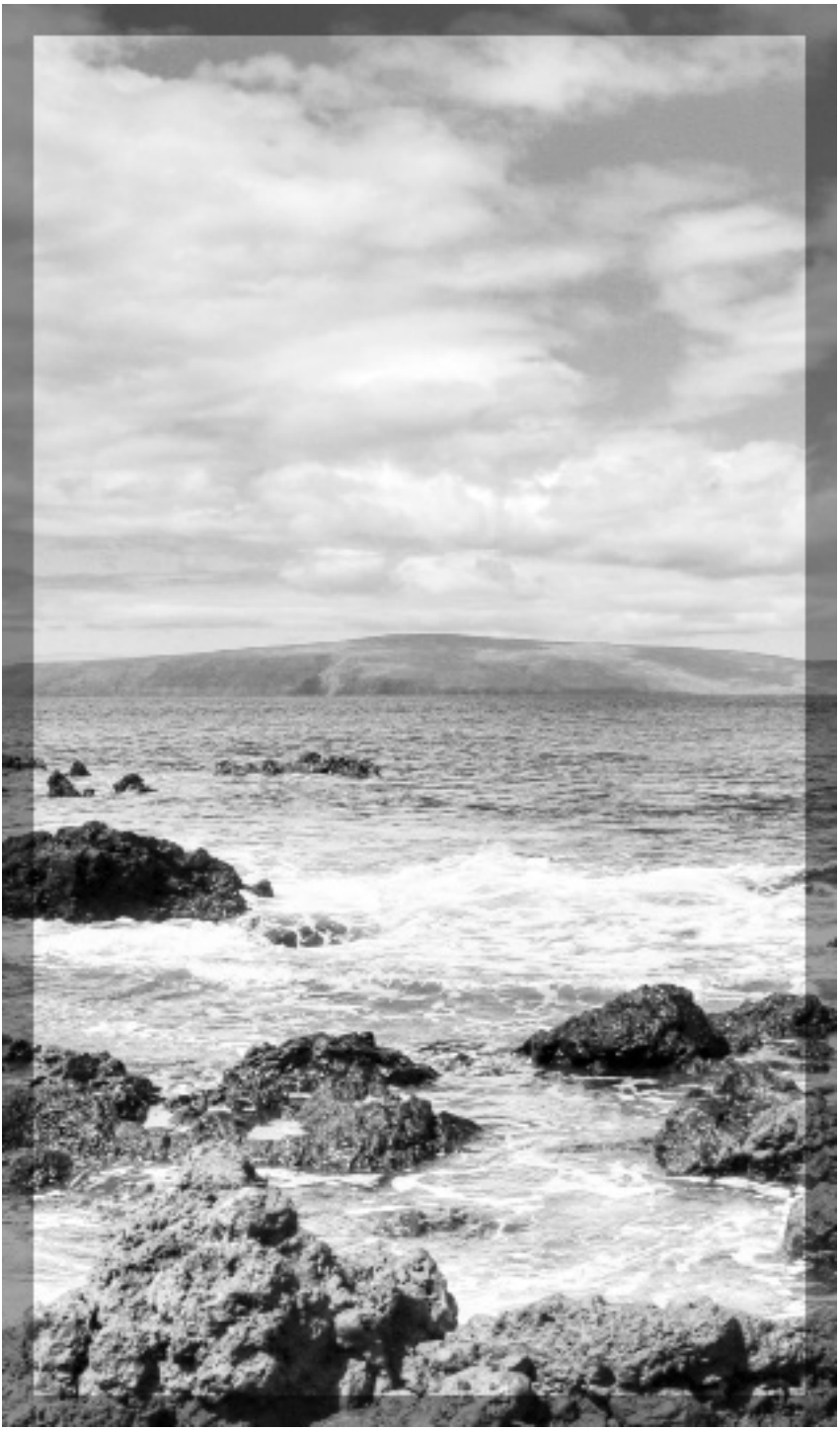
skulls

both in hamlet s hands staring blankly
these skullsskulking in their graves
never six feet though
my father told me so
agravedigger at ten
his dead had green masks wrinkled into
precious empty sockets
said you could see
the cranial fissures

like fractured coconuts hollow as their smiles
with some fuzz still left on cheeks
he played hamlet from timetotime
kissed the skulls
their receded lips
called them fools while
he dug their beds
sometimes roots found ears
whisperedwater onto drums beating
my father s crazed wail as he softened earth
with his iron sickle

throat
for danny

your gray is not as old as mine
you keep yours in eyes
in jars with
gold shiny lids
mine fell out of breast stained
resin floors flaked with sparks
give me some of
yours in exchange
i would eat
your cancer away
take the guilt from
your throat even though
your voices might
go with it yet
i will still hear
the shouting
your yelling at the ground wondering
why it won t answer back



Darren W. Brown

Contributors' Notes

D. BRIAN ANDERSON'S work has appeared in the *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Rio Grande Review*, and *Open Minds Quarterly*. He holds an MFA from UT-El Paso and teaches at College of the Mainland near Houston, Texas.

CYNTHIA ATKINS received an MFA from Columbia University's School of the Arts. Her first collection of poems, "Psyche's Weathers" (Wordtech, 2007) was recently featured on Verse Daily. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review, American Letters & Commentary*, *BigCityLit, BOMB, Caketrain, Cold Mountain Review, Del Sol Review, Denver Quarterly, Harpur Palate, Inertia, The Journal, North American Review, Sou'wester, Valparaiso Review, and Verse Daily*,. She holds residencies from the VCCA and Breadloaf Writer's Conference and teaches creative writing, most recently at Roanoke College. Atkins lives in Rockbridge County, VA, on the Maury River with her artist husband, Phillip Welch and their family--Homer is their Wolf/Dog!

JONATHAN BARRETT currently works in banking and lives in Kansas City, Missouri with his wife and three sons. His poems have appeared in numerous literary journals including *The Literary Review, The Minnesota Review, North American Review, Notre Dame Review, Pavement Saw, Phoebe,* and *Subtropics* among others.

AMALIA B. BUENO'S most recent poems and stories can be found in *Locuspoint*, *Tinfish*, *Bamboo Ridge*, and *Walang Hiya: Literature Taking Risks Toward Liberatory Practice* (Carayan Press). She is a media relations consultant and a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where she is pursuing an MA in Creative Writing.

JAIMEE WRISTON COLBERT is the author of the novel, *Shark Girls*, a finalist for the Foreword Magazine Book of the Year and the USA Book News Best Books of 2010 Awards; the linked stories collection, *Dream Lives of Butterflies,* a gold medal winner in the 2008 Independent Publisher Awards; a novel in stories, *Climbing the God Tree,* winner of the Willa Cather Fiction Prize; and the story collection *Sex, Salvation, and the Automobile*, winner of the Zephyr Prize. Her stories have appeared in various journals, including *TriQuarterly, Prairie Schooner, Tampa Review, Connecticut Review, Gettysburg Review,* and *New Letters*, broadcast on "Selected Shorts" and anthologized. Two recent stories won the Jane's Stories National Short Story Award and the *Isotope* Editors' Fiction Prize. Originally from Hawai'i, she is Professor of English and Creative Writing at SUNY, Binghamton University.

MATT COOK is the author of three books of poetry (*In the Small of My Backyard*, *Eavesdrop Soup*, and *The Unreasonable Slug*, all published by Manic D, San Francisco). His work has been anthologized in *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poet's Café*, *The United States of Poetry*, and in Garrison Keillor's *Good Poems, American Places*. He lives in Memphis, TN.

BRYCE EMLEY is an editorial assistant for *The Florida Review* and Managing Editor of *12:51* in Orlando, FL, where he also substitute teaches and freelances. His writing can be found in *Yemassee*, *Measure*, *Ruminate*, *Pleiades*, *Slipstream*, and elsewhere. He can be found on YouTube making popular poems into songs.

LISA BATYA FELD is a graduate of the Colorado State University MFA program. She now lives in North Carolina, where she works as a production editor for Oxford University Press.

CARLY GATES teaches English and advises a student literary magazine in West Palm Beach, Florida. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of the South's School of Letters. Her poetry has appeared in *Flint Hills Review* and *Steam Ticket*.

SHANTEL GRACE is currently an MA candidate at the University of Hawaii. She works as the managing editor for the Honolulu Weekly, and her creative works (fiction, creative non-fiction and songwriting) have been published in *All Things Gir*l, Starbucks, Yahoo!, iTunes, Nokia, *The Truth About Kate*, Sony Tree, questionablynerdygoodness.com, Rhapsody, P.L.A.Y., and feministblogs.org, among others. She has released six full-length albums and two chapbooks.

JAIMIE GUSMAN lives in Honolulu where she is a PhD candidate at the University of Hawai'i, teaches creative writing and composition, and runs the M.I.A. Art & Literary Series. Her work has been published nationally and internationally by "Socialism, Capitalism, and Nature," *Unshod Quills*, *Hearing Voices*, *Hawaii Women's Journal*, *Tinfish Press*, *Spork Press*, *Shampoo*, *Anderbo*, *Juked*, *Barnwood*, *DIAGRAM*, *DarkSky Magazine*, *2 River Review*, *The Dirty Napkin Review*, and others. Her chapbook *One Petal Row* was published in 2011 by Tinfish Press. She has another chapbook coming out from Highway 101 Press this year titled *The Anyjar*. She blogs at poeticvetanda.blogspot.com.

JODY HASSEL is an MFA Candidate in the Creative Writing graduate program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Her most recent works of creative nonfiction detail the eventful journey of her search for and reunion with members of her biological family in Hawaii and Samoa. In her hometown of Fairbanks, Jody also enjoys teaching yoga, studying Polynesian dance and spending as much time as possible outdoors. Her home in the

Interior of Alaska is 500 miles inland, and she really misses the ocean.

BRAD JOHNSON has two chapbooks *Void Where Prohibited* and *The Happiness Theory* available at puddinghouse.com. His third chapbook *Gasoline Rainbow* is available at finishinglinepress.com. Work of his has recently been accepted by *Nimrod, Poet Lore, The South Carolina Review, The Southeast Review*, *Willow Springs* and others.

PEYCHO KANEV is the Editor-In-Chief of *Kanev Books*. His poems have appeared in more than 500 literary magazines, such as: *Poetry Quarterly, Evergreen Review, The Monarch Review, The Coachella Review, Third Wednesday, Black Market Review, The Cleveland Review, Loch Raven Review, In Posse Review, Mascara Literary Review* and many others. He is nominated for the Pushcart Award and Best of the Net and lives in Chicago. His poetry collection *Bone Silence* was released in September 2010 by Desperanto Publishing Group. A new collection of his poetry, titled *Requiem for One Night*, will be published by Desperanto Publishing Group in 2012.

D. KŪHIŌ is finishing up his first year as an M.A. student in Creative Writing at U.H. Mānoa. Born and raised on Oahu, Donovan moved to San Francisco at the age of nineteen to study fine-art painting. Most recently, he taught writing workshops for the non-profit Pacific Writers' Connection. He is currently working on a collection of poems about his grandfather.

J.T. LEDBETTER is Professor Emeritus at California Lutheran University where he teaches Creative Writing and Environmental Literature. His poems and stories have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Salamander*, *Lake Effect* and others. His latest poetry collections are *Underlying Premises*, *Lewis Clark*

Press, 2010, and *Old and Lost Rivers*, winner of the Idaho Prize for Poetry and published by Lost Horse Press, 2012. *Death by Violin*, a collection of short stories, will be published by Stephen F. Austin State University Press this year.

D.C. LYNN is an American university lecturer who has lived abroad for many years. He attended the University of Southern California and holds degrees from Auburn and Pepperdine. He has published widely in print and digital format in the UK, Australia, and the USA.

CHERI NAGASHIMA is currently a Creative Writing MA student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

DOUG NEAGOY grew up in Pennsylvania, Nebraska, and Hawai'i. He is presently a first year MA candidate at UH Mānoa where he received the Hemingway Award for undergraduate fiction. His short story "Figs for Pa" was a finalist in *Glimmer Train's* 2011 new author contest and a top-6 finalist in *Black Warrior Review's* 7th annual fiction contest. "Sinking Relics" is his first published story.

CONNIE PAN: Originally from Maui, Connie Pan lives in Morgantown, where she is an MFA candidate in fiction at West Virginia University. Her work has appeared in *Rosebud Magazine.* She is obsessed with the ocean and dreams of it constantly.

NO`U REVILLA is from the island of Maui. Her chapbook *Say Throne* was published by Tinfish Press in 2011. She will begin the Ph.D. program in Creative Writing at the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa in fall 2012.

SUSAN RICH is the author of three collections of poetry, *The Alchemist's Kitchen (2010)* named a finalist for the Foreword Prize and the Washington State Book Award,

Cures Include Travel (2006), and *The Cartographer's Tongue / Poems of the World (2000)* winner of the PEN Award for Poetry. She has received awards The Times Literary Supplement of London, Peace Corps Writers and the Fulbright Foundation. Recent poems appear in the *Harvard Review, New England Review, Poetry Ireland,* and *The Women's Review of Books.*

RYAN SHOEMAKER'S fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Santa Monica Review*, *Grist: A Journal for Writers*, *Weber: The Contemporary West* and *The Fiction Desk*. He lives in Burbank, CA, with his wife, Jennifer, and two children, Kieran and Haven. He once shared a plate of bacon with George Saunders in an Athens, Ohio café.

MARK SMITH lives in DeLand, FL, and has poems forthcoming in *Poetry East*, *Pleiades*, and the *William & Mary Review*. As a novelist, he has received fellowships and awards in fiction from the Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Fulbright and Ingram Merrill Foundations and the NEA. He is emeritus professor of English at the University of New Hampshire.

GEORGE SUCH is an English graduate student at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. In a previous incarnation he was a chiropractor for 27 years in eastern Washington. Besides reading and writing, he enjoys hiking, cooking, and traveling, especially to India and Southeast Asia. His poetry has been published in *Arroyo Literary Review, Blue Earth Review, Cold Mountain Review, Dislocate,* and many other journals.

D.J. THIELKE is a graduate of the University of Southern California and an MFA candidate in fiction at Vanderbilt University. Her short stories have appeared or are

forthcoming in *New Delta Review, The Dos Passos Review, Cold Mountain Review, Roanoke Review* and *Southern Humanities Review,* where she was recently nominated for a Pushcart prize.

JONATHAN ULLYOT is the screenwriter of *Crime Fiction* (Anthem, 2008) and the upcoming *Mulligan* (2012). He completed a PhD at the University of Chicago in Comparative Literature. He has contributed to such magazines as *Point Magazine, Modern Philology,* and *Comparative Literature.* For more John Hanson, see http://www.thepointmag.com/2011/philosophy/john-hansons-statement-of-teaching-philosophy

DAVID WAGONER has published 18 books of poems, most recently *A Map of the Night* (U. of Illinois Press, 2008), and Copper Canyon Press will publish; his 19th, *After the Point of No Return,* in 2112. He has also published ten novels, one of which, *The Escape Artist*, was made into a movie by Francis Ford Coppola. He won the Lilly Prize in 1991, six yearly prizes from *Poetry,* and the Arthur Rense Prize for Poetry from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2011. He was a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets for 23 years. He edited *Poetry Northwest* from 1966 to 2002, and he is professor emeritus of English at the U. of Washington. He teaches at the low-residency MFA program of the Whidbey Island Writers Workshop.

ADAM WALSH: My poetry is of projective verse as noted by the second generation American Modernist Charles Olson. Its form visually is as important verbally. The double spaced lines are intentional as with all elided words (elision). I earned a BA from the University of Montana and a MFA from Eastern Washington University under the tutelage of Christopher Howell. My poetry will appear in *The Journal*, *Edge Piece*, *Crab Creek Review*,

FeatherTale, *The Lummox Journal*, *Laughing Dog*, and *Ascent Aspirations* in 2012.

N.S. WILEY is a native of Nyack, New York. He received his BA at Connecticut College in English and Philosophy. His stories have appeared in *First Inkling*. He currently attends the MFA program at Wichita State University.

NICHOLAS Y.B. WONG is the author of *Cities of Sameness* (Desperanto, 2012). His poems are forthcoming in *580 Split, American Letters & Commentary, Gargoyle, Harpur Palate, Interim, The Jabberwock Review, The Journal, Natural Bridge, Quiddity* and *upstreet*. He is the recipient of Global Fellowship Award at ASU Desert Nights Rising Stars Writer's Conference in 2012. He reads poetry for *Drunken Boat* and has recently been nominated for a Pushcart.

The Artist

Darren W. Brown is an amateur photographer who currently resides in Houston, Texas. During the last decade, Darren has been compiling landscape images from both North America and Europe. The Hawaiian Islands have recently become a place of enormous interest for him. Darren has found some recent success in publishing some of his landscape images with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Weld County Colorado, City of Houston, and the Maui Visitors Bureau. Back in April 2007, *Just Jazz Magazine* of London published one of Darren's short stories, "Nine Months After". Darren is happily married to his lovely wife Maria. They share a beautiful life with their son Denver and are expecting another baby boy.

On Artistic Aesthetic

Photography has always been my passion. It's essentially my "comfort blanket." I was blessed to have lived in Boulder, Colorado, during my young adult years. Boulder was a postcard city for a young man who just inherited his grandfather's 35mm SLR camera. These days, I'm highly addicted to anything "Nikon" as well as a churning hunger for travel, both near and far.

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Hawai`i Review

Hawai'i Review 75

Winter 2011

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