In Loving Memory of Rita Collier-Machuda
January 9, 1962–December 17, 2000

Last year, one of Santa Cruz’s finest native daughters lost her struggle against breast cancer. Everywhere she went Rita made a lasting impression on the lives of those who knew her. Growing up, she attended Holy Cross Elementary and Marello Prep, before graduating from Santa Cruz High School and eventually becoming a nurse at Dominican Hospital. For over thirteen years, Rita served our community as a caring, compassionate and devoted caregiver for those most in need of her loving and affable personality. Described by co-workers as immensely considerate, charismatic, and unfailingly jovial, she helped to make a difficult work environment much more agreeable and pleasant. Rita was an advocate of the Nursing Union and established a local health care program known as Beverly Home Care, which provided in-home nursing for those unable to meet the financial demands inherent in a hospital stay.

Among her passions away from work, Rita loved horseback riding (she was an accomplished barrel racer at Graham Hill Fairgrounds), skydiving, singing (in many of the local nightclubs), and surfing. It was her brother Vincent Collier (a renowned surfer) that originally got her interested in the sport she so enjoyed. Matt, her surviving husband, is himself a board-shaper, and fondly remembers watching Rita catch her last wave. Over six hundred friends and family members who overflowed the Holy Cross Church during her services gave testimony that her incredible personage touched many in an indelibly profound manner. Thank you Rita.
How Do You Live With a Terminal Diagnosis? (for Rita)  
Joanna Martin

You put on a sleek, black dress  
with spaghetti straps  
a velvet dog collar necklace  
and sing in a band in a nightclub that moans across ocean.  
During the day you may receive chemo  
wretch up your lunch  
and tomorrow they may pull another liter of fluid  
off your lung  
but tonight you slide your fingers across the braille code of life  
thread your voice through the haunting bass strings gone wild  
as tumor clawing through tissue  
growing like grass or weeds to the height of your smile  
and suck up all available light  
clap your hands and swivel your hips  
gutturalize your notes to cancel your weight  
as if you have discovered a way to divide and reconnect  
spirit from flesh on this night we witness  
your sound that takes unlimited physical shape  
a hand that lifts us up out of our chairs to dance  
lifts the hair on the backs of our animal necks  
fills our tear glazed eyes with the charity of yes  
you massage the room of twilight figures  
moving away from and towards you  
you make your choice  
etch out this life  
this cursed relief of light in shadow  
bring all of it up microscopically close  
the suck in to gather up, build, turn and release it takes  
to form wave after wave  
you show us how it’s done  
bob your hair platinum  
plunge diamonds into the depth of your cleavage  
line your eyes in kohl  
put on your slinkiest dress  
glean the gold off each falling away moment  
become whirling dervish  
shape shifter  
ghost in the flesh  
the sound of ocean pinched off into a hollow shell
shade our eyes from your gleam
bright as the silver shiver of a polished gun
being raised up to all our temples
you show us how it’s done
stand like a goddess stage center
flanked on all sides by the men of your band
the crush of your admiring fans
lean up so close to the microphone
its metal a hair’s breadth from your lip
and at the peak of your fall
on the highest dry spot you can find
filling up with liquid
you turn into wings
and sing, at the top of your lungs
you sing
for us.

Brian T. Hamilton
Tears for the Beauty
(for Rita)

Susan Allison

The lighthouse at Pigeon Point
winks
in pre-dawn darkness,
a single star
to light my way;
driving north on
Highway One
rain tattoos
the roof of my car;
no windshield wipers
for the tears
that freely fall.

At Pescadero
I cry at the beauty
of pink marsh water
reflecting billowed clouds
and silver sky,
timbered mountains
veiled in mist,
dawn rising in gold
from every hill.

I cry for my students
who at fourteen
think hatred only grows
in Maycomb, Alabama;
who torture one another
with icy silence
cruel whispers
poisoned notes;
who read about mockingbirds
and those who shoot them,
but don’t feel the rifle
in their own hands.

I cry for my friend Rita
who is dying;
who can’t eat
for the tumor
ballooning
in her stomach;
whose breast and
uterus are gone,
who’s been poked
and cut
and poisoned by chemicals;
yet laughs
as she rides her horse
through chaparral
above the bay;
and surfs at the Lane
with dolphins,
 flying across the foam
with wide-beaked pelicans;
Rita
whose singing spirit refuses to die,
whose spirit won’t die.
It breathes in me
and in all of us
who aren’t afraid to live,
who aren’t afraid to see
the beauty in the world,
and
are trying to be kind.
That night, I couldn’t sleep, not because of Rita’s death, (though her angel-spirit flew through my dreams). No, it was the owls that sang me awake, hooting across the forest canyon in the waning moon’s half-light. They were calling to me, trying to give me a message, but I couldn’t quite catch it, and let their voices lull me back to sleep. I dreamed of tribal totems on the banks of narrow inlets, forested by thick pines and firs, hearing owls call the names of those who will die.

I forgot the owls and my dreams as I drove north on Highway One to Pescadero, stopping in Davenport for coffee laced heavily with cream. Pulling onto the road, I watched the sun dawn pink in my side mirrors, and orange clouds streak silver sky. To the west, the ocean churned from onshore wind, and darkness still hovered on the road ahead. The coffee warmed my hand and belly, and I settled in for the drive, turning up the stereo, and letting the flute of Carlos Nakai carry me.

A mile or two north of Davenport, I saw something white flutter in the other lane, a large bird, perhaps a hawk or an owl, lying in the road. I was so warm, so content, and on time for work, that my mind said *Keep driving*, yet without realizing it, my car seemed to turn around at Swanton Road and head south. I slowed down, and before reaching the bird, crossed left over the centerline and onto a dirt turnout. I had never stopped here, but had seen the telephone pole from my car many times, covered in plastic flowers, the memorial of someone killed on this stretch of highway. One or two cars passed in both directions, commuters on their way to work between San Francisco and Santa Cruz, and each time, the bird’s feathers flew up from the wind.

I got out of my car, but before I could decide what to do, I saw something else, a large, lumpy form a few feet away from me in the bike lane. Curious, I walked closer, not forgetting about the bird in the road, but somehow drawn to this other figure. I squatted down only a foot away from a great horned owl, darker than the bird in the road and larger, the male of the two. Looking from one to the other, I realized that this owl’s mate had just been hit, and he sat there facing her. I found myself crying and talking to him, saying, *I’m so sorry; I’m so sorry* over and over, and sobbing even harder each time I spoke. I suddenly remembered that great horned owls mate for life, and now she might be dead. His face had been looking at the highway, not at me, but suddenly swiveled on its thick neck and faced me. The heavy, closed lids over his round eyes opened, and he gazed steadily at me. His deep yellow eyes blinked once or twice very slowly, and looked so patient and sad, but also seemed to be asking for my help. This was why I was here. This was why I had been awakened in the
middle of the night by owl voices; I had not understood before.

I knew what I must do. Still crying, I told the male owl not to worry,
that I was going to get her out of the road. I found a piece of cloth in the
back of my car and walked onto the highway. I was pretty certain the owl
was dead, but if she was injured, I wanted to reach her quickly and then
find help. The accident had just happened. The blood on the side of her
white face was bright red and still wet. I felt the softness and warmth of
her body as I lifted her to the side of the road, her brown and white wings
spreading as I carried her. Directly in front of me was the pole, laden with
lavender and white plastic flowers, and behind this, a bank with more
flowers to honor the loved one who had died. I carried the owl to the top of
the bank and laid her gently in green grass, making sure her head and
wings were straight. Many stray plastic flowers had been scattered by wind,
and I gathered these and put them in a circle around her. Again, I
began to cry, seeing the owl in death, so fragile and yet so lovely. As her form blurred with my tears, I saw another face and body; it was my friend Rita, who lay on her bed in her white, lace death-dress, surrounded by flowers and candles.

The night before at Rita’s wake, I had joined many friends and family to see her one last time. After several years of fighting cancer, going into remission, and being re-diagnosed, Rita was dead. And yet, Rita could never die for those of us at her bedside. She was so deeply loved by hundreds of people, friends who rarely left her in the final weeks, who made her special foods, snuck out with her for horseback rides and beach romps, who drank wine with her and made her laugh, helped her choose her dress, and once she had died, combed her hair and lovingly put her in lacy cotton, filled her bedroom with flowers, and surrounded her with candles. Beautiful Rita in her circle of light, softened in death, but never diminished, cherished by us all. And somehow I felt that by honoring this owl, I honored Rita; I honored her memory.

Looking down from the grassy knoll, I saw the great horned owl had not moved. I began to think he was injured; perhaps in trying to save her, he had also been hit. My friend Korie had told me stories of owls that, in trying to help a wounded mate, were also killed. I climbed down to the pavement, and once again kneeled by his side. She no longer lay in the road, yet he continued to stare straight ahead. Once in awhile, he seemed to sigh deeply, to rise up slightly, then settle once more. He now had his head tucked to his breast and looked so forlorn and resigned that I asked, *Are you hurt; can I help you somehow;* and his only response was a shudder, a subtle shifting of wings, before quieting and dropping his head. In that moment, his posture reminded me of someone, someone I had seen recently: the bowed head, slumped shoulders, the sighing and shifting.

And I realized it was Matt, Rita’s husband, whom I had also seen the night before at her wake; Matt who hadn’t slept for thirty-six hours, who had hardly left her side for a moment while she was dying; Matt who after her death, looked so drained and colorless, so completely spent. I remember seeing him sitting in Rita’s room, with all of us there who knew her and already missed her; but it was Matt who held the grief for us all, carried it in his face, in his shoulders, that slumped as he held his head in his hands. His mated one, wife and friend, no longer lived, and he was alone.

I wanted to do something for this owl hunched in the bike lane that I hadn’t been able do for Matt. The night before, I had told him how deeply sorry I was, but it didn’t seem enough. What can you say to someone whose young wife has just died? What can possibly be said that can help? My frustration made me rise from the owl’s side, with the belief that he might be injured, and get into my car. I drove back to Davenport in order
to call Native Animal Rescue. The volunteer on duty told me they were understaffed, and I needed to bring him in to them. One of the owners of the café grabbed towels, aprons, and a plastic milk crate and agreed to help me catch him. I followed her green wagon up the slight hill to the turnout where we both parked. She looked puzzled when she got out, and I soon realized that the owl was gone. I thanked her, and she got in her car and headed back to work. I stood on the side of the deserted road, and looked up to see a red-tailed hawk watching me from the fence, the redtail often called the daylight twin of the great horned one; it made me wonder if the owl had shapeshifted, and now watched over his mate in the sunlight dawning all around us.

All at once I felt dizzy with the morning’s events and needed to sit down on the hill. So much had happened in a short time, and it had all begun at home with owls and dreams. As I sat there on the side of the highway, I realized I had been invited here, and had accepted the invitation, and my role had been to lovingly carry her from the road, and to honor her passing. I had witnessed an owl in mourning for his mate; he had not been physically injured, but was deeply grieving her passing, not caring about me kneeling so close; unaffected by the sound and speed of cars; he was just not ready to leave her. I began to cry again, as I would off and on for the rest of the day. I cried for all the mates who die, but I wept especially for those left behind, for the great horned owl, for Matt, and for myself if I am the one to be widowed. I cried for all of us who won’t be the ones winging free and without pain overhead, but left by the road, weeping our loss.

THESE PAGES DEDICATED TO RITA
As rapes went, she supposed, it was not that bad. After all, she was alive. Blood. That’s what saved her. Her husband didn’t think of her as saved, however. He thought of her as other than. He’d put a seal on the whole damn experience. Her experience. He was proud of his Mediterranean temperament, as he put it, and there he was now, stamping, pacing, while she lay on the bed, discarded as a lost sock, pulling knots out of her long hair. Words like slattern, harlots were pulsing in her brain. He didn’t actually use those words, having not much congress with words at all. He was slightly illiterate. An artist. But she heard the words, nevertheless. Maybe they were her words.

She’d lost the brass hairclip he’d made for her. He saw that.

It happened in broad daylight. Overcast, as usual. She’d gone over to the dunes, to take a nap, to get away from the babies for an hour. Beverly had offered to watch them. They lived on Beverly’s beach property, in a little bougainvillea-covered cottage in the back. Beverly called it an artistic commune, although Beverly would never refer to herself as a hippie; she thought of herself as a Bohemian, lives with an aging hipster who limps. She calls him crip; he calls her baby. He’s on the road more than off, and Beverly is always restless. Still wears red lipstick and black eyeliner. Beverly says everything’s been either saved, or gone to hell. And there’s nothing more to paint.

There was always a price to pay with Beverly. Beverly would watch the babies, but for that she’d feel entitled to once again play mother hen. “What are you doing with him?” She was talking about Fury’s husband and this was a recurring question. Beverly was not interested in the answer. Beverly had decided to not like Fury’s husband, had never liked Leos, she says. Says he’s a dilettante, smokes too much grass. Fury has asked herself this same question, but her own reasons are not fully formed. Fury tries to take the long view. She’s not sure what’s going on with herself and her husband, not sure why they fight, what happened to peace and love. But today, it was all too complicated. She’s always tired. Two babies. One up, one down. Like blackjack. She’d like to be dealing blackjack again. Drinks afterwards, a little coke. She used to like staying up all night.

Fury looked out the window, turned the pages of her book. Shogun. She likes big books; ones she can stick her small thin hands into like a warm paper mitten.

“You’ve got to learn to say ‘no,’” Beverly said, lighting another Sherman. “Beverly, why don’t you go save a whale? Or how about another damn Tibetan?”

Fury didn’t mean that. Of all the people on the planet, Tibetans were the best. One day she’ll go to Tibet. Take the babies. Ride a yak, sleep with
a Sherpa. Didn’t everyone? She didn’t want this conversation. Didn’t want to be sitting in a cloud of Beverly’s smoke, watching her lick red lipstick off her teeth. Beverly knows Fury’s story: she’s the kind of chick that men always want to rescue, or play games with, that ‘no’ wasn’t in her vocabulary, that she always preferred ooo kaaay. Like that cat who’d picked her up on Hollywood Boulevard, years ago. “Wanna smoke some shit?” he’d said, and she’d said “Whaat?” “Smoke some shit,” he’d repeated and she’d said, “Well, ooo kaaay.” Then later, meeting Dennis Hopper, before he was Dennis Hopper and his saying: “What do you think of S & M,” and she’d said, “I’ll take the S.” So he asked her walk on his stomach in four-inch heels. And she did. She’d agreed with those men: words like moral, guilt, wait a minute are useless words. But Beverly likes to analyze—did Fury’s behavior come from her own karma, or was she merely Dennis Hopper’s projection, or vice versa… or the projection of six other cats, blah, blah, blah. Fury has good karma. She’s lucky, never been hurt, like that time in the Ambassador Hotel with the maniac jewelry salesman. But Beverly has heard this before.

“You ought to go back to him, you know. You’re a mother now,” Beverly said.

Now Beverly is speaking of the father of the two-year old. She approves of that man, even though she doesn’t know him. She can tell, she says, by the baby. Such an easygoing baby. That’s true, Fury thinks, and that was exactly the problem. Maurice was a lovely man, decent, kindhearted, but overweight from years of playing the guitar in clubs. Soft, no bones, and Fury loved bones. He was a genius. Gave her the I Ching. Read Gurdjieff. Smoked a lot of grass, like her present husband. The difference being that smoking grass improved Maurice, and he could turn it over for a little profit. There’d been no arguments about money, behavior, expectations. Not even when she left him. The two-year old does have all his qualities. Easy going. Not given to tantrums.

“On the other hand, I mean, you can’t survive by always acquiescing,” Beverly said. She lit another Sherman.

“You mean I should live up to my name?” Fury said. She should live up to her name. Her father had named her Fury, after a million dollar racehorse. He was a bookie at the track. She reached back and pulled a sheaf of long hair over her shoulder, twisting it into a heavy braid, tightening the brass hairclip.

“Maybe you need a nap. You look wasted.” Beverly was kind, wanted to be kind. She was full of lovely words. Acquiescent. Coalescent. Chimera. The main reason Fury liked talking to her.

Yes, Fury thought. Close her eyes, sink into the dark, not think.

“Go on. Go on over to the dunes,” Beverly said. “Take a nap. No one’s over there this time of day. I’ll watch the babies. Take this.” She handed her the good alpaca throw.
So she took her book, found a shallow dip in the sand. The dunes were the size of burial mounds, covered in pale blue sand daisies, and beyond that stretched an acre of pink ice plant. She lay down, pressed the heavy volume on to her chest like a paperweight. The fuchsia skirt billowed around her legs, and she pulled the alpaca snug under her hips. She felt vaguely medieval, bound in wool, a weight on her chest, the burial mounds. There was no noise on the beach. Like Beverly had promised. She needed this hour of silence. The air was cool, the sky dim, sea gulls screeching companionably. The surf roared softly and the families frolicking in it were faint dots on the shore. She didn’t read. She put the hardback under her neck like a Geisha. She would sleep for half an hour.

She closed her eyes, idly scooping the sand and letting it fall through her fingers. The salt air was good; it cleansed her aura, her sinuses. She took six deep breaths in rhythm to the sand drifting through her fingers. She resolved to take her vitamins, for the babies. She drifted, the image of the blue sand daisies and pink ice plant floated before her. She tried a mantra: Be happy, be happy. But Beverly’s words kept coming back to her. About the first father. Going back to him. To Maurice. Their baby was eight months old when she’d left him. She remembered how he’d looked when she told him she’d fallen in love with someone else. He’d given her a worn-out smile, like he wasn’t surprised. She’d thought that the ‘someone else’ she’d fallen in love with was exotic, even looked a little like Dali. He said he was of Mediterranean origins, an artist. And she was a sucker for both. He’d made her a beaded choker, he could make anything—decoupage, lost-wax stuff, pre-Columbian stuff—said she looked like an Indian princess, that she should come to his houseboat, he wanted to do a quick sketch of her. Before he made her pregnant. Yes. No. They’d laughed at the absurdity of that. But he gave her that lightness of breath, the throbs in her belly that she missed with Maurice. So, how did she get pregnant in the first place with Maurice? She figured that the baby had just had a violent death in its last life and accidentally, or however these things worked, that soul, chose the first vehicle that came along, and that vehicle was Fury, a very determined soul. It never had anything to do with Maurice. It was her baby. Named her Sabine. Didn’t know how to pronounce it for the first month.

When she told her bookie father all this, he said, “Yeah, you’re a lot like your mother. Crazy as a loon.”

He meant she was flighty, and like her mother, prone to having affairs. Fury loved affairs. She’d travel long distances, to and fro on Route Sixty-Six, getting away, getting to, making them work out. She once drove four hundred miles in a Michigan snowstorm to meet one of them. Nice man. Skinny. Cocky, like a used-car salesman. He was a used car salesman. He knew all about blocking hats, it was a fetish of his, and she loved anyone who admitted to a fetish. “Wanna block my hat?’ he’d said, sitting down
on the barstool next to her. She knew what he was talking about. Always
wore a grin and a hat in bed, usually a straw boater, like Fred Astaire. Had
Fred’s nice thin face, long slim fingers. He was the only man who ever
used hat talk during sex: here’s the center crease, here’s the teardrop, the acey-
deucey-trey. Too bad he was married. He thought so, too. Paid for the
abortion. Never again. But he gave her the yellow convertible that got her
to California.

She turned over, lay on her stomach, snuggled the alpaca tight around
her. She felt safe, mummified in the sand, her bones like warm water. She
was settling into that lovely daytime sleep, the kind that never comes at
night, when she heard a noise. Footsteps coming through the sand. Odd—
the way the sound echoes. Maybe a dog was coming to investigate her. No.
The footsteps crunched closer. Stopped. She felt her body shiver; she’d been
so warm, so nearly sleepy. She sat up. A young biker-type cat in a ponytail
stood at her feet. Part Elvis, part Hell’s Angel. Heavy boots. Scuffed.

“Whatcha doin’, hon?” It was Elvis…alive and well… “Nappin’” he
drawled. It was not a question. She was coming to, like waking from a
heavy dream. She took more of him in now. Black leather pants, black T-
shirt, silver zippers, aggressive buttons. Then she felt like she was punched
in the chest. His fly was unzipped and a knife was dangling from his right,
no his left hand, a long gray blade, red and black handles, its tip pointed
casually toward the sand. Electric shocks whizzed up her arm. Her throat
closed.

He sat down in the sand next to her. He smelt like wet dog. He set the
knife aside. She did not stare. A buck knife? The Charlie Manson knife?
“What’s your name, hon?” Another bolt of electricity shot up her legs.

She took a deep breath. Jesus, she thought, what is my name? She pulled
the alpaca around her shoulders, clasping her cold hands together in front
of her chest.

“Cat got your …” He shifted closer, leaned into her. He cracked his
knuckles.

“My name is…my name is Mary.” Her voice hoarse like a stage whisper.

“Where do you work?” The surf grumbled. “Mary.” He made the word
into a sneer.

Shit, he knows I’m lying. “Safeway,” she lied again. Breathless. Where’s
the knife? No, no fear. The little she knew about fear she knew from
racehorses. How they can sense fear, how they take advantage of that fear.
She couldn’t be afraid.

“Lookee here, Mary. Look at me.” His hand fell on her shoulder. He
had brown eyes, glazed. Then he looked at the lost-wax ring her husband
had made; it was biting into her finger. She looked down at his hands.
Grime under his nails. “What’s he do?” he said, poking a dirty finger at the
ring.

“He…ah, he,” she fumbled. She couldn’t get her mind to work. She
sensed the knife, nearby in the sand. Waiting.

“My husband,” she said finally, “is a… a mechanic. I mean, a trucker.” Make him mean, she thought, with a spasm of cunning. “A mechanic with trucks.”

“Guess you don’t know what your old man does. Huh, hon?”

“We just got married.”

A child screeched down by the shore. A gull echoed. “You a Indian?”

“Tibetan.” It flew out of her mouth. She saw him narrow his eyes. Shit, he thinks I’m being a smart-ass. “No, no. I’m a Shoshone. Oklahoma?” She needed to sound agreeable, neighborly.

“You don’t sound like no Okie.” He unclasped her hands, took her left hand in his. Take the ring, she cried from inside. Let me take it off for you.

She was freezing, wanted to pull the serape closer around her shoulders, no, no, she needed to take it off and wave it at the people yelling on the shore, beyond the dunes, but he had her hand. The people were in clusters, fading like stars at dawn, the surf, a sad moan.

He mumbled, “Don’t worry, witchy woman. They can’t see us.”

What the hell does he mean? Do not shake, she told herself, burrowing her other hand into the damp sand. He ran his rough fingers over her hand. Oh, God. She tried to send a message. To anyone. To Beverly. Her husband. Where the hell is the knife? She stared straight ahead, not breathing. She felt the brass hairclip slipping, like it always does. A long, tiresome time seemed to pass. Like the Dr. John concert, the Oakland Paramount, the week before Marigold was born. Four hours for him to get into his hat. He sang *Starry Starry Night*.

The biker continued to ignore the knife. He ignored the crowd down at the shore. “Pretend we’re on a date, Mary. I won’t hurt you.” He put his hand under her chin, turned her face to him. He was grinning, his face babyish, beardless, no bones. His voice, light, without menace. Reminded her of the obscene phone call voice she’d once mistaken for a friend; a survey of how to wear garter belts and silk stockings.

Then he was up on his knees, facing her, a monument of black iron, blocking out the sky, the distant beach. In her peripheral vision she saw the knife. Should she grab it? See blood spurt? No. The burial mound at hand. He undid the silver clasp at his waist. It’s going to happen, she thought. A sea gull screeched. I will not die across the street from my babies. He aimed his penis and a smirk came over his brown Formica eyes. Not all there, she saw. Maybe he’ll have a seizure. She stretched to look over his shoulder at the far shore. “No one can see us,” he whispered. “Relax, dammit.” He breathed his dog breath at her, pushed her shoulders down. She sank like a stone into the dune. He pulled up her skirt, yanked down her panties, her pubic hair tearing away from the fabric. Air hit her thighs. Her arms flew out. Relax, she told herself. Where’s the knife? Don’t slit me. The babies need me. Sabine, Marigold. She imagined the blade. Pressing on her throat.
She stopped breathing, waited for him to enter, filled her mind with pink ice plant, pale blue sand daisies. No, no, you’ve got to fight. *Learn to say No, you’ve got to…* He was grunting. The cold air flooded her chest. Freezing water, tearing her open. It’s only intercourse on the beach. The sand crumbled around her bare feet. Her icy hands hovered like unidentified objects over her trembling thighs. It’s only an opening, a vehicle. A dark red tunnel. A baby pushed its way through that tunnel.

Suddenly he reared back, like a wild horse. He sat back on his knees and pulled out his penis. It hung there, a red-splotched thing. He stared at it in disgust, did not touch it. “What the hell?” he snarled. “What’s on it? Blood?”

“I’ve just had a baby,” she murmured. He looked horrified, confused. The sound of her voice brought energy. She struggled to sit up, her elbows sinking into the sand, her panties strangling her knees. He was backing off, stuffing the thing away, zipping up his fly. He reached over and picked up the knife, keeping his eyes on her. He’s addled, like a wild, but beaten dog. He stood up; the knife dangling like it was when he first appeared. He turned then, and without looking back, galloped down the dunes. And she was moving as fast, yanking off her panties, stuffing them into her pocket. And jumping up, pulling the alpaca around her shoulders, she ran, she flew, tripping over her long skirt, like a fuchsia tumbleweed rolling down the dunes.

Tumbling, skidding, jumping through the deep sand. The smell of salt air, the ocean pounding in her ears, a gull screeching. She was running toward home, scaa-reeech, her long hair blinding her, strangling her. She was running to the babies, scaa-reeech. To the cottage. To milk and water and oranges. To her husband. Oh, shit, her husband. The ocean roared the roar of destiny. Where did those words come from? *Shogun*? She’d left the book back there; she’d lost the hairclip. Stop, she told herself. Think about this. And words shot through her head, like a hot knife through butter. “Don’t tell him, he’s jealous, don’t tell him anything. Doesn’t matter that we just had a baby. You know how he is. Act like nothing happened.” Every nerve fiber, every Tarot card, every past life reading warned her.

But there he was, standing in the driveway, holding his flea market straw hat in his nice artist’s hands, looking like a cross between Al Pacino and Paul Gauguin, and that did it—broke her resolve; she crumbled, she cried, the sharp stones in the driveway cutting into her bare feet. He saw her tangled hair, the long loose strands, saw that his brass hairclip was missing. Later he’d say it became a found object on the beach.

Then they were inside the cottage. And everyone’s attention was taken up by him, as though it had happened to him. He was stomping around, pacing in the small space, glaring at Beverly who was yelling at him. Yelling because he’d just stuck his fist through the bedroom wall—her ‘Degas pink’ wall. “That’s my wall,” Beverly shrieked. “Stick your fist through one of
your fucking paintings, not my wall.”

One baby was crying, the other one wide-eyed and sucking her thumb. Van Morrison, too loud, on the radio. Everyone too nuts to turn it off.

“I know you like to be center stage, you Leo bastard, but stop freaking out.” They were circling each other, angry Whirling Dervishes. Fury wanted to scream, or go to sleep. She lay on the bed, pulling knots out of her hair.

And then he wanted to run off and catch the rapist. Like a hero. Like a Corleone. He didn’t put his arms around her.

Beverly handed the crying baby to him. “Light some incense,” she said, her voice low and feral. “Get hold of yourself. I’m taking Fury to the doctor. Protect all of you from the clap, or whatever.”

Fury followed Beverly into the parking lot, catching her skirt in the door as she went through. She heard it rip. Tears filled her eyes at the sound. “I don’t know which is worse,” she sniffed. “That goddamn doctor. Asked me if I’d had a nice day at the beach. He looked at me like I was a slut.” She got into Beverly’s Dodge.

“Did he give you a shot?” Beverly took out a Sherman.

“Penicillin. I asked him for some downers. He refused. He said you’re already down. What does that mean? I was crying. He was mad because no one had phoned the fuzz. Then he said, you’re still nursing, Mrs. blah, blah. Not anymore, I said. Mispronounced my name.”

“What a bastard.” Beverly punched the cigarette lighter.

Fury pulled back her hair, braiding, twisting. “Give me a cigarette.”

“You don’t smoke.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Not nursing, now smoking. Sounds good.”

“I need a shower.” Fury lit the cigarette, the smoke making her eyes brim again.

“I know. I’m sorry, darlin’”

They drove along the coastline toward home. The sun was setting. Beverly pulled the Dodge into a beach parking lot. “Want to watch?” she sighed. “Just for a minute?”

“Why?”

“Because it’s pretty.”

“Oh, yeah.”

It sank, like a large orange turd behind the rim of the earth. “It’s not pretty,” Fury cried, pressing down on the door handle. “It looks like shit, and I don’t want to be here.”

“Wait a minute, hon, wait. We’ll go. Take you home,” Beverly put the car in reverse. “I just thought…” she gave another deep sigh. “And it’s okay, okay to be angry. Be angry.”

“Live up to my name, you mean?” The Dodge bumbled along. Beverly rolled down the window. The sound of the surf again. The roar of destiny.
The same smell. Would she always hate the ocean now? The ocean she’d loved.

“You don’t know the true meaning of your name, do you?” Beverly, trying to be a friend.

“I don’t know the true meaning of anything.” She blinked back tears.

“Don’t pout.” Beverly was preternaturally impatient. One of her words, preternaturally.

Fury wiped her eyes with her sleeve. She rolled down the window, rolled it back up. “Fury was a beautiful chestnut mare,” she recited, her voice dull, “won the Preakness in fifty-five. Twenty to one…”

“I know that.” Beverly snapped. “Sorry.” She patted Fury’s knee. “Let me tell you something. The real Fury, the Greek original, was an avenging deity. She tormented criminals, inflicted plague.”


“Probably saved your hide. It is kind of a joke. Later you’ll see that.”

Fury dropped the butt in the ashtray. “I’m going to get a dog, a big one, lots of teeth, name him Idi Amin. I’m going to become a Catholic. Buddhism is too damn hard. It just leaves you hanging out there with all your projections and shit.” Beverly blew a perfect smoke ring.

“All is suffering, blah, blah, blah. And then what?” Fury asked. “What then?”

“I should marry you, Fury,” Beverly said, and Fury laughed. She heard herself laugh. She watched the sun make its final climb of the day down into the cellar of the world.

Her husband would paint it: Still Life in Sand. Knife and Sand Daisies. She shouldn’t have lain down next to the blue sand daisies. She should have stayed miles away from them. She’d forgotten, she’d been stupid.

She’d wanted roses on the day Marigold was born. For some reason, her husband had brought her daisies. She’d never been fond of daisies and she remembers them next to her hospital bed, and the hospital smell that came from them. She’d wanted roses. She’d gotten disinfected daisies. They wilted quickly.

When she walked into the cottage, her husband was lying on their bed, smoking. The air was heavy with disapproval and Cannabis. Sabine was sleeping on the end of the bed, her thumb in her mouth. Marigold was asleep on her stomach in her white wicker bassinet, cheek turned to the left. Fury put her hand on the tiny back, feeling the steady rise and fall.

She went into the bathroom. She had no energy to argue with him.
about not smoking around the babies. Yellow paint flecks drifted off the sides of the shower and the faded plastic curtain was streaked with mildew. She stepped into the steaming stall, filled the pink douche bag with water and white vinegar, and delicately inserted the plastic nozzle. The warm gush soothed her stinging labia and traces of blood flowed onto the wet cement. The sliver of Palmolive slipped out of her hands and whirled down the drain so she shampooed her body and her long hair with baby shampoo. She scrubbed every crease, every crevice of her body, working the soap until she was covered in white foam. She made long strokes down her thighs, her buttocks, pressed her fingers into her collarbone, tapped her sternum, massaged her belly that still pooched a bit. She bent forward, head touching her knees, grabbed her ankles, her fingers nearly touching. She was an archway, her hair a black waterfall. For a moment, she wanted to vomit, but she did not. The rushing hot water pounded her spine. Afterward, she threw the washcloth in the wastebasket.

It occurred to her that taking a shower alone, from now on, would be a frightening thing. She’d never been frightened before. But for now, he was in the next room, protecting her. But could he? Would he? How could they ever pull it off?

She pulled on her lilac velvet robe and wrapped her wet hair in a white towel. He’d be hungry. She went into the kitchen. She made one serving of macaroni and cheese and a cup of cream of tomato soup. Why was she doing this? Habit? Love? Repentance? He hadn’t touched her since it happened. She carried the food to him on a Chinese lacquered tray; she set it on the bedside table. He did not stir. He looked peaceful. She took an orange from his still life bowl on the dresser, sat down on the green shag rug and, with teeth-gritting concentration, made the peel come off in one piece. It was a sweet orange with soft pits. The room smelled of grass, oranges, and tomato soup. The milk from her full breasts seeped onto her robe, dark purple circles like a belly dancer’s costume. She looked at Marigold’s rosy cheek, wondering if she dreamed. Should the baby sleep through this sadness? The hostility? They said babies feel the vibes, bury it in their little unconscious minds.

She wanted to wake her. Feel the soft sucking on her nipple, the tiny fingers pinching her breast. Comforter, comfortee. Rapist, rapee? Who’s who? Does it matter?

She reassembled the orange peel, fitting the edges together so it looked whole. She cupped her hands around it and held it for a moment against her breasts. She placed the fake orange in his still life bowl and turned on the lamp. Soft golden light flowed through the silk scarf he’d draped over the Woolworth fluted shade.

His unfinished sketch of her and the baby was propped up against the wall below the ragged hole he’d punched. A disaster has occurred here, she thought. She remembered those emergency directions posted at the
exits of the social services building. “In case of earthquake, fire, tornado, insurrections of any sort, proceed to the…. Do not use the elevator.” During the last four point five tremors she ran outside, scuttled under the cypress tree. Foolish as a fly, her husband said.

The brass wind chime tinkled outside the back door, a thin echo of a sea gull’s screech. She flinched and shook her damp hair free. She thought she smelled garbage….but no, it was only the ocean.

“Hey. Hey, man,” she said. She couldn’t bring herself to use his name. Her voice entered the dim thick air of the room like an intruder. She wanted to talk. He looked at her. Then she didn’t want to. Rage still glowed behind his brown, oblique eyes. Denial is useful, she decided.

“Hey,” she repeated. “Did you know that according to the Greeks, Fury was an avenging deity who tormented criminals? She inflicted the plague. Did you know that?”

He raised one long Gauguin finger in front of his lips. “Shh,” he whispered, “You’ll wake the baby.” He bent his dark head over his plate and continued to eat.

She scooped up the sleeping baby and pressed her against her shoulder. She walked to the still life bowl, picked up the orange peel. I could throw it, she thought. I could... She dropped it on the floor. “Hush, yourself,” she said.

One day he would want to paint her. Standing in front of a pink wall, her lilac robe, long Cherokee hair drifting over sleeping baby. Smiling. Eventually he’ll bring her flowers and more vintage powder boxes from the Happy Dragon Thrift Store. He’ll tell her they’re made of French Ivory and want her to love him again.

Months later, Fury would recount the story to friends; it became a mania. She became boring, so she made up a different movie. Depending on the audience, she would render it ironic, absurd, almost a joke. It had happened elsewhere, LA, or Morocco, the weapon became gun, a shillelagh, the biker was a foreigner, he had no dick, she appropriated Faulkner. Or he became sexy, more like Dennis Hopper; I’ll take the S. There were no sand daisies. She tried to lose track of what really happened. But the part she could not seem to lose could never change, the part that never became a joke, of course, was her husband.

Jaimie Strickland