THE COCONUT MILK RUN

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ABSTRACT

The Coconut Milk Run is based on the three years I spent in my mother's home islands, the Northern Marianas—also known as the Islands of Thieves. We had been living on a yacht with my American father for twelve years, sailing around the South Pacific and Asia. When my mother ran away from him, I asked to go with her. What I found was a place and people overrun with violence and beauty.

The book addresses in part the othering of the Chamorro people, so I've included found material from explorer notes—i.e. Captain Fraycinet's Letters to a Friend. The memoir braids together three lives: mine, my mother's, and my troubled cousin Laurena's. It further deals with place, sexuality, faith, memory, suicide, and myth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Special thanks goes out to Ashley Talley, friend of my life. Could it really be an accident we were here at the same time. And to Eric Vithalani—for reading draft after draft, for always backing me, for finding the keys, for everything.

Just generally, I could never express the depth of my appreciation for the faculty and students of the Creative Writing Department, who have afforded me the opportunity to do what I love, in the best possible company.

DEDICATION

For my mother, Laurena, and the whole Dela Cruz family whose love and support means the world to me. And for my father, who taught me to write in the sand.

Part One: Return

Creation Myth

The Chamorro people say Puntan and Fu'una. Puntan the brother, caretaker of emptiness. Fu'una the sister, caretaker of nothing. They say the brother died and the sister plucked out his eyes and flung them high, sun and moon. She pushed his heavy breast until it arched, became the heavy sky. They say the brother's heart drummed and they say the drumming is time. The sister Fu'una rested the brother's back on the bottom of the nothing, laid it down gently on the nothing. They say she pounded and tilled the brother's back into earth and Taro grew and Pandanus grew and bees unfolded from the coconut trees. The sister smiled and cried, they say. Swam with sharks and followed whales, and in the sea near Guahan, became a rock that broke apart. They say every stone is a people. Some are not good. Some fish, muddy streams, are tender, and at the end of the day when everything is slow and the light is full of dust they say, "Come near you young children, and listen."

Leaving Motel Le Bambou, Nouvelle Caledonie (1989)

My mother leaves my father in the dark of, in the black of, in the middle of night.

Can I come with you? I ask.

A pause in my mother's going, one hand on the doorknob, the other on the suitcase. Better leave a note for your father, she says.

The room holds a table with spindly legs five steps from the narrow foam bed. A bare bulb hangs from the center. The kitchen is just one wall of the room, everything in miniature, the refrigerator comes only to my mother's knees.

I write the note in black marker while my mother waits in the doorway. Backlit by the soft light from the street, my mother is thin as a shadow. She weighs eighty-five pounds and her hair falls out in tufts like feathers. Sometimes, she spends time in front of the mirror. Reaches towards her own reflection. The note is taped to my side of the closet where, in the morning, the light from the opening door will hit it.

In Australia, they tell my mother that because I do not have a visa, we cannot wait there for our next flight. Twelve hours is too long to stay, so we will have to go to Japan and stay the night there.

Will it be cold? my mother asks.

In the airport gift shop, we buy two matching purple sweatshirts with koala bears stitched onto them. There is nothing we can do about our sandals.

On the plane, we huddle up in the scratchy blankets and breathe the raw, recycled air. Our skin dries out and our feet go numb. I watch the clouds below us, stacked like solid objects, and think of adventure, of refugees. My mother watches the seat in front of her and I don't know what she thinks.

My first view of Saipan from the plane listing in the sky: the water grows deep, grows black next to the island. Sharp, toothy cliffs. Trees burnt and twisted flat from the salt wind. Flat-roofed, blue cement houses. Narrow dirt roads, like veins.

My mother leans over me, presses her mouth to my ear: We are home.

Soon, we will step from my cousin Vincent's truck, our clothes that fast dampened with sweat, and find the house dwarfed by bamboo. Auntie Lou in the kitchen rinsing rice in a big sink. Behind her, the taotaomona trees full of spirits. Uncle Pedro, sitting shirtless under the sagging porch roof, rolling a joint dusted with cocaine. A curl of ants around his ankle. A few pecking chickens, one lame dog. The air clouded with fruit flies, the ground thick with starfruit.

Captain Fraycinet, *In a Series of Letters to a Friend* (1817), or: It is defended by the Sorrowful Virgin, The Holy Angel, and St Vincent

At length: the Marianne Islands. Here original habits mingle with the austere, superstitious manners of Spaniards. The bottom is good, the anchorage safe. Our minds, greedy of pleasure, make us eager. Rich countries we quitted make us eager.

Our first view. Trees are rare on mountains. Vast masses of bare rock, a painful contrast to the few slender, to the few pale, leaves. The skirts of the shore alone exhibit smiling. Our eyes, already saddened, rise at intervals, turn with regret. Our first view did not answer the idea we had formed.

Humata village: thirty hovels built on piles. Built of the ribs of palm leaves. The people exhibit a frightful, a disgusting, a robust, a savage. Dirty, stinking cloth covers women loins to knees. Wide trowsers cover men only to the middle of thigh. A disgusting, an active leprosy leaves on the body black and livid marks. Even when it disappears, a continual dread. They live and they die with a few ears of Indian corn. Here everything is hideous: the houses, and the specters.

The measure of a house (1989)

The house sags. It's loose around the middle, slack under the eyes. Cracks in its walls let in lines of red ants, a red dust to settle over the furniture. Through the broken screen door, mosquitoes and bees. Late at night, the house is a sound like buzzing. The house is at once falling down the hill and sinking into it. One day, it will be necessary to excavate. Because the heat does not go away, the house does not shrink or expand. It holds its breath. Except during the monsoon, when it becomes wet and waterlogged and sobs for days on end. The house wears no clothes. It is square and concrete and ashamed.

The inventory of the house as we come to it: Uncle Pedro and Auntie Lou. Their children: Ann-Margaret, the eldest—silent and stubborn. Vincent, excited. The elders say he has the gift, could see since babyhood, the ghosts of the island as clearly as he saw his own parents. Laurena, defiant, spilling over with life. Fransisco, the baby—missing teeth, wild. Ann-Margaret's husband Ron is quiet, self-effacing, until he drinks and sobs and stabs kitchen knives into the mattresses. Ann-Margaret's children: Edgar, Stacy, Michael. When my mother and I come into the house, we make it eleven people. And on the same sprawling red land, my mother's other brothers and sisters, and their children and their children's children. In the evening, there could be as many as thirty or more. A small village.

Captain Fraycinet, *In a Series of Letters to a Friend* (1818), or: Their shape is superior

The women, dark yellow, wear men's hats. A handkerchief covers the forehead, floats loose over the shoulders. The hair tied very low. The women, dark yellow, bestow favours for a rosary. Smoke segars of monstrous size. A sort of coquetry in displaying segars six inches long. Petticoats are very long, to the regret of–their legs are very well shaped, their walks conspire to fire the imagination. The men do not bush to offer up a sister. In church, like Christians; in the city, like savages. Painful to see a people given up to darkness.

Laurena, dark yellow (1989)

The boys driving down the red dirt roads. The boys whistling like honeyeaters in the night. Whistling her from bed so late. The boys all hands and low voices. The boys biting, sucking at her chest, until the skin breaks, bleeds. The boys who leave their names there, on her breasts, written in bruises. She bestows them favours, gives herself up to darkness. In church, she wears short red dresses, her legs well-shaped. Her walk fires the imagination. In church, she does not offer up a blush. My cousin Laurena changes her name to Lorraine and makes all the boys call her Rain.

Myth of the Ancients

The Chamorro people say: We came here for many reasons. We came here because we don't know why. Because there were too many people in the other place, because there was famine. In the other place, there were tribal wars. We can't remember the other place. Because there was fighting over god and earth, that's why. A catastrophe, a disaster. A volcanic eruption. We came because we felt the ocean was our mother and the stars were our father. The night before we left, we ate a good dinner, some of us danced and drank fermented coconut milk and fell asleep on the sand. And in the dark, before the sun was up, we pushed our sakmans into the water and raised the masts. We waved goodbye to those standing small on the vanishing shore, and then for years we drifted, listening to the swells. We drifted for many years, watching our own faces change, hearing our sounds change. When we came, we were a different people, a new people. And all we brought with us were slingstones and rice.

My mother and I came for many reasons. (1989)

Unpack our clothes, leave them folded neatly in stacks against the living room wall. Uncle Pedro passes through. The night before, Uncle Pedro had boiled a fruit bat whole in coconut milk for dinner. He ate the bat at the kitchen table, where a mouse trap made of cardboard and glue had captured a single squeaking mouse. After each bite, he licked his fingers, making a noise.

Many years ago, when his walk possessed the kind of energy that made his body look unwieldy or unhinged somehow, Uncle Pedro had been part of a gang that called themselves the Sons of Saipan. My father had seen him once break a beer bottle over a man's head in a restaurant. Just because he was Filipino, my father said.

Now, passing through, Uncle Pedro's foot leaves a black imprint on my mother's yellow skirt.

My mother passes the time smoking. Sitting on a white plastic chair in the red dirt at the front of the house. She does not shoo away the dogs or flies, but sits perfectly still with only her hand passing to and from her mouth. The first time I saw her smoking, not so long after we left the boat for the motel, she was embarrassed. Batted the smoke away, and came towards me smiling. But now, it's no secret. And each day, her sisters and she sit together in the evening and smoke thin, long, menthol cigarettes like the ones in American magazines. Drinking coffee so heavy with milk and sugar it leaves a paste at the bottom of their cups. They play mahh-jong, tiles clinking in their fingers. An unhurried, thoughtful sound. And if they talk, there are no questions.

During the empty and hot days of summer, my cousins lounge inside the house, cooling their bodies under the air conditioner, rub ice on their necks. They chew betel. Pick the green mangoes from the trees outside to dip in red salt that will stain their hands and mouths. My cousins crave salt and spice, will use salt and bouillon cubes to make tastes sharp and spiky to the tongue.

I stay inside, smush ants with my fingertips, and read the dusty volumes of Encyclopedia Britannica that Auntie Lou once ordered from a television infomercial late at night, and then had to buy so many new bookshelves to hold them. I try to imagine the day the encyclopedias would have come, probably several months after the initial order. It might have taken so long that the delivery would have come as a surprise. I think of the number of boxes that would have been carried into the house, how heavy they must have been. L-M is missing, or maybe it never came. The books are old now, the information outdated. The pages, once wet from rain coming through the unshuttered windows, are thick and warped.

Or else, I sit in a sun-soaked room at the back of the house, a bedroom rendered useless by the piles of clothes and trash, garbage bags of who-knows-what, and read a romance novel whose cover is missing and in which an English girl falls in love with the American pirate who abducted her. In the end, the pirate realizes that he will do anything for the girl, surrender his reckless ways. In the end, the pirate realizes that she is more captivating than even the sea.

For dinner, there are so many of us around the table, or sitting on the floor. My cousins stream in and bow to the elders. And so, of each elder, I too kneel, ask for a blessing.

Mumble the words *not* or *nora* and wait for their touch on my forehead. No one has expected this. A sudden hush. Tittering from the corners of the room. And I have done it because something in the ritual had appealed to me, maybe the grace of Laurena ducking her head, the way they had all moved into the gesture like habit. I have done it without thinking, amazed at the way my cousins had become humble. The laughter, the focus of so many eyes, and I move towards my mother.

Ay, it's okay nenny girl, Auntie Lou says.

Her voice is gentle—sweetly sympathetic—and I flinch inwardly. Looking at the room, I back towards the door. A small moment, but I will never try to even say one word in this language.

For dinner, there is rice left over from some other meal in a covered bowl. Some of the grains are crunchy and translucent. There is canned tuna in oil which has been fried in a shallow pan with soy sauce and cabbage. There is spam, in thick pink slices with crisp, black edges. Mahi-Mahi cooked by the acid of lemon juice and served afloat in coconut milk. Laurena cracks a raw egg into her bowl of rice.

We eat with our fingers. I know how to set a table, where to put the salad fork, the dessert fork. I know how to set my knife, the precise angle at which it should lie on the plate. Can tell the difference between lobster fork and oyster fork, can remember how to fold a linen napkin so that it stands like a hat on the plate, but I eat with my fingers too, feeling for the first time the oil of food on my fingertips and lips, the starch of rice on my fingertips, the residual stickiness.

In the evening, when the shadows move across the yard, baths are taken outside, beside the house. The brush is thick with bird noises. A big black barrel of cold rain water, leaves sailing the surface, and a washcloth. Skin raised with goosebumps. Soap and shampoo quickly, because mosquitos stick to the skin and smear when you slap at them. Zoris slip over the mossy rocks. From the trunk of a tree sprouts an orchid plant, its purple leaves lush and startling in the half-light.

At night, my mother and I sleep on foam mattresses in the living room. Television mumbling in the background, spiders unfurling in the ceiling corners. Sometimes, Uncle Pedro falls asleep on the couch. His round belly rising, his mustache trembling, his snoring loud as a car engine. My mother and I sleep in t-shirts and jeans and socks under the whir of a fan. Wake up sometimes under the couch, having rolled there in the night.

On the phone, my father's voice is small and distant as a star: Hannah. Making my name lonely. He sleeps in the bed I left empty. Wakes up sometimes clutching my clothes, also empty.

How was your flight? he asks.

We stopped in Japan, I tell him. There was snow falling outside. It was clean and white and I held it melting in my hands.

At Grace Christian Academy (1989)

Drive to school with my mother in Uncle Tony's old car with the side panels rusted through. I lift the floor mat and spit my gum through the hole there and onto the road rushing underneath us looking, with its bright flecks, like water. Last year this time, I was lying on the deck of the boat and watching the ocean just beside the boat rush by until it made me drowsy. The car radio is broken, stuck on a country music station. My mother's window only goes down about two inches and when she exhales the smoke of her cigarette hangs like a fog between us.

Grace Christian Academy is on one of Saipan's higher hills. A fairly new school, and small. From the side of the building, the view is of trees and lagoon and reef. The school's colors are gray and white. The hallways themselves have no doors at either end, and so they smell of mold and there are muddy tracks on the tile. We can hear the muffled voices of teachers and students through the skinny walls. In a small office, an elderly woman informs us that because of the difference in school systems I will have to make a choice. My mother sits bolt upright in the chair; she keeps her purse clutched to her body.

You'll have to decide if you want her to jump ahead one year or stay back one year, the woman explains.

My mother looks surprised.

I'll jump ahead, I say.

We're very worried, ma'am, that the transfer from a French school system to an American one will slow her down in her subjects.

But I want to jump ahead, I say.

And my mother is nodding then, saying, Yes, that's fine—let her jump ahead. She holds my hand and on her face there is a faraway look.

She'll need to buy her uniform before she can begin.

You don't. My mother leans forward. You don't have ones she could use to start.

Ay, no madam. Each child must buy her own.

Oh yes, of course. My mother pats my knee, smiles over at me.

In the afternoon, we have my uniform made at a Korean dress shop. Gray skirt, with a single box pleat. White, collared shirt with an emblem on the pocket. We buy one skirt and one shirt. We don't need more than one pair, my mother asks me, and I shake my head no. The school has given me a pink gym shirt with a large cross on it. My mother cuts my pair of black pants off above the knee and cuffs them, so I can wear them for school exercises.

My mother is sure to wash and press the uniforms at least twice a week, carefully removing stains from the white shirt. She lays them out on the floor, flat and starched.

The Virgin de los Remedios (1805)

The tribe of Carolinians arrives in long, leaky canoes from a nameless island. They wash up on the beach with burnt and blistered skin, hair bleached golden from the sun. The chief and some followers come to meet them. The Carolinians talk with their hands. Draw a typhoon in the air. Show with their gestures and noises how the winds had snapped palms, flattened huts and crops. How livestock, children, and elderly people were washed out to sea. The Carolinians point to their boats–they have brought water, yams, a few moldy stalks of sugar cane, a goat, one dead hen, and a statue of the Virgin de los Remedios. They stand the saint in her blue and white robes, with her hands clasped at her breast and a wide circle of gold stars around her head, lopsided in the sand.

The statue had been left to them ten years before by a Spanish woman, Maria Anna, who had come with a small group of explorers years before. The Carolinians donated the Virgin de los Remedios, the patron saint of fishing, as thanks for their new home.

The original names of the Carolinian settlers are not known. Soon after they arrived, the men and women were baptized in the Santa Remedio church with new, Catholic names. So many brothers and sisters selecting different names, the bloodlines were permanently muddled. They took the soft, gentle names of saints. *Juan. Pedro. Angela. Isidro.* Combined those with the names of birds, *Teitiga,* the red honeyeater, and words with promise, *agapa'*, headed in the right direction.

Glass house, or the first moment of her leaving (1970)

My mother, seventeen, perfumes herself against malevolent spirits. Dabs the scent on her wrists and neck. Everyone in the house is asleep. Her four sisters in the sagging bed behind her, their hair knotted over the pillows like seaweed. The night is warm, moist. The sisters have kicked off the thin sheets. In the bed together, they are heavy-limbed and pale. My mother is the smallest, the darkest. She tiptoes over her three brothers lying, fully clothed, on the floor. She can hear the gentle snoring of her parents coming from the other room. At this time of night, there are no cars bumping down the uneven roads, only the immediate noise of her family, then far off the sound of surf, a dog howling, coconuts falling on the tin roofs.

The empty sand path to the beach is empty. There is no danger of being caught; most of the island falls asleep before midnight, but still she looks occasionally over her shoulder and hurriedly makes the sign of the cross.

At this hour the tide is low, the ocean peeled back to the reefs a mile out. The smell of brown algae dried from the sun stinks up the wind. Bare feet pick their way through the scurrying hermit crabs.

My mother, a girl in a pink school uniform, does not notice the moon drifting like a buoy in the dark water. She has no ear for surf dashing the reef. She sits instead, facing inland, on the cool sand with her dry arms hooked around her legs. Rolls and smokes four cigarettes, tucks the burnt ends inside crab holes. She waits.

Inside the glass house, lights pop on. One by one. The glow falls onto the beach and tugs at the shadows. My father enters, still young. His wife follows, pale faced, hair the color of wheat swinging down to her hips. My mother lets down her own hair, tugs at the ends, dry as grass. Music leaks from the seams in the glass. By now, she has learned all the songs and so she half-sings the lyrics under her breath. The beach is dark, and the water and the sky are dark. The house is lit up from the inside like a shop window. Or else, like a movie screen.

Inside the house, my father and the woman move through the rooms, they smoke a joint and my mother imagines she can smell it. The two inside climb the curving staircase, which will in my mother's memory build until it winds up at least three levels and in some of her memories even further, in some the staircase keeps going and has no top. On the amber wall behind them, my father's shadow shadow stretches long over his wife's. The blond woman says something to him, a scrap of talk thrown over her shoulder.

My mother is seventeen, catching her breath as he pushes the woman up against the clear wall, leaning in hard for a kiss. She holds her breath the length of the kiss, exhaling only when it is over. Something fierce grows inside of her, something that sees only the tableau unfurling in front of her.

Going home with her hair smelling of sea and her bottom caked with damp sand, my mother is a new person, headed in the right direction. And every night that she can, my mother comes down to the beach. She doesn't care that she is learning to sleep less and less, or that at school her head droops over the books. She continues to come. Every night she can sneak out, my mother slips barefoot down the sandy path and waits for the glass house to light up.

He notices (1970)

It takes nearly a year for my father to notice her. And by the time he does, my mother knows what he likes to eat for dinner, knows his smile, can tell the impatience of his gestures. She hears his music in her head as she walks through her days, and her imagination swims with the idea of leaving. She wants to leave more than anything.

My father, long-hair, John Lennon eyeglasses, drives a red VW convertible, keeps one arm around his wife. Today, the island makes him happy. He has found the harbor safe, the anchorage good. And a happy thought has come flitting into his head. Having sailed to the islands on the groovy tide of the late sixties with hash-hish and marijuana stuffed in all the fake outlets on the yacht, he has grown fond of arguing in favor of drug use especially. Nights with friends, he insists loudly that all drugs should be legalized. The premise is delivered with a crooked smile and a fist thumping hard on the table: a crime needs a victim, and the victim couldn't be defined as the user who is a rational adult. No victim, to my father, equals no crime. In these arguments, anyone can see that he is supremely happy. His sensitive mouth twists wryly, his eyelids shut partway, and he leans back in his seat.

Now, speeding over the island with the wind ruffling his wife's hair so it looks like something made of gold, he grins broadly, thinking how he will prove it here. He snaps his fingers to the music spilling from the radio, anticipating the debate and the shock, looking forward to navigating the gray loopholes of the law, looking forward to winning. In this way, my father is an artist, able to take the legal system and bend it like rubber, able to reshape the world with nothing more than arrogance and fast talk.

Up ahead, on the dirt road, a teenage girl in the street chases a naked baby. He brakes sharply, a cloud of dust, and she looks up. My mother is embarrassed, ashamed to be here in the dirt road with flyaway hair and bare feet and her sister's crying baby running ahead of her. One hand goes up as if to hide her face. She thinks of the way he and his wife move through their clean house lit up with lights. She thinks, Why does he have to see me like this? Thinks distractedly that it is a shame her sister's baby is such an ugly one, bald and dirty. Wishes to be anywhere else. Briefly, my mother is angry with her sister, her whole family, and their poverty. She straightens her back and looks at my father, her eyes narrowed.

But my father, looking at the shapely outline of her legs through the transparency of her skirt says out loud to his wife, Who is that girl?

Captain Fraycinet, *In a Series of Letters to a Friend* (1819), or: Translations

The primitive language of the inhabitants of the Marianne islands is monotonous, difficult. They have adopted the language of their master, the language of their vices. But sometimes, translate the one of their speeches word for word: you will be astonished. A native said to me yesterday, 'The aspect of the island has I know not what of the majestic, that enlarges the mind, purifies the thoughts.' And, speaking of the lightness of the *praos*, he said: 'like the birds of the ocean they cut the waves, and display the wind: they are the wind itself.'

He has adopted the language of his masters, the language of his vices (1990)

My grandfather is Joaquin de la Cruz. My grandfather is silence. He farms sweet corn and sugar cane. Raises koi fish in mossy ponds, their bodies brushing red against my fingers. After the war, when he was eighteen, he went with American soldiers to search the caves of the island for survivors. Walking back at dusk with no survivors, they saw a cow turn into a goat, into a dog, into a bird. Bad luck, Joaquin said. Now, my grandfather refuses to speak, refuses to know English. Sitting together, my grandfather and I are silence. Sitting together, he takes my hands and shows me to braid baskets out of pandanus. The smoke from his cigarette in my hair. His skin against mine dry as paper.

The Wow (1977)

Eight years later, and when my father comes walking golden into the office where she works now as a clerk, asking would she like to play some tennis sometime, asking does she know how to play tennis, my mother turns her dark head, pretends she doesn't recognize him, and says maybe.

In the time he has been on the island, my father has managed to legalize marijuana for six months before those outraged by the proceedings contested and had the law overturned. Still, he wears the air of the victor, careening wildly on the high that comes with changing a place, just like that. Perhaps, too, he senses that this act, among so many others, will further him as a legend. Years from now, he thinks, the people in the South Pacific will remember the name, Ben Abrams.

So, when my mother turns her head disdainfully and says maybe, he reminds himself that there are plenty of other girls, gives up asking her on dates after that, and every time he comes in, she says, Good morning, Mr. Abrams, stiffly like she doesn't care, like her palms and the backs of her knees aren't damp with sweat. And he takes out island girls one after the other. Their fathers are suspicious; they grumble about what this American man wants with their young daughters. To which, my father grins and says, Hey, dark meat is sweeter. Still, looking at my mother, sitting there with her back ramrod straight, he smiles and shakes his head that there is really no other woman as beautiful as her on the island.

He's divorced now. Separated, at least. The woman with the wheat hair lives alone in the glass house and my mother is no longer interested in night visits to the beach. My

father now lives alone on the yacht, Slow Dancer, he sailed to get to Saipan. He begins plans for a new project: the island's first discotheque. Already, he's opened up a head shop, sold black light posters and glass bowls. Single-handedly imported real music to the island. This island had no *real music* before me. So, it's a disco. Right on the beach, under the waving palms. He buys and renovates an old building, fills the rooms with air-conditioners and mirrors, strobe lights and speakers. Everything high-end, top dollar. In the fall of 1978, my father opens up The Wow.

Captain Fraycinet, *In a Series of Letters to a Friend* (1818), or: The common people, very superstitious

Superstition is the daughter of ignorance. Superstitions do not fail to have fatal effects. Since our arrival, four shocks of an earthquake are attributed to the dissolute morals of the settlement. If we were to believe the inhabitants, God pays attention.

Lying in the sun, Laurena speaks. Her shoulder hot against mine like melting. (1989)

Hannah, are you sleeping? Don't sleep. You want to know something: Tony tried to kiss me. No, not that Tony. Our *cousin* Tony. He followed me into the room, and he tried to kiss me. He's always been like that. You shouldn't trust him. You want to know something: his sister's pregnant. Marla. She's not even saying who the father is. I'm not saying that. I'm just saying, be careful of boys. And at school, be careful. They'll tie mirrors to their shoes. If you run, they'll catch you. Your first day, you should wear a bra. The shirts are so thin. Try not to be so shy all the time. Be careful, don't be so shy.

The Myth of the Lourdes Spring

The Chamorro people say they did not want the war. They did not care about the war. The Japanese were nice, they say. The American soldiers were good, had medicine and fine tobacco. They say that when the beaches caught fire, and the sky was like fireworks, they gathered their bags of potatoes, their pots and pans and crosses and children, and headed for the hills. For the dark caves full of bats in the hills. They say it lasted too long. That the food ran out. The birds flew away. From the caves, they could see the gray ships in the water and the planes in the sky. They say the Japanese farmers ran off the cliffs. With their small children, hand in hand, off the cliffs. At night, the sky was bright and loud, the ocean red. At night, they prayed. On hands and knees, they prayed. On the rocky cave floor, their fingers moving the rosary beads. Water bubbled from the ground, they say. Fresh water from the ground. They carried the water in their cupped hands to the sick. Held it to the lips of the dying and felt death go away. The spring they called Lourdes, and left their idols there.

During typhoons, the family assembles (1991)

Candles line the window sills. Even ants have shadows. Dogs swim to the door, scratch to be let in. The beer sits warm on the table. Uncle Pedro sends long arcs of red betel spit thudding into a tin can. We children have seen our grandmother's ghost in the upstairs bedroom. So now, the Aunties have put away the mah-jongg trays, take out the Ouija boards and summon her spirit. They say, Ana, are you there? They talk to my grandmother, while the candles melt, run down the walls, and the rain piles up into an ocean outside.

At Grace Christian Academy (1989)

They are here to save us, to teach us. The missionaries are here to sing. To teach us God's history. Grace. To make us tie up our long hair. To make us shine our shoes. Clean our plates. Say our prayers. Become saved. They are young and pale and earnest.

The missionary teachers call us outside, gather us outside. They put us all together around the tables, under the flame trees. In gray skirts and pants and shined shoes with mirrors, in pressed white shirts with cross emblems.

The teachers carry the dead frogs in plastic tubs. Give us plywood boards, a few nails, hammers, scalpels, frogs. We nail the frogs to the boards, pale, bloated bellies up. We use six nails.

The teachers hold up a limp frog, show us the first incision. Not doing it themselves, but pointing to where it should be. They count it off, we small and cruel doctors poised with our instruments. On three, we cut just under the chin down to the middle of the belly. We open. We slice the chest crosswise. We pull the skin and muscle back. Break the thin bones.

A second of nothing. We look down at them. The air heavy, the flame trees still and bright above our heads. A second of nothing, then the lungs of the frogs labor out. So many small, white balloons, delicate blue veins. With every breath, the lungs expand, go limp. The teachers say softly, Oh no. They say, Oh God.

The frogs struggle on the boards, eyes blinking furiously, mouths yawning wide. The frogs give great gasping breaths, balloon lungs inflating, red foam trickling from the corners of the mouths. A few of those that writhed on the boards, writhed so hard they came loose

of their six nails and went dragging away across the red dirt of the school yard, trailing their insides behind them in the dirt. Oh no. Oh God.

Captain Fraycinet, *In a Series of Letters to a Friend* (1819), or: In the small palaces of stone and wood

Agana village: huts standing in tobacco plants; bordered by sago trees, from which inhabitants make cakes, indifferent enough, and biscuits somewhat better, but very doughy. Two rooms, separated by deals of bamboo or cocoa-tree. In one, the cooking and household work, and here the brothers, sisters, cousins, pigs, and friends of the family, sleep pell-mell. In the other, the master of the house sleeps alone with the smoky figures of saints. The family assembles, recites prayers every hour of the day. Affecting, if we did not know how easily these senseless people forget their religious duties, as soon as the prayers are at an end. They smoke and chew the whole day; live only on tobacco, areca nut mixed with lime and a few leaves of betel.

After typhoons, the house comes down (1989)

At my grandfather's house, koi fish and guppies are found dead in the garden, washed from their ponds. The wood holds water and rot; it gives up too easily in the wind and rain. There are holes in the roof, or else, no roof at all. Sand has become part of the carpet. Everywhere, palm leaves and sand and hermit crabs who have lost their shells. With every storm, a part of the house comes down, is rebuilt in concrete. Stronger, not as pretty. And one day, there will be no house, there will be nothing but a cement lot full of chickens made uneven by the roots that push up from underneath.

The first year on Saipan, a typhoon comes spinning off the coast of Africa and flattens the island a week before Christmas. In the tumbled yard, my grandfather strings up long ropes of oversized bulbs, and in the sand we plant a plastic Santa, tall as a real man, a row of reindeer lit-up from the inside. A picture of Laurena and me in matching dresses, twisting shyly under the lights, faces obscured by the pixilation and light.

So blurred is the photograph, that a person might not notice that there is something wrong with our ears. In the early morning the day before, a box had come for me from my father's mother, full of Hanukkah presents. A ballerina's pink tutu and bejeweled tiara. A wand with streamers, a makeup case. A dolly with a hard, smug porcelain face. I made a small ceremony of unpacking the gifts in the living room, carelessly strewing wrapping paper about.

Your makeup case is empty, Laurena taunts.

That's because, I say softly leaning towards her, makeup makes your skin wrinkled and old by the time you're twenty, and before that it makes you look cheap.

Bitch, Laurena says.

Later, while Laurena is out getting her ears pierced, I take the stickers for her new, oversized Hello Kitty dollhouse, a swank pink mansion, and paste them about haphazardly. The dining room's chandelier sticker goes upside down on the bathroom floor, looking like an out-of-place tree popping out of the tile. The stairs I put on the roof of the house, appreciating the fact that any imaginary character who used them would walk straight off the clean, pink gutters to their death. I park the car in the dining room and the clawfoot tub in the bedroom.

Then, I hide in the garden.

Years later, she will say it was I, overcome with jealousy, who first clawed the new earrings from her in an abrupt catlike rage, but I will only remember our ragged and bleeding earlobes and Laurena screaming at me over her father's shoulder, in her small hands a rock the size of a grapefruit which she hurled my way. And even this, will become something to laugh about, as if it had somehow brought us closer. We will always keep these fights, hold them dear, proof positive of our affection.

At Grace Christian Academy (1989)

The books have names like, History From the Christian Perspective. The teachers are blond and from California. They have all been saved and born again. This is possible for us, too. Before lessons, we stand by our desks and put our hands over our hearts. We pledge our allegiance to the-flag-of-the-United-States-of-America-and-to-the-republic-for-which-it-stands, our voices a satisfying chant and smoothly we then move into the pledge of allegiance to the Bible-God's-Holy-Word. The schoolrooms are divided by particleboard and we can hear the lessons from other rooms. Air conditioners rattle the windows.

In my class, there are twenty students. Two other Americans, both boys. And one of them has a small, pinched face, a dome-like forehead. The teachers mildly reprimand the children who tease him. I make sort-of friends with a Spanish girl, Aleili, who used to live in Oakland, California. She pulls her frizzy hair sleekly back into a bun, so tight her eyes squint, wears large gold earrings, and paints her mouth scarlet. Because she is from the Mainland, we defer to her. California becomes Cali. She teaches us to make little booklets with questions in them like, Who is your crush? Who do you want to marry? When we pass the pamphlets around, all the girls write down Jesus Christ.

At lunch, we sit at long gray tables outside and eat white rice and fried spam. If there is too much water used in the rice, it becomes a pudding. They use a cup to scoop out handfuls of orange chips from a barrel. After lunch, we stand in rows and sing, As the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after thee. For some of the songs, we clap and sway back and forth and feel like one.

We put on our gym uniforms in the afternoon, pink shirts with crosses and black cuffed shorts, starched and ironed. Then we run around the school building twice—a race.

I learn to ask God for strength in every small task. I learn to ask for His wisdom before a test, and also before these runs. I say in a whisper, Lord be on my side.

We have lice that jump from our hair to our shirt sleeves. At home, my mother goes over my head with a fine-toothed comb while I stand topless before her in the yard. She pops the bugs between her thumbnails, scrubs my head with a shampoo that smells like bleach and chops my hair off to my ears.

Before we left (1989)

After she moves off the boat and takes up residence at Motel le Bamboo, my mother goes to work in the kitchen of a Mexican restaurant. As she does not have the proper papers to work in a French territory, she is paid under the table. Enough to give rent money to the woman at the front desk at the end of every week. Enough to tuck a little away every day in the lamp base.

In the restaurant kitchen, everything is made of aluminum. There are deep sinks. Extendable hoses with nozzles the size of sunflowers to rinse off dishes. There is steam rising thickly. The floury smell of fresh tortillas, the sound of meat sizzling. My mother is the only cook. She gets there before they open, stays until late at night and then walks the four miles home to where I will be lying in bed in the small cot in our room listening for the lonely sound of her footfall.

The soap at Taco Taco is strong. Dissolves the food on dishes just as it dissolves my mother's hands. Even when she wears gloves, the soap manages to get in and her skin whitens and peels as if they have been dunked in acid. The skin hardens and deep cracks form in the palm and on the pads of her fingers, sometimes when she bends her stiff hands, they bleed. Above her hands, on her forearms, she collects burns from oil splatters, small round marks.

After school, I hang out in the restaurant, swiveling on the barstools. The manager is young and happy, he jokes and gossips with my mother about his love affairs. The restaurant stays crowded; there is no other Mexican restaurant on this island, and my mother and I laugh about how they pronounce words like taco, so seriously. I think that things will go on this way indefinitely, or I do not think at all.

Her name is Stella. Eighteen years old, black, smooth skin and a loud laugh. This is how to whistle like a bird, she tells me. This is the proper way to shuffle cards. And if you do it this way, you can cheat. During the day, for just a few francs, she will sand and varnish the wood trim on Slow Dancer.

Doesn't she sing like a lark? my father says.

Yes, I answer. And watching his face, I say, She's very pretty.

Stella whistles like a lark, and after he pays her, the francs clink in her pocket as she walks away.

On deck: a pair of pants, a rumpled blouse. In the sky: a hot midday sun. My mother puts a finger to her lips, says, Shhhh. I don't ask why we are not at the restaurant, where she brings me for the long, two hour French lunch. Right now, other families are eating lunch, sandwiches of pate and softened brie on crusty bread. But my mother and I, we move on our tiptoes, she waving me along ahead of her. Downstairs, the cabin is half-shadow and, where the skylights are, dust is stuck in legs of light.

Who knows how long it takes them to notice us, but to me the scene unfolds in slow motion. Stella moves over my father, but when she spots us, her shriek is a high sound, a squawk. She leaps out of the bed like she's on fire, one hand covers her mouth, the other the dark hair between her legs, and she runs out into the daylight with her breasts shaking.

My mother's hands are heavy on my shoulders. My father, pillow over his lap, shouts, Jesus Christ. His shoulders glisten with sweat, and he stares over my head at my mother. I stare at his shadow curving on the wooden wall of the cabin. Count the books on the shelf behind him. I can hear my mother's breathing, feel it on my neck, hot and harsh. I can hear my father's curses as his shadow points its finger accusingly at my mother. Hear him go from imploring with my name to furious. Why did you have to bring her? he asks. In the distance, Stella's footsteps vanish down the dock. I can hear the whole world: my own heart, the traffic from the streets, the gulls giggling overhead, and I can even make out the lashing sound of rain as it falls, so many miles away, in sheets over the empty ocean.

The first time your father asked me out to the boat, my head was like, Wow, this is fancy stuff (1978)

A year after my mother gave him maybe, my father tries again, mentions a party on his boat, asks if she wants to go. Her head fills with the movies, with starlets drinking champagne on the decks of sleek white yachts tied to docks. She calls her father to say she'll be working overtime, that she'll be late getting home. It's a risk. Once she had stayed out past curfew with cheerleading friends. When she came home, her father sitting outside by the koi fish pond, said nothing. And the next morning her father had still said nothing, but come into the room where my mother sat with her brothers, holding in his hand her cheerleading uniform and a pair of scissors. He cut the costume to shreds, the fabric floating down slowly. He left the pieces like confetti on the living room floor.

The moon shakes in the water by the dock. My mother looks around for a boat. There is only my father in ripped jeans and a small wooden dinghy with no engine. Sweat at her nape, and she asks where the boat is, hearing how the panic shakes her voice. He points, and she spies a fragile mast, rigging fine as cobwebs, wobbling a mile out. She has never been on a boat before, has never learned to swim. He rows, and she holds her pocket book in her lap. Water seeps into her sandals.

Not a party, just two other people. Another American guy, another island girl. My mother is seasick from the rocking of the boat. Her stomach feels like ocean; bile rises in her throat. She can't eat a bite. Sips a glass of water carefully. Nods and tries to smile. Goes home at eleven, and stays awake all night.

She keeps him a secret; doesn't speak his name to anyone, not one person, even as she continues to meet with him, even as she makes love to him on a pile of lifevests, my mother does not say one word until the following year when she, with a belly just beginning to show, will bring him to my grandfather's house, and announce that she is five months pregnant and leaving—not just leaving, but leaving now, tonight.

My father says, This is the way it's going to be (1979)

You want come with me, raise the baby on the boat, then you come. Otherwise, I'm going without you. It won't be easy. And I don't want to be married again. I like to move, you know. I don't ever want to be still. It will be hard. I'll take care of you. I'll take care of the baby. It won't be easy.

But my mother's bags are already packed.

They do, in fact, get married after his divorce is finalized. I am two years old. They are married before a Justice of Peace. Both in plaid shorts and sandals, hair messy, smelling of sea. Me, asleep in diapers in my father's arms.

At some point, my mother orders a ring from a catalog for herself. It is thin and flexible as bird cage wire, and there is lover's knot tied in it. Over the years, it will warp and twist until it looks more like fishing line looped and glinting around her finger.

My mother is Natividad Concepcion de la Cruz (1989)

She came back, my mother, and all she brought with her: a daughter, a maiden name, and his best leather suitcase.

Part Two: The Trench

Small islands, deep water

The islands are an arcing of piled up lava, volcanic peaks stretching for daylight. Their roots go deep into the sea. The islands are made of tectonic collisions, of explosions over time that have built up mountains. My mother's family lives on the small peak of a mountain, five and a half miles by twelve and a half miles. The island is just the top of a mountain which has dried in the sun. There are shells imbedded in the soil, even in the highest places. On Mount Ta'pachau, the highest point of land on the island, where a Jesus twelve feet tall has been raised on a white cross, there are shells and coral branches broken at his feet.

On Saipan, there is a grotto, a hole in the island, a mouth wide open to the sea. The walls of the grotto are curved, overgrown with kudzu. One hundred steps under great, shadowy trees and sleeping bats down to the grotto, where the water is so bright, it looks as if it's been lit below by lights.

A long line of us, nearly the whole family, scramble down the steps all to show me the grotto. My cousins complain and giggle, Ayaday, why is there no elevator? Oh my god, shit, I think a bug is in my hair.

Reach the grotto and look up to find the sky shrunken. When we speak, our voices echo, come back startled and shrill, so that eventually we say nothing but look around, hop from rock to rock, peer concernedly into the water. We grin at each other and point to where the light shifts in the water.

When the island is battered by typhoons, the grotto is calm. Underwater, you can see one hundred feet, it's that clear. Expect barracudas, expect sharks. Expect sea turtles

and clouds of fish billowing up like tornadoes and napoleans and startling light. A chill from the labyrinthine passages going out to deeper water. Looking up, expect to see the darkness give way to a rubbed out circle of blue sunlight, with beams wobbling down and, where they hit, that spot is illuminated in sharpest relief, and there in the center of sun through water, like erasure poetry which leaves only what is vital, like the fuse to a bulb which is the heart of the bulb, the clearest light. Some of those who die here while diving are not always found, sometimes, their bodies drift out and are lost in the trench.

Going back up, no one in our family speaks. Some vital energy gone, everyone hungry and tired. Some of my cousins who are fat and round as eggs, huff and sweat and struggle on the stairs. My mother climbs up nimbly, quiet and smoking a cigarette.

Beside the island, an abyss. After explorers came for the land, they came for the sea. For depth. For decades, they have been coming to here to dive down and come back with stories of fish glowing in the dark. Off the coast of the island, the ocean goes down for miles until there is no light and beyond that to where there is only heat and where no person could survive. All this water and no one in my mother's family knows how to swim.

They've got the funniest light down there. Not of the sun. It's unexpected, this beautiful science.

Below us the crust is not solid. Thin. Like the shell of an egg compared to the size of the egg. Big plates of thin crust floating the molten. And the oceanic plate is heavier. The oceanic plate is subducted. Creates trenches, mountains, black chimney smokers spewing minerals, cities. The concept of ocean is changing.

One of us swims the deep gulf near Tinian. One of us swims lonely. Finding the way through reef breaks at night to kick skinny legs into the bottomless. Later, the rest of us will marvel, swirling water in glasses: It must have been like swimming in space.

We have dredged the deep water. Trawled the dark trench. Lowered lines into the North Atlantic and hoisted sea stars, heavy and dripping. Made echo maps on wet paper: sending sound to bounce off the solid down there, while the whole world went quiet and we counted the seconds on our fingers. Go push your lips up to the salty wave, speak, and wait for the sound to be returned.

We have found it alive, the icy darkness. We have.

The seafloor is littered with the lost. 129 men. 99 men. So many ships we say graveyards and think of snapped masts, fish bursting through the collapsed. The seafloor is littered with things we drop and come back for later.

We have netted the lost. Hydrogen bombs. Secret codebooks. Hauled up children's marbles. A lady's wristwatch. The hungry among us have been treasure hunting for so many tons of California gold. Sold the rights of shattered hulks to Hollywood: darkened theatres weeping into popcorn.

Along the way, we built cameras to photograph through miles of water and disappearing light. To put secrets down on glossy paper. This is ours, we've told ourselves. We have plugged in microphones, pressed our ears to the speakers. Tuned into the fury of the Gorda Ridge. Listened to volcanic outbursts of Juan de Fuca, made notes on yellow pads about heat on the dark seabed, how it can beget a jungle of life. We fall asleep cradling radios that spill whale songs, like the private acoustics of our mothers' bellies.

On top of the long ropes, the anchors, the echoes, we have sent ourselves. First with the lenses of polished turtle shells, fins of palm leaves and tar. First, on big, stiff-legged kicks. On jackknives into the blue. We have trained ourselves in apnea, in little deaths. Seven minutes. Nine minutes without air. Some of us who are experts say, Only death is next. The body in blackout, with its convulsing limbs, dances a Samba. Still, we have weighted ourselves to tunnel faster. To plunge alone with just one narrow beam of light 450 feet before beginning the slow frequency, big amplitude, kick up.

Trieste, a word like the sadness of saints touches bottom, sends up a little gusting of sand. A little sigh. It has been four and a half billion years since we were last here, the deepest point of the world. This is 35,813 ft. Seven miles of water above our heads. Everest underwater, and then a mile. Sixteen thousand pounds per square inch of pressure. Eight tons of pressure. The crushing weight of twelve thousand hollow hearts packed into one cubic inch of pressure.

Modesty, or Laurena offers up a blush (1989)

At the beach, Laurena refuses a swimsuit for an oversized shirt, a pair of shorts. Only up to her knees in the water, arms extended for help, fingers splayed. I hold her up, so in the shallow, warm water she floats on her belly, spitting salt water and arching her back to keep her hair dry.

In wide, slow arcs I turn her, sometimes letting my hands drop a little so she is just floating there on my fingertips, her baggy tshirt and shorts ballooning out around her. For a long time, we spin slowly out, and into deeper water until I'm floating too, treading the warm water.

She panics and sinks a little grabbing my neck in a chokehold, I don't like the dark—it's like it's alive or something, like an animal. Looking down, I see we have floated over a black patch of algae, like hair. The tips of the seagrass slip around my ankles.

Later, she seeks out the shade on the beach, afraid of being browned by the sun. She mocks me from a distance, You're already blacker than the rest of us man. Aren't you ashamed of showing your body like that?

Floating on my back, what she says comes in fragments—her voice alternating with the weird, heavy silence of water. I try to keep myself submerged. The sun is so strong it dries the beads of water on my skin in seconds, and the heat and smell of salt make me drowsy. I float out to a sandbar and sink into the sand, cool and gritty under me. From here, I can see Laurena standing impatiently under a tree, her hands shielding her eyes. I feel like staying out here forever until barnacles grew up on my back, until my skin scaled over. And so even when I hear her calling me back in, I decide instead to swim out and feel the cool of deeper water and even feel the land giving way.

Going back, finally, with my shriveled hands and feet, Laurena walks down the beach and stands ankle-deep in the water, looking both panicked and angry. You were so far out, she says, flinging it like an accusation.

And walking out of the water, I can feel the weight as it returns to my body, awkward.

Hydrography

My father lives on a boat so he can move, drift, float. So that everything in his life will be drowned in his wake, irretrievable and irrelevant. When he was twenty-six, my father built the boat he called Slow Dancer with his own two hands in Taiwan. He bought the design from a man in Seattle, and spent eighteen months building the boat. It was forty-three feet long and weighed sixteen tons.

My father is a hydrographer of sorts, charting out the world and recording it according to no science but his own. He looks to the horizon. Says he doesn't like to live in the past. Things change. Says, Hey, that's the way it goes. My father says, Hey I like to be happy, so I don't look back. What's the use of thinking of mistakes that have already been made? I like to look forward, I like to move.

Sailing is exploration is getting away, my father says. And it is discovery too. Some people think it's lonely, but not me. I'm not afraid of going. I'm not afraid of leaving everything and everyone behind.

When he discovers a new place, my father loves and abuses it as perhaps we all do with something new. The island is great. The island is backwards, it has no road signs. The people are great. The people are stupid and you can see this by the way they cover their mouths when they talk.

I like the ocean, he tells me, because it's always changing. Never the same. Every day is different. The water is new. The sky is new. Even we are new, our past mistakes are

imagined, and so, forgotten. He is a romantic, my father. He names his yacht Slow Dancer and says life is a slow dance.

My father likes the never still quality about the ocean. Likes the way sound gets lost in it. In the middle of the ocean, the rest of the world is muffled, a rumor. The world exists only in the maps that he traces the pencil and protractor. If we shift course by even one degree, my father says, we could lose the world all together.

Part 3: On the Island

I am divided (1990)

They call me American girl. Say, Hey, little American. Little haole. Little Jew. Where is our little white cousin? Hey, if she's white, how come she is darker than the rest of us? You're the darkest one.

My cousins set me apart, divide me from them, whisper behind their cupped hands. When forced to take me with them to the store, they walk quickly ahead.

My birthplace is wrong, not here on Saipan but another, neighboring island. I am born on Guam, that place that has let go its heritage and rushed off eagerly to America. People born on Guam are not even Chamorro. Guamanian, Laurena says. So why don't you go live there, little Guamanian girl?

My last name is wrong and funny. It is white. American. Jewish. In their mouths my last name sounds like a mistake. They call me names out of anger and frustration. Out of boredom. Spite. And sometimes, out of habit, so that eventually the taunting rolls from them almost fondly. Hey, little Jewish girl, little American girl, what are you doing over there? Hafa, little white girl, what are you crying for, eh?

At night, when the elders are gone, out putting their last dollars into a poker machine somewhere, they tell me there is a spirit sitting next to me. They lock me in a dark bedroom, the light burnt out, pound their hands on the door and say, Turn around—who is that in there with you? They tell me the White Lady is coming to get me. They tell me I'll see the woman with blood running down her face in the mirror. They lock me out of the house and tell me the small spirits of children will come pitter-pattering over the red yard to fetch me. I'll be killed, they call out to me, my spirit stuffed into a coconut.

Laurena is my most relentless abuser, taunting even after the others have stopped, under her breath or in asides, or in whispers and pinches and looks. Look at your face bitch, she hisses at me. Me in a bathroom searching my face in the mirror for two hours. Alternately, she can save me. Move between me and a pack of others, slip an arm around my shoulders and all my frustration with her vanishes, leaving nothing behind.

Laurena (1990)

Have you ever been with a man? This is my fourth. We did it first in the car; he was so big Hannah. My god, right. And again in his room. Here, let me draw you a map of his room. On the floor, here, we did it. And on his bed too. Do you know that's what makes your boobs big? If a man touches them, then your body knows you're a woman. Have you never kissed a man? If you kiss him, on the neck, and then down lower. That's how to please him. And don't be too gentle, Hannah. When you're first with a man, don't be too silent. Let him know you like it. He loved me so hard, I have bruises here on my hip from his fingers. Look. Right here.

The Discipline Principle (1995)

Do not leave your seat without permission. Do not talk unless you have permission. During teaching, always keep your eyes to the front. Do not be looking around or at other students' work.

To cheat is to steal and exercise dishonesty, two things totally foreign to a Christian Education. The heart's desire to obey must come from the Lord. This school of Saipan belongs to the Lord.

Do not sit on desks. Do not vandalize. Do not write on the desks, deface the desks. Do not carve the desks. Do not write or carve the walls. Do not throw things or litter. Do not chew gum. Students who disfigure properly [sic], break windows, or do damage will be required to pay. Students who carve and chew gum will be required to pay.

Cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, narcotics, any drugs or medicines, knives, guns, martial arts weapons, and explosives of any kind are not permitted on school grounds.

Gum should never be brought to school for any reason. Radios, tape players and tapes, CD players and CD's, cellular phones, inappropriate books and magazines are not permitted on school grounds. Do not complain or stir up discontent. Do be prompt and cheerful. Do say Mrs., Mr., Miss, Ma'am, or Sir. Do be open, do be frank, do be friendly. Do not run, do not shove, do not horseplay, do not yell. Do maintain self control.

Students are not to argue, manifest a hateful disposition, make a "wise-crack." Threats against a teacher whether physical, verbal, or legal will not be tolerated.

Proper Christian conduct with the opposite sex will be emphasized. No holding of hands, no arms around, no physical contact will be permitted. Christian young people must dress and act differently than the world. The teaching of biblical separation is vital.

Refrain from swearing, using indecent language. Refrain from lying and tobacco, drinking and drugs. Refrain. Refrain from gambling, dancing, and renting or seeing violent or immoral movies. Refrain here and at home. Refrain from indecent, from boisterous, from disorderly.

Rock or "rap" music of any type shall not be listened to at any time, here or at home. So called "Christian" rock shall not be listened to at any time here or elsewhere. Students are not to play this kind of music on their car radios. Students shall refrain from singing, humming, or talking about rock and roll songs at school and at home.

The house comes down (1990)

Comic books come tumbling out of Vincent's room looking like swiss cheese. He kicks them along, cursing. Their plastic covers fall away like lace, and Vincent pokes his finger through the holes in the pages. He kicks and yells and the living room is full of bright confetti. Superman and Spiderman. I fucking hate this place, he says. Lately, he is dissatisfied with the island, angry at invisible things. He wants something bigger: money, a job, fame, a sports career, something. He just wants to leave for a little while so he can come back later and fix things that are wrong.

I once told Vincent that my father remembered him, liked him. So now, Vincent smiles and says, Ay, hafa Hannah? I could go check on your dad, maybe he could give me a job.

In truth, what my father remembered about Vincent was that once, before I was born, when Vincent was a toddler, my father had given him unsweetened tea to drink and had laughed to see the boy spit it out. Hannah, my father told me, I loved that moment—it was so great. Your mother's people, they only like things with sugar; it's why their teeth are black. No matter how much you tell them what sugar will do, they don't listen, and what happens? Their teeth rot. Don't you forget to brush your teeth, my father told me.

I wonder what my father would say now if I tell him Vincent has the gift. The Sight. That he can see the dead, the ghosts, the spirits. Ever since he was a baby, he has been able to see them.

The termites that eat through Vincent's comic books are like ants with wings. They burrow into the doors and the furniture and into the floors and through boxes and the roof and our school papers. Sometimes they shed their wings, leave them like scales around the house. After Vincent kicks his boxes around, he leaves the comic books in a soggy, deteriorating stack in the yard. No one speaks of the termites after this, even though we sometimes see them lumbering slow and fat through the house. Even if we have to flick them from the furniture.

Every now and then a piece of ceiling or wall will tumble and dissolve over time into the carpet. We joke amongst ourselves about the condition of the house. Tell our friends who call to hang on, while we get the phone upstairs. Then set the phone down and mime walking up a flight of stairs, big, exaggerated steps, and everyone watching rolls with laughter. We call the room with broken window treatments the sun room, the cement slab kitchen outside, the lanai.

On long, boring afternoons, Laurena and I make lists of subjects for books we are qualified to write: how water stains on the ceiling can look like cloud formations, how we can tell if a car is coming or going on the road outside by the sound the rocks make flying from the tires.

At Grace Christian Academy (1990)

The girls say sex. The girls say I once had sex for four hours. Say I wore him out. Say he had a big cock. He tasted too strong in my mouth, I spat it out in my hand. I smeared it on the sheet, on the carpet, on my leg. The girls say, Oh gross, this one time he got it in my hair. The girls say sex makes the world spin, that it wears out their restless bodies, that it passes the time, the night. I like to tell him what to do, how to move, if he should go faster or slower. I like to be in control. The girls say I like to be held after. Like to be softly kissed after, all down my back and down my legs. The girls say my god it felt so good. The girls say Ehhh listen to you. It takes you somewhere you haven't been before, they say.

Cruising (1990)

The new car is red and the seats are black leather, slippery. The car is bought with borrowed money, just enough for the down-payment. When Vincent turns up the music, the bass punches my back, throwing me forward. You can feel it in your chest, he shouts at me. Even in the ground you can feel it.

Vincent is short and skinny and wants to play football for an American college. On Saipan, there are no football teams. He trains by doing push-ups on one arm while I count. Sometimes, he does so many sit-ups that he collapses on the ground, coughing. Recently, he has begun shaving the bottom half of his long head of hair—tying the upper half in a ponytail, like the ancient Chamorros did. I tell him he looks ridiculous, that his head is too big and also uneven in spots. And he does look crazy, in his tapered jeans, rolled and cuffed, a ripped and oversized tanktop, black Air Jordans, and this hairdo with a stringy ponytail hanging down his bag. But he just smiles, says it looks badass.

At night, we cruise slowly around the island in Vincent's new car, occasionally stopping in parking lots to shout out at other cars, because the roads are full of other cars with tinted windows and restless youths and booming basses, so that from up above, the island would be lit up by a string of headlights, so many bugs heading nowhere.

My first drowning (1991)

If I concentrate very hard, I can make the classroom rock like a boat, make the walls tilt.

The lesson is boring the first time I do it. The lesson is boring and useless, something about God and arithmetic, how God is actually not just in the arithmetic, but he has created the arithmetic. The room is stifling and my eyes hurt from forcing them to stay open. A wash of loneliness. The girls in my class are absorbed in magazines under the desks. Some numbers are holier than others. Through the window, I can see the Pacific, try to recall the rocking of Slow Dancer, the wind as it would push against me on deck, and for a brief moment, the classroom feels like sailing.

Miss Eunice goes on with the lesson, her wide blue eyes magnified behind her thick glasses stare just above our heads, and I concentrate on making the room feel like it's bobbing over ocean. Tease myself with the feeling, gripping the desk with both my hands as the ground under me seems to keel over like a hull.

It becomes a game I play to escape a room or a person or a time, until I can no longer control it and the dizziness comes and goes of its own free will. That's how it starts and then it gets worse. Instead, of the room rocking, I am drowning heavy in my clothes. I focus on breathing and feel like everyone notices. Soon, I tell myself, I'll start choking. I saw on television that drowning was the most violent death.

This first sinking, a feeling of being swallowed whole, can happen any time and for no good reason. The girls at school. The infinite circling of our drives on weekends. No good reason.

While everyone else walks around on solid ground, I am balancing on waves. I say I'm sick, not so good, don't want to go to school. I keep the television on mute. Keep the blankets and pillows on the floor. Stay huddled under them. Ignore the breakfast fried eggs left on the kitchen table for me, the yolks hardened. Ham left on paper towels yellow with grease. Stay here forever in these blankets, in these same clothes.

Stare straight ahead and move my wooden limbs slowly. Cut the pictures I like out of magazines, throw them away. Forget the relationship between the cup in my hand and the tap in the sink. Sleep. The most important thing. Keep my eyes closed even when I feel myself waking. Sleep.

Try to keep from thinking I am going crazy. Try not to face the fact that I am twelve years old and going crazy. Know that there is no help for it—Hello, doctor, I'm having a problem where everything is uneven, and I think I might be seasick.

I try not to think it's only a matter of time and avoid phrases like, holding it together. Try to deny it instead. Deny it, and then forget. Try to reemerge as if nothing has happened, practice denying things out loud, but just softly, under my breath. Only crazy people talk out loud to themselves.

No, I have not been shrinking fearfully away from. Withdrawing from. Never used the hall pass to cry, to sneak out of the buildings and hide in the bushes. Never ran from the classroom and vomited quietly in the girl's bathroom; no, I did not rinse my mouth at the sink or wash my face until my shirt front was soaking wet. I have not been panicking, and my mother would never let me stay home day after day without any questions. Without a single remark. I have not stayed home from school for over two months.

The Farm

My grandfather cut the big land he called the farm into seven pieces, one for each of his children. Before my grandmother died, he would escape her by bringing his sons here to work the rows of corn. Back then, it was dark and quiet, without the glow of a lightbulb or the hum of electricity. They pissed on the ground and shit in the woods.

Now, the family assembles. Aunts and uncles have built houses made of concrete to stand in the red ground. Outside, the grass is bright and green, the flowers vines have overtaken the trees, the fruit is heavy and swollen in the branches, on the ground. Inside, a few hot rooms, and the walls have long cracks. In one room, the whole family will sometimes sleep pell-mell. In one room, the church people will sometimes bring the baby Jesus swaddled in blankets, and we will kiss his perfumed feet. In a worn brown box, we children will push dollar bills into the slot.

The ceilings blossom and sag with mold and water marks. We are our own village. My mother's land is here too, but off to the side, through those bushes with the thorns. You would need a machete to find it really. Overgrown with banana trees and passion fruit trees and mango trees. Overgrown with kudzu and bramble.

My mother leaves at night

My mother's new boyfriend is gaunt. A captain like my father. But unlike my father, his clothes are old and they fit poorly. Just as, underneath them, his skin is dry and dark from the sun and hangs loosely on his frame. His blond hair is nearly white. And when he talks, his voice drawls and melts the words.

She met him where she works, and she works on boats. After all these years, it is what she is qualified to do, even if she still can't swim. So she takes the tourists out on a sunset cruise, serves them drinks and takes pictures of them dancing. Denis is the skipper of the boat, part-owner of the company where she works.

Because my mother sleeps in a living room waking up sometimes under the couch and Denis lives on the boat with the crew, they spend their time in tents, living the life of hobos, camping in the dense bramble. In the evenings, my mother takes a pillow, a blanket, a flashlight, and paper plates sagging with food covered in tin foil. She is gone all night and comes back in the unforgiving daylight with dirty feet and twigs in her hair.

Once, Laurena calls me outside, smiling. She leads me around the house, one hand gripping my arm.

You want to see something.

What is it.

Laurena smirks and in this moment I'm afraid of her.

Look, she says, and pulls from her pants pocket a folded piece of yellow paper. She looks at me, hesitates, and then holds it in her open palm waiting for me to take it.

The note is to my mother. It says she is beautiful. It says she works too hard. It says she spends too much time being a mother. That she shouldn't spend so much time worrying and just being a mother. It says she needs to quit being a mother and get laid.

Laurena laughs when I fold it back up, and says, Oh my god. Gross. He's talking about having sex with your *mom*. He looks like a monkey anyway. And it's like he's trying to *steal* her from you or something.

When I say nothing, Laurena shakes me. What's the matter with you, she says nervously, you can't say anything. I just thought it was *gross* man.

Later, I put the letter, carefully folded along the same lines, back into my mother's pocket.

Auntie Lou, sad as the moon

Auntie Lou's face is round and sad as the moon. It is this way even in the water-stained baby pictures that I find in a cardboard box. Her face is pale and freckled. Her voice is of softer noises: a small wind passing through the high, thin branches of the guava tree. Her voice sounds sorrowful and encouraging at once, as if it wants to say how horrible everything is and how good it could one day be.

Auntie Lou's face is sad as the moon, and her movements are slow and soft and heavy. Her clothes are wrinkled and often stained. Her skin is always soft and white and cool. She is taller than all her brothers. Everyday, she works in a small office with files of papers. Sometimes, we visit her there, bring her lunch. When I hug her, I press my face to her shoulder or bosom and feel how soft and comfortable she is. Around Auntie Lou's sad face, her hair is dark curls. She is more Spanish than her brothers and sisters.

When she was twenty, she married Uncle Pedro who could, in his worst and most drunken moods churn out violence like a storm. On their wedding day, Auntie Lou's was passive, her eyes lightly trained on something behind the camera. Beside Uncle Pedro, Auntie Lou remained remote and quiet, untouched by even the smallest of annoyances. She was content in her own sadness it seemed. Her hair grayed a bit at the temples, but otherwise it stayed black. She became a little heavier, but not much. Few changes, and over the years the sadness stayed the same as well, with little variance in its depth. She sighed often, but not so deeply.

Ayaday, Hannah girl. What am I gonna do with this family? she says to me.

But in her aside there is no real fear. And I know she says it just to reassure me. Like saying, I know you're worried Hannah, but look at me here at the sink. All that matters are these dishes, this soapy water, and maybe dinner a little later on.

Her sisters tell her to grow a backbone. Laniaday, Lourdes, you don't even know how to say no to anybody.

Auntie Lou does not listen. And maybe it's true that we're all a little jealous.

She watches over Ann-Margaret's screaming children when their mother is out on a date with her new boyfriend. She buys Laurena's dresses, takes the clippings Laurena has cut out of magazine and has the dresses made down at the Korean dressmaker's. Leaves directions in her neat handwriting for the garment: please make it like the one here in the magazine, but just a little shorter please, and if you have crepe de chine, that would be nice also.

Auntie Lou stays calm on the night that her youngest son screams and throws all the knives he can find in the kitchen at the rest of us who go running into the living room. Laurena laughing so hard her eyes water up, as she calls to him, Little brother, you give them hell. Only Auntie Lou stays in the kitchen tenderly asking, Ay, Francesco, please put the knife down and come here to me.

She lets her children stay home from school and gives them all her money. She lets them go out into the night alone and doesn't ask that they come back. She is never sharp. In a family of violent and dynamic people, she is the thing they throw themselves against both in frustration and weariness.

My mother came here, to her house. And Auntie Lou asks no questions of my mother, but makes her coffee. And sometimes she places her cool palm on my shoulder, where it rests heavily. She says, Ay Hannah girl, what a world this is. Her full name is

Lourdes Dela Cruz Sanchez, and even the name sounds swollen and weighted, an anchor dropping.

Beauty

In the square house that comes undone, Laurena and her brothers and sisters are experts in beauty. Students of fragrance, astringent, hair curlers, and deodorant. The girls tweeze their eyebrows, then painstakingly draw them back in soft pencil swooshes over their eyes. They moisturize with lotions every part of their body. Tease their hair into waves and hairspray it with Aquanet and Rave until it stands up unnaturally, starchy and stiff. They collect rouge, emery boards, eyelash curlers, cold cream, nail polish, eye shadow, combs, and compacts in bright plastic cases with many drawers. Unopened jars of bath salts and oils line the rocky walls of the outdoor shower. Empty bottles of fine shampoo gather on dressers, the packages themselves too beautiful to toss away. They apply pale face powders over their tans, spray eau de parfums on their clothes and socks, melt the tips of eyeliner on hot light bulbs before ringing eyes already too willing, put lip gloss on their mouths until they shine like glass. Small bags of cotton swabs and powder puffs lie around the house. In the mornings, a group jockeys for a spot in front of the mirror, palmfuls of mousse. Even the boys are avid apprentices—clipping their nose hairs, coating their underarms so thick with deodorant that it dries whitely all over their shirts. Their collars are soaked through with eau de cologne, with the smell of spice and musk. Shave painstakingly every day, occasionally leaving the fuzzy outline of a mustache. At night, they apply ointments for zits and blackheads and sleep with hardened and cracking masks of cucumber and aloe on their faces.

The Discipline Principle, or Rules for Modesty

School uniforms eliminate the competitive nature so prevalent in our society today. It eliminates having to burden parents and school administration with the following questions:

1. Is it modest?

2. Does it call undue attention to itself?

3. Does it identify with an element of society that is contrary.

to God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

4. Does it properly differentiate between the sexes?

No one should be burdened with questions.

Do wear dress shoes. Tennis shoes may not be ragged. Boys are to wear both shoes and socks. Boys are not to wear sandals. Students are not to go barefoot nor wear thongs or flip-flops.

Under no circumstances are boys to wear any jewelry of any sort. Boys are not to wear necklaces unless it is holding a medical tag. Girls should not wear any bells or other noise makers. Girls may wear pierced earrings but only one earring per ear, and no other jewelry is to be worn.

The length of the skirt must come one inch below the knee when the student is standing. This applies to all girls, beginning with kindergarten. Undergarments must be worn. Each button of the blouse must be fastened. Pants or slacks are not considered proper dress for girls and may not be worn at any time.

The Bible makes clear that a girl's hair should be long enough to distinguish her from a boy. No girl will be allowed whose hair is cut so short as to give the appearance of a boy. No faddish hairstyles.

Pants with a belt. No shorts. Each button of the shirt must be fastened. Imprinted T-Shirts may not be worn. Shirttails are to be tucked. Boys' hair must not touch the collar and must be neatly trimmed in the back (blocked or tapered). It must not touch the ears and must be tapered above them. Bangs must not hang down into the eyes, but must be at least one and one half inches above the eyebrows. Sideburns are to be no longer than the top of the ear lobe. Boys are not to have "rat tails," "surfer" cuts, wigs, bleached or dyed hair, "punk" or faddish hairstyles. Boys are to be clean, no beards or mustaches allowed.

1. Girls may not wear loose fitting slacks or culottes that come below the knee. No low necklines in the front or back. Girls are not to wear shorts; they are not according with the modesty standard. Nor any skirt that comes above the knee. Tank tops and sleeveless shirts are not to be worn by girls at any time.
2. Boys may wear shorts that come to the knee. Tank tops and athletic shorts should not be worn except for all-male sports activities.
3. Shirts with writing or pictures on them should not be worn at any time.

We believe discipline is absolutely necessary in the lives of young impressionables. Discipline will include corporal punishment, discipline will include warnings, notes, phone calls, conferences, probation, suspension, expulsion.

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old,

he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

The administration, faculty, and staff are endeavoring to provide the student with discipline. I Corinthians 14:40 states, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Without discipline, no order. Without order, no real learning. A well-disciplined school is a school. Poor behavior has consequences. A student should know what the consequences. WHEN A STUDENT KNOWS WHAT STANDARD IS REQUIRED, THE FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN IS ELIMINATED. No one should be unclear.

Laurena (1990)

Laurena has no language for safety or risk. The words are simply not there, nothing bad can happen. The only things that frighten her are planes and ocean, so if she stays on the ground she's as brave as a lion. Not afraid of boys, not afraid to stay out all night, or fight, or talk back. She wears red silk to church, kisses the boys in the hedges while the sermon drags on. There are no words for the bad things that could happen, or the good. The only language is for the right now.

Rules to follow to escape shame

1. Don't walk on the street so people will see you and think that this girl's too poor to have a car. And worse, people might say, She's trash that girl. Has no shame walking around all day. Better, she should be working. I don't know, look she doesn't even have enough friends to drive her where she needs to go.

2. If you ride in the back of your brother or cousin's truck, don't sit up so people can see you and talk about you like you're just like Mexicans of Filipinos who try to carry their whole family around in the back of their pickup.

3. Don't talk bad about your own family to strangers. They won't have any respect for you.

4. Give your husband the time he needs to be with his friends. He's a man so let him go play cards and drink, if you don't let him do that then he'll just take off. Just don't expect him to do everything you want him to do.

The boy Ponce (1990)

The boy, who is really more like a man than a boy at nineteen years and so tall, comes to the school twice a day. Twice, the blue truck shudders over the bumpy road. I see it coming during lunch, even before the high sound of the engine is heard. Can look down and see the speck of blue on the winding dirt road. Ponce brings his brothers and sisters lunch. In the cafeteria, a look this way, and I eat carefully, staring down at the plate. He picks them up after school. Leaning against the truck, his feet are dusty in their shabby zoris, his hair oily from the heat. Where the sweat has dampened his thin white shirt, I see skin. Another look. And here I am, so bold suddenly to just stare back, openly and unblinkingly, but no one watches and in my mind I count the seconds off one by one.

My mother says off-handedly to me one day seeing him there in the gravel parking lot, His father's an American, and he knew your father.

I don't care, I blurt out, terrified. But she looks as like I've hit her, eyes widened and lips pressed together, and I don't know how to undo it.

I pay attention to his talk and find that his voice, when it drifts across to me in the crowded cafeteria or in the open air of the parking lot, slips out slow and soft, like feet shuffling along. An island noise. Ponce has a mild and lazy face, all half-shuttered eyes and unhurried smile. And still somehow, the unwavering stare suggests alertness, the presence of something sharp and quick lurking behind.

Leaving the parking lot, I see him in the rearview mirror, hands shoved deep in his pockets, watching us out of sight, and a small ball of heat unfurls in my chest like a clenched fist loosening.

After school, I nest in the big, dusty couch in the living room and replay his face in mind. How he looks in the brightness of day with the hot air making everything seem damp, making everything slow, so that even our smallest gestures are labored and look like swimming.

In the beginning, I protect Ponce from Laurena. Give her other names. I talk about another boy, the way I let him hold my hand under the cafeteria table. His palm had been sticky and I had looked straight down at my plate, never at him. It had been hard to eat with just my left hand holding the fork. And his breath against my ear smelled like sour milk. I had squirmed under his eyes so close to my skin. Still, there was something thrilling in the pressure of his fingers, the illicit nature of the gesture.

Now, that hint of the forbidden makes my skin tingle and gives something to my voice which pleases Laurena. She pushes for information, wants his full name. The name matters—if he is a Duenas then he will be wild, if he is a Lopez, he will be stupid but loyal, if he is a Camacho, he will be drunk and his family won't like me anyway, if he is Filipino forget about it, and if he is a Carolinian, I'll have to take my chances. In the end, she smiles at me and makes jokes for days to everyone in the family about me. Si Hannah has a boyfriend. Si Hannah is maybe not a virgin anymore. Hey Hannah, you a virgin still or what?

In my old life on the boat with only my parents, the small insinuation of a crush was taboo and humiliating. Even now, while Laurena's words make me my cheeks hot and my body shake, I am grateful for her shouting. And I don't speak of Ponce to anyone, not to my mother or Laurena, but hold his name under my tongue like a pebble.

Laurena (1990)

Laurena drapes, loose-limbed and elegant, with her legs thrown casually across Donnie's lap. A necklace of bite marks around her throat, purple as plums. On her thin fingers, she wears the rings he has given her.

Around Donnie's throat: necklaces of thick gold chain, bulky with saints. Twenty years old, with teeth already going black from betel and worn down to bits, their edges brown and melting.

Laurena teases him, tells him about the other boys that have watched her at school today, how their eyes drifted over her body.

Would you beat them up if they tried something? she asks.

He winks at me. Maybe I just go with someone else then, right Hannah.

She pushes at him and he laughs, says to her, Yes, what do you think—beat them up. Not only that. I would kill them for you. He smiles again, winks at me.

I watch her fascinated, the way she can pull his attention back with a pout as if he were tethered to some rope that she shortened and lengthened at her pleasure. He loves me, she tells me later, and that's the trick.

Donnie already has children by another woman. A wife he's left. Laurena spends time with his children.

They don't care; they get it, she says. Anyway, I've seen his wife and her face is kind of boring.

Donnie and Laurena go everywhere together, their bodies always wound one around the other, his hand in her back pocket, her arm around his neck.

I have become guided only by my inclinations.

The phone book is thin, limp, out of date. Clean tunnels where the termites have passed. But here people are not afraid of going unfound, and the phone books only come every couple of years. I circle the name in the book in red pen, use the one brown phone in the hallway to call. Sit on the floor with the old carpet scratching the backs of my legs. The curly cord stretched to loop around my toes.

Hello? His voice is always half-asleep. Hello? In the background, there are voices and dishes clinking, family noises.

I can see from where I sit, the bare bulb of light over the front door swarmed over with moths. A cloud of soft, hot, gray bodies. The receiver is hung up gently on the cradle and that alone makes me nervous, the tenderness of the click, without any anger or suspicion. The whole night, I shiver in my clothes and don't sleep.

The Discipline Principle, or A Demerit System

A demerit: a slip which indicates that a student has been involved in unacceptable behavior or acted in a manner that is detrimental to a Christian's testimony. Simply put. An accurate record is kept.

The following list is a sampling. The following list is not exhaustive.

ONE DEMERIT

Homework not done Unprepared Homework not complete Throwing trash

TWO DEMERITS

Failure to follow Unexcused tardy Out of seat Talking

Out of class Working on unrelated material Sleeping

Changing seats Failure to receive permission for any activity

Use of the telephone

THREE DEMERITS

Food outside designated areas Eating without permission Shoving or scuffling

Chewing gum or eating candy Climbing fences Throwing objects

Failure to serve

FOUR DEMERITS

Physical conduct with the opposite sex Insults Name calling

Belligerent teasing	Rudeness	Derogatory remarks

FIVE DEMERITS

Insolence	Negativism	Worldly conversation
Sarcasm	Disobedience	Lying

-------Flagrant and repeated violations of the dress code will mean that the student will be sent home. If the problem of dress persists, the student will do hard labor work for three days.

The island's roads

Red dust in the dry season. Red mud in the wet season. One of the three roads is lined on both sides with sugar cane, flame trees, kudzu, bamboo. Two of the three roads are lined on one side with ocean. These roads were made long ago, first by footsteps, by hands snapping branches, by things dragged inland. Then, later, by tires. By heavy cars with under-carriages rusting from the salt water. All three of the roads connect with one another and lead only back to their starting points. All three are haunted. A thoroughfare of men and spirits. All three of the island's roads are fluttered over with yellow moths buffeted and churned by the wind like swirls of leaves.

Excerpt from: Pigafetta's Voyage Round The World. Effected in the Years 1519, 1520, 1521, and 1522 By the Chevalier Pigafetta, on board the Squadron of Magellan, or The Island of Thieves

These people are ignorant of law, are guided by inclinations. They have no king, no chief. Adore no Being or image.

These people go naked. Some among them have a long beard and black hair. Wear small hats made of palms. These people are of good size, well built. An olive brown, but we are told they are born fair and become dark. The art of staining teeth red and black is a mark of beauty. The women are pretty, of handsome shape, and less dark than the men. Hair black, sleek, hangs to the ground. Both men and women anoint their hair, the whole of the body, with the oil of cocoa-nut and seseli. They go naked.

These people live on birds. They live on flying-fish, potatoes, sugar cane, figs half a foot long. Their houses are of wood, leaves of fig-trees four feet in length. These people have tolerably decent rooms, rafters and window frames; beds are pretty soft, made of palm-tree laid upon straw. Their only arms are a lance tipped with pointed fish-bone. These people are poor, but very dextrous at thieving; for this reason we gave the name De los Ladrones to the islands.

These people so much astonished at the sight of us. These people had never seen any other than the inhabitants of their own island.

Uncle Tony comes home from California (1990)

Brings with him a new wife and her twelve-year old daughter. They debark the plane, goggle-eyed and bewildered, silent and hungry. The mother and daughter with skin like night, hair braided tightly to their heads. The mother recovers first, drinks beer with the men, becomes loud and brave. Candace, the daughter, the new cousin, hovers in the backs of rooms, loiters in stairwells, hides in the car. Her eyes both angry and terrified, the whites of them yellow from sleeplessness. She is taller than me, taller than Laurena. The elders hand her over to us, to Laurena and I, tell her to play, to make friends. We wait for her, hungry as tigers.

She's darker than you, Hannah. Look, she's darker than the wood furniture, than the coffee, than the shadows, than the ocean at night. She's black as hell. Black.

She's blacker than a crow, blacker than ink, blacker than the dark behind my eyelids, blacker than the oil stain in the driveway.

The girl learns the edges of rooms, tries to lash back, pees in her sleep. Laurena links her arm with mine, and I assuage the guilt by leaving Candace chocolates on her own pallet in the living room.

My mother lives outside (1990)

Her hair tangles down her back. Above the hollowed out cheeks, the eyes slant like anger. She comes inside late to lie beside me, to hold me against her hollow chest. And I try not to register her smell of campfire smoke and sweat, of unwashed skin. A smell I associate with musty, stifled cabins and seasickness.

While my mother sits blankly in her plastic chair, watching the trees and the ground, I stay inside. I cool myself in front of the one air conditioning unit. My cousins and I form a line and take turns in front of the slight draft, raising our shirts to better capture the coolness. I stick my head in the freezer and wait until my face is red and stinging from the cold.

My mother's ankles are cracked with dirt. Her nails are yellowed and broken. I can see, on her neck, the dark lines of sweat.

We have become separate, my mother and I. We occupy different spaces. I watch her from the windows.

Songs for night

Late at night we sing, Laurena and I, to drive the ghosts away. Earlier we made our own dinner, fried eggs and rice with ketchup. Now, sit up side by side in the outdoor kitchen and smoke our mother's cigarettes. We don't need anyone. We sing to keep the ghosts away, but also to keep dreams and sleep at bay. Amazing Grace. Silent Night. The Star-Spangled Banner. We sing every song we know, drink Bartles and James wine coolers. While we sing, we think our own thoughts. Ponce is sleeping right now, or could he be up too and thinking of me. Somewhere in the dark woods my mother sleeps in a tent, throws a leg over her lover's hip, moves her face into the space between his shoulder blades. Uncle Pedro in the living room sleeps the heavy coma-sleep of the high. Auntie Lou slumps at a poker machine with the other sisters—for now, they breathe softly and contentedly. Laurena and I, careening madly on top of the world, raise our voices, throw our arms around each other, and let the high-pitched sound of our drunken singing ring out into the night.

The Discipline Principle, or An Accumulation of Demerits

1. Upon receiving ten demerits, two consecutive detention halls. For every five demerits received thereafter, the student will serve one detention hall.

2. Upon receiving twenty demerits, the student is required to go for a spanking. At any time a teacher deems it necessary, the student can be sent for a spanking. Regardless of demerits.

3. Upon fifty—the student will serve. The parents of the student will be notified. The parents will need to make an appointment.

4. Upon seventy-five—the parents will once again be notified, and the student will lose all privileges for three weeks.

5. Upon one hundred—the student is suspended for three days. This suspension is unexcused and carries with it zeros. This suspension is entered on the student's permanent record.

6. Upon one hundred twenty five—the student is EXPELLED from school.

Youth Group

Miss Eunice overwhelms the tiny house. A large white woman with a big, quivering bosom that has something to do with a ship's prow. During prayer, she looks up to the sky and points her big breasts at us. Beneath pleated, khaki shorts Miss Eunice's legs are stumpy and dimpled and veined. Her names for us: dear kiddies, sweetie-pies, adorable little children, little lost babies. She wears her hair in short blond curls and on her mannish nose, rest silver-framed eyeglasses.

Every Sunday, we crowd her house for youth group. For prayer and songs and pizza and soda. Balance our paper plates on our laps, the grease seeping through to our legs. We sip the warm soda out of little red plastic cups. Sing about God and the baby Jesus. We tell her how we like school. We like classes, Miss Eunice. We like the lessons this week. Feet twisting uncomfortably and squirming on the couch because there is not enough room on here. Antonio smells funny, maybe it's true he never showers.

Too cramped, so Miss Eunice will stand in the doorway between the living room and kitchen, looking in on all of sitting there together. She sips wine out of the same plastic cups. Sometimes, she blows her nose. I'm glad God has blessed me with you sweet children. He is so good to have given you to me. Sometimes, it's sad to be here. But you make it good. A fearfully pert smile. Let's sing for Jesus.

Her voice shakes and her head droops and we sing song after song afraid to stop. Youth group runs hours long, and in the end we spread out. Miss Eunice, can we walk outside? The complex of teacher housing is on a big, flat dry-grassed lot. Houses separated by hedges. Little squares of land, little faded houses. All very quiet.

In the prickly shrubs, kids pull out cigarettes and blow the smoke into paper towels. No one will see it this way. Cho behind the house with Jessica. She leans her back against the wall peeling with blue paint and comes away with a blue dust on her clothes. They're learning to kiss. Her shirt comes untucked.

Inside and outside, hot and sticky behind my knees and on my neck. Even when the sky softens and the clouds blur, hot and now mosquitoes everywhere, settling blackly on my arms and necks, even my cheeks, even the flats of my feet. Back inside, Miss Eunice has fluorescent lights humming. Tired out now, we lounge on her floor and drearily sing more songs. Talk about Christ. You're all so lucky, kiddies, to have found the way in Him. I am lucky. But we should all feel even luckier. The skin under her eyes is greenish. Flat-voiced now, tired, wants us to get out, go home, wants sleep and to shut the door. Make paper cards for your parents.

Snip the red paper, draw the home you love, paste in the glitter. You are the best Mom in the world, Love.

Cars honk.

God bless you. Miss Eunice touches us each on the shoulder and on the way home, my mother asks if it was fun and the broken radio plays a country song.

Ponce

Who is that? Vincent eyes Ponce who stands a few yards away, his fingers hooked on his belt loops.

Who? I climb into the car.

Why is he watching you like that? Vincent leans forward, squints. Do you know him?

Say nothing, look blank. But I glance anyway, see the smile hovering, the head inclined.

In my head, I think, Why doesn't he look away? But if Ponce has noticed Vincent, he does not look at him. His gaze fixed steadily on me.

Hannah. What is that in Vincent's voice? Worry, anger, interest.

He doesn't go here. I don't know who he is.

With the window down, the cool air rushes in. Pick up Laurena at Mt. Carmel High School. Shirt untucked, hair twisted off the nape. Beads of sweat on her forehead. What the fuck took you guys so long?

Hannah has a boyfriend.

Shut up, I don't.

Laurena says nothing. She takes off her shoes.

Seriously, Hannah. Are you listening to me? Don't mess with that guy; you want to wind up like my sister back there?

Fuck off. Who's this guy anyway?

No one. I can feel her eyes on the back of my head. Can sense her leaning forward.

Come on, spill it cousin.

Get this, he's not even in high school.

Seriously? How old is he Hannah? Do you like him?

No.

Hey, if he messes with you, tell me. I'll take care of him.

Look over at Vincent, and he raises his dark eyebrows.

It's true, nobody messes with family. Laurena leans back and closes her eyes, end of conversation. What a surprise.

Laurena, a picture

Her eyes are large and set back somehow above her nose, freckled and slightly hooked. In the store lights she is surprised as a bird. She holds a briefcase, wears a white suit with padded shoulders. The cameras flash.

You're beautiful, they tell her.

I watch from the side of the store with our mothers as they change her out of the suit and put her in a pair of overalls, give her a rake to hold. There are shadows smudging the undersides of her eyes. She looks older than fourteen. The startled air gives way slowly to something else. Hooded eyes, a certain languor in her pose. The cameras flash.

Over the store catalog, we crowd around. Ehhh, Laurena, you really look like a model, huh? She's going to be like Portia.

My eldest cousin, who lived now in Hawaii, had won the Miss Northern Mariana Islands pageant. Had even been flown to Los Angeles to compete in Miss America.

Give her time, my father had said, she'll really pork up. Especially if she keeps packing away that rice.

The pages of Laurena's catalog are bible thin; the red ink that I've used to circle her photos has bled through to the other sides. We keep a stack of catalogs in plastic bags to protect them from the termites, but every now and then I pull out a copy to bring with me to school and show my friends.

A visit (1990)

I'm not there when the blue truck turns down the long, red road to the farm. Away with my mother as it snakes around the holes made by the latest rains, moves into the rocky driveway and idles under the guava trees at the front of the house. Late afternoon, I'm not there to see no one pay attention at first, until Vincent opens the front door and sees the truck sitting in the sun-dappled driveway. People come all the time. They come without calling or knocking. The houses are all unlocked, the doors always stand open. A person could come, make some coffee, smoke a few cigarettes in the kitchen, and leave without anyone knowing.

Still, Vincent screens his eyes from the light with his fingers and tries to make out the person sitting behind the wheel. I'm not there when the truck backs slowly away and whines off down the road.

Only the women gamble (1990)

In our family, only the women gamble. My mother and her sisters gamble. They come home from work and only go out after the evening meal. First, they make dinner for the family, grate coconut, mash chili peppers, let the chicken cook itself in the acid from limes. They bring food to the table and cover the bowls with paper plates to keep the flies away. They make blue Kool-Aid to fill the pitchers.

And then, they disappear out into the heavy night in ill-fitting tshirts and wrinkled shorts and sandals. To look at them, you would never take them for sisters. My Auntie Lou, tall and sad. My Aunty Tanny, short, round, and strict. My Auntie Abig, big-laughed, sharp-tongued, and the most given to tears. And my mother, the youngest, darkest, smallest, the most silent.

In the smoke-clogged poker halls, they sit side by side, clutching their purses to their laps. They borrow money from each other. Oh my god, you know… I'm out. Can I borrow a fifty?

They gamble all through the night, pushing their money into the bright and chiming poker machines, waiting for the Big One, waiting to win.

Ponce

I wait in the car while my mother buys bread. Through the window, bubbling and peeling with indigo tint, I see Ponce walking down the beach just off the road, whistling like a bird. Skin burnt by the sun. Head thrown back, hands clasped behind his back.

I lean forward, forehead resting against the glass of the window, catching my breath. Without thinking I open the car door. Step down and wait for him to look this way. When he sees me, I can feel my mouth open to speak even though he is too far away to hear.

My mother comes out of the store, calls to me, Asaina! They're out of chotdas.

Ponce lifts a hand, a wave.

The boys call her Rain (1989)

She sits straight-backed on a kitchen chair without speaking. Around her throat, a necklace of bite marks, purple as plums. Her shadow on the wall is stretched thin and long. In the next room, I pretend to read, but really, I listen.

When he first finds out, Uncle Pedro laughs, says that's what happens to girls. Says, Who cares? That's what they're for.

Next to him, Auntie Lou tells Laurena, You're only fourteen.

I'm afraid of her and the way she swells. In my dreams, she splits in two, and I wake up yelling. Her ankles get big, but her arms are like sticks. She moves unsteadily, a bloated cartoon girl.

The elders eye her hips, cluck their tongues, and grumble about the narrowness of her. Too thin, they say.

She stays home from school, draws in my sketchbooks, refuses to wash her oily hair, complains of constipation, rubs coconut oil on her belly for stretch marks, and whispers to me about how her boyfriend, the one with bad teeth and two other children, will take her away from here. All the way to Hawaii, she says. She shows me on her belly, a line of hair that has grown from her navel down. She traces it with one finger, and says, This is where they will cut me and afterwards it will look like a caterpillar.

Behind the house, she crouches, the hem of her skirt dragging the dust. When I get home from school, I find her there drawing a night sky in the dirt.

Hey, go get me please some cigarettes, *phan*. And some wine coolers too please, she says without looking up. Her belly pushes against her t-shirt.

I bring them to her, and watch the way she pulls smoke from her mouth to her nose. I've seen this before, but she shows it to me like it's new.

Watch this, she tells me. The thin waterfall of smoke streams upwards. Above her lip, a light shadow of hair where there wasn't any before.

The Discipline Principle, or Special Discipline

There are other reasons for which students may be spanked, suspended, expelled. Some reasons are listed. This is not an exhaustive list. The final decision of what discipline is necessary will be the administrator's.

The following infractions will result in immediate expulsion:

PROFANITY or VULGARITY

POSSESSION OF HANDGUNS OR KNIVES

IMMORAL CONDUCT

POSSESSION OF ALCOHOL

THREATS

POSSESSION OF DRUGS

PORNOGRAPHY

CHEATING

OFFENSIVE SLANG

GAMBLING

SMOKING

LYING

FIGHTING

DEFACING OR DAMAGING PROPERTY

QUESTIONABLE READING MATERIAL

ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC, COUNTRY MUSIC, SO CALLED "CHRISTIAN ROCK MUSIC"

IT IS THE RESERVED RIGHT OF THE ADMINISTRATION TO DECIDE THE PUNISHMENT HANDED DOWN IN EACH OF THE ABOVE OFFENCES.

Ponce

I call the house twice and hang up at the sound of his father's voice. Another call, very late. Phone clutched tightly in my fingers. Ponce says hello three times. I hold my breath, the phone line crackles. He says, Meet me at the movies this Friday.

The theatre is old, slanted. The only one on the island, with rats and cockroaches scurrying through the crumpled popcorn bags at the back. My mother leaves me at the front. Tattered posters tacked to the wall. Meeting a girlfriend, I tell my mother. Early afternoon, the sky graying for a squall. A skirt that's too short, up to *there* short, a pair of high-heeled boots in the wet heat, hair cropped like a boy's.

Wait in the balcony, light a cigarette. A stream of blue light from the projection booth, a solid blue beam of dust. Inside the theatre, it's empty. It's midnight in here and the seats smell like semen. Watch him walk towards me, a smile when he sees me. For an hour, his arm against mine. The movie light flits across us. The rain hits the tin roof and drowns out the movie. His fingers move over mine. Moist palm on my leg.

I love your breathing, he says. Your hair is so soft, he says and I can feel him catching the ends in his hands.

A choking in my throat, fear and excitement.

The pressure of his hand makes a deep, swift pang in my chest and I think illogically that somehow I have broken a rib and the stabbing of it into my lungs is why I can't breathe. The fabric of my skirt crumples in his fist, and shivers shake down my backside and I think dizzily that I'm drowning again and that my arms are heavy and my hands are numb, useless, lying face up in my lap. When we kiss, his mouth is full over mine and my body comes swaying off the chair of its volition and his hands cupping my face are

soothing, are unhurried, leisurely, are saying we have time to spare, there is no rush, and his taste is of sweet tea and my ears are full of rain.

The Discipline Principle, or Punishment

In order to be a partner in the development of character in the child, the administration believes it is necessary. The administration believes in following the Biblical admonition to correct a child when his behavior is in violation of the rules. Biblical correction includes corporal punishment. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth (spanks) him betimes." Proverbs 13:24. And: "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul." Proverbs 29:15 & 17

Corporal punishment will be administered:

A. If a student is sent to the office for a spanking, the parent will be notified.

1. The parents will give permission to spank the child.

a. In this case a permission slip will be sent home for the parent to sign. When it is brought back, the spanking will be administered.

b. The student will not be allowed back in school until permission is received.

2. The parent will come to the administrator's office and administer the spanking himself.

3. If the parent refuses administer the spanking himself, the student will be removed.

B. The offense will be clearly discussed.

C. The administrator will discuss scriptural applications and will pray with the student.

D. A number of firm strokes will be administered with a simple flat paddle by a staff member of the same sex.

E. A second staff member will bear witness to the spanking.

F. The student will not be physically restrained. If he refuses to submit to a spanking, the parent will be asked to come. The parent will be asked to administer the spanking or remove the child.

G. Following the spanking, the administrator will pray with the student. The administrator will talk with the student assuring him of his and the teachers' and the Lord's love.

H. A written record will be made of the date, offense, number of strokes, and names of correcting staff member and witness.

The school expects full cooperation. Never forget.

The language of our masters, the language of our vices

The Chamorro language is not one, but many. Confused. Spanish, Island, English. Creole, not creole. Pidgin, not pidgin. The language is melodic as music,

A visit

Hannah, that blue truck was here again. Vincent has not been accepted to college. He sits barefoot on the steps of the house, his pants rolled up to his knees. Beer cans in the grass. Leans forward. That truck was here again. It pulled up and sat in the driveway for thirty minutes.

Heat in my cheeks, the shame unraveling in my chest. I shrug.

What, you like this guy. Does your mother know.

Fear stronger than shame. No, please. Just don't say anything. It's nothing. Please. My voice breaks.

Hey. Is he bothering you.

No. It's fine.

He follows you.

Yes.

You don't like him.

No.

Inside the house, I curl in a thick blanket and try to read the encyclopedia. Something about whales. My face is hot, but inside I'm like ice. Auntie Lou presses her lips to my forehead. A fever, she tells my mother. For three weeks, I sweat and shake and don't speak to anyone.

The Discipline Principle, or Chapel

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7)

In order to instill Biblical principles, regular chapel programs will be held. These programs are designed to encourage, stimulate, and rebuke the students spiritually. Each chapel program will provide students with a different challenge. Ensembles will be invited from fundamental Christian colleges to give students a well rounded spiritual diet. Chapel will be a time for singing, testimonies, reflection, and preaching.

Students are required to bring their Bibles to each chapel program. Students are to come in quietly and listen diligently. Bible teachers may quiz.

Our whole family is silence

Even Laurena can be quiet. For days at a time, she can be silent. We have all learned to turn inward. Studied it in each other, seen in each other what a closed face looks like. It's true that my grandmother was once bitten by a hermit crab while gardening, that her hand bled and that she didn't say a word as she walked away and came back with a hammer. It's true that she crushed the crab, smashed it to smithereens, before she bandaged her hand. It's true that none of us watching said anything to her, to each other.

Our whole family is secrets. We grow them inside our bodies, feel the secrecy as vines, thorny and thick, until the whole jungle of them leaves us breathless and strangled. And one day, the secrets become buried somewhere inside and can be forgotten.

So many years ago, my mother kept my father tucked away inside of her, even as she felt me growing there too. And when we left, she buried the past so deep, buried it until it became make believe. There is something wrong with my mother's teeth. Who knows what. My father said something once in a moment of ruthlessness. Ask your mother about her teeth, he said. Besides, she chews with a hand over her mouth. Small bites. Small secrets.

I never say that I know how I caught the fever. Never mention that my body caught fire in the back row of the movie theatre in the middle of the afternoon and that with every thought of his lips on my neck, on my chest, on my shoulder, my skin burns once again with fever.

Laurena sleeps (1991)

On her side. Shoulder blades sharp under her shirt. Spine ridges prominent under her shirt. Breasts plump and transparent. She must sleep, the doctors say. She must not move. She must be still, careful. I imagine the baby falling out, dropping like a stone from her body. I stroke her back, feel the bones and the heat at her lower back. Donnie gone now for three weeks. Gone to Hawaii with another girl whose belly swells with his baby. Please, Laurena had said an hour earlier from the blanket spread on the living room floor. Please, my back. Curled up behind her, I make my fingers light so they will feel like feathers.

These Indians

These Indians are strong. When born, they come out white, walk in the sun and water, become dark. They use nets to catch fish. Inventions to catch fish. No better sailors or divers have been found.

They catch flying-fish, a very good fish. They use hooks of very hard wood, of shells. Bait with coconut meat and shrimp or minnow. All the fishermen throw these gourds into the sea together, everyone taking care of his own. It is by watching the gourds and seeing them wiggle that they know they have a flying-fish. There are so many fishermen because all those living on the coast of all the islands are fishermen. There are flying-fish for all of them as there are sardines in Spain. The average fish measures about one palm in length, and others about two. The first flying-fish they catch, they then eat it raw. The second one is placed as bait on a large hook and the cord is thrown over the poop and in this manner they usually catch many dorados, swordfish, and other big fishes. They are much enemies of the sharks and they do not eat them. The Indian chiefs do not eat any fish with leathery skins nor soft-water river fishes either. I want to conclude, as far as their fishery is concerned, with two things I have seen by which the reader will be convinced that they are the most skillful fishermen and sailors who have been discovered.

These Indians go about naked in the flesh. They do so from the time they are born until they die.

Uncle Pedro (1990)

One day I come home to find Uncle Pedro, red-eyed and high, running around the yard furiously shaking a live chicken at his youngest son.

Ponce

The fever lasts three weeks and when I walk out of the house, I am a different person. The old school uniform is too big and the day is too bright white.

In class, Miss Eunice says there were no dinosaurs. Wish there were no blinds over the windows. Hold the desk with my two hands. Make the room rock like a boat at sea. There were no dinosaurs ever, she repeats. What about the skeletons, the fossils. Adjusts her glasses, smiles at me. Have you ever seen them, Hannah?

At lunch, I sleep with my head down on my arms. Never completely wake up. The classroom rocks like a boat at sea. The waves lap at my desk.

After school, the parking lot glows with white daylight. Ponce's truck too blue. Walk towards it. He steps out, the boy who is really more of a man than a boy. His face is all wrong—eyes swollen shut, lips pursed and blue, nose crooked, jawline blurred and yellow. His face is smashed.

Laurena, so angry

No longer languid, but angry. Mean and vulgar and restless. Hey, bitch, she taunts me. My tits hurt. I'm so itchy. God, I'm itchy down there. And I turn my head when she points.

Lying on the mattress in the living room, I arrange the pillows around me like a fort. From outside, I can hear her screaming. They are here on charity. On pity. Without us, they would starve, be homeless. They would have nothing without us. I hear her mother say, Shhh. Hear her say, Calm down. Hear her say gently, That's enough. But it's not enough, and she is screaming so loudly the sound echoes through the house and the yard. I pull the pillows closer, cover myself with the blankets and cushions from the couch, turtle up. She screams until there is nothing left in the world except for her scerams. What do they pay? They come here with nothing and spread their bodies all over the floor and eat our food and drink our tea it's not our fault they have no fucking place to go tell them to find some other people go somewhere *else* for god's sake man we have enough problems of our own that we don't need them here living like bums like parasites I hate them I hate them. Who *pays* huh for school who *pays who* huh huh *we* do *we we we do.*

The end of night. An empty, given-up silence. Dawn wearily coming over us. My mother tugs the blanket back from my face, but I keep my eyes closed anyway. She doesn't mean those things, she tells me. Tries to hold my hand, but it is a fist. She doesn't mean those things, my mother repeats.

The night after she screams, Laurena laughs.

Breakfast steams on the table. Uncle Pedro opens a beer. The night is gone, vanished. I look around for the traces, but the blankets where I slept are folded, the family exhibits no memory. The wind pushes leaves and dust into the house. Laurena laughs, slaps her bony knees. When she stands, she makes a sound like, Ooof, and presses a hand to the small of her back. I take down from a shelf a dusty volume of the encyclopedia, carry it in my arms to a room full of boxes and mess, lock the door, fall asleep on a garbage bag full of clothes. Through the broken blinds, the sun comes sneaking in, heats my skin. Even my hair when I wake up feels hot.

My shame

There is a way that shame can unfurl in a person's chest. It is hot, and it swells up like another heart, and like another heart it can throb and you can feel that some days, that throbbing, way down in the soles of your feet. Or behind your eyes. Which is when it's best to push back, because most people can see it lurking there. Looking people straight in the face, they will certainly spot it. In some ways, this is worse that fear. Weaker and uglier.

What I tell my mother

Small boring hot. I hate it here. This is a-nothing-to-do-island. A nowhere-to-go-island. Everyone here is lazy, slow, nobody does anything. From Mt. Tapachau, you can see the whole island. People don't speak right here. People talk too much here. School is too easy here. Papa says the books here are no good. Small boring hot. And the girls at school are stupid and swear all the time.

Leaving (1992)

The day I tell my mother I want to leave the grass is bright and the plumerias are the impossible colors of sunset Cry and scream that I want to leave that I have to leave She says it's not good enough for you here and her eyes are different than normal and I say no no that I hate it here that everyone is mean and dirty and the place is so small and boring and I can't stay and I have to leave She says it's the color of my skin you're embarrassed by me by the color of my skin She holds up her arm and shakes it in front of me You're ashamed of being brown ashamed of your own mother all I can see is her arm in front of me with its clenched fist and I sob that I'm the same color and she says too bad.

Part Four: Ten Years Later, and Some Letters

The Myth of Man

1. The Chamorro people say a god named Chaife. They say Mt. Sasalaguan, a volcano. They say the god Chaife governs the winds, the waves, and fire. Creates souls in his blacksmith shop to be slaves. They say he pounds souls into shape, the shape of slaves. He puts too much wood in his oven, they say. An explosion. The air full of ash and stone, the volcano rivers of fire. Chaife is angry. They say he searches for the escaped and wants to kill the lost souls.

One of the souls falls to earth at Fouha Bay and turns to stone. The rock is near the ocean, and they say the waves caress the rock's feet. Over time, the sun shines on the rock, and the rain and wind weather it and the stone becomes a man. The man was so pleased with the beauty of Guam that he took the red earth and mixed it with water. From this clay he made sculptures of humans. Using what he learned from Chaife, he made souls for the statues from the heat of the sun. He named these people the children of the earth.

2. In ages past, the Chamorro say, there was once a spirit named Chaifi who lived in Sasalaguan, a volcano where the souls of people who died violent deaths went. There he made souls using a forge and used them as slaves. They say one day Chaifi built a very large fire in an open pit that suddenly exploded. In the confusion, one of the souls escaped, turned into rock, which softened as the rain fell, turning into a man.

After exploring the island, they say the man found he didn't like being alone. He made companions for himself. Gathered up red earth and water, formed them into the shape of man. Used heat of the sun to give man a soul. They say he made men and women and called them children of the earth.

They say that Chaifi discovered an escaped soul, that he noticed a small child playing on the beach. Thinking it to be his lost soul, Chaifi sent in a big wave to destroy the child, but the child escaped because his soul had come from the sun.

Laurena

When you called, the trees were lit up with Christmas lights in the town where I lived. The air cold and sour along the river. I had been walking earlier down the dark streets, my face red and tingling from the chill. But by the time the phone rang, I was tired, weighted down with three blankets and your voice on the line was the wind moving through the pines outside. I didn't recognize you at first. But you spoke my name a few times, making it a question, and I could see you as you were when I was eleven and you were thirteen.

Hannah? you said again into the phone.

Laurena.

You talked fast, the words tripping. More a sister than a cousin, you said. Your oldest friend. You spoke of marriage. Girls in sky blue dresses, a honeymoon. You said you wanted to be married, but not without me. Never without you, you said.

Of course. Sure, I said. But I was sleepy and might have mumbled a little. Sure, but listen, it's late here. Can I call you? I'll call you tomorrow.

But the next morning, the hedges in the backyard, the rusty beach chairs, the bird feeder, they were all drifted over with snow. My coffee was black and bitter. The glass in the windows rippled like water and the music spilling from the kitchen radio was tender and your call had lost its urgency.

Carlettis on the San Pablo (1596), or The Islands of the Lateens, The Islands of Sails

Canoes, all with sails. It seemed they covered the sea all around us. Canoes, light as birds that fly in the sea. In each, four or five Indians, completely naked. Fat, robust, burnt by the sun. Naked, without covering that part of themselves that is shameful among us. They gave us entertainment, great pleasure. They carried canes, green and fresh and full of water. Fresh and salted fish and rice and fruits to barter for bits of iron tied to cord. They tied what they carried with parsimony, and for this they are called thieves.

What I don't remember

A few months in 1991. Not just days, but weeks lost and blank and empty. After the boat, after my mother packed up half of my clothes and socks and underwear, there are months where I have erased myself from the world. The amazing vanishing girl.

Where did we go first? I ask my mother.

You don't remember?

I don't remember.

We stayed at different houses.

Whose houses?

You don't remember?

There's nothing. Wait. I remember you smoking.

You caught me.

In a yard with a steep slope. And you jumped up and put the cigarette out in the wet grass, it must have been early. Whose house was that?

We stayed at five or six different houses.

What did you tell them.

What do you mean.

I mean, did they know why we were there, staying there. Why we were there with only a few clothes. Did they know why we were there.

Maybe they guessed. You don't remember Isa.

Isa, in three memories

1. In the old, unused garage, we take chalk and draw all over the walls. We draw trees and cities and many suns. Black-eyed Susans bigger than ourselves, on tip-toe to finish the top petal. In the corners, Isa finds daddy long legs, and she pulls their thin legs off one by one. Or is that me. Poor spiders, we say. Certainly, we both say that looking down at them. Dusty knees, shoes and skirts covered in chalk powder.
2. Her mother brushing Isa's hair so tight that in her small face the eyes are tilted, the lids pulled shut. The fine hair pulled into a high ponytail with purple rubber bands. In a little while, when she stops crying, we learn the words to Beatles songs and sing them into her hairbrush.
3. Isa's father comes home with an octopus, still alive. Isa helps him turn it inside out. Helps to cut the tentacles, tells me how to chew it—at least one hundred times you chew it—and eats with me out of one bowl. In the dark of her bedroom, her stories are even longer than mine and she falls asleep in the middle of them while I stay up and think about possible endings.

Narrative by Quiros (1596-1637)

The excuse for wasting lines on this: small things have something divine in them. Small barks made of a certain wood as light as cork. A single Indian sails. When the spent wave breaks, filling it with water, the one who guides it throws himself overboard, like a fish, and by picking it up over his shoulders turns it over in the air.

In port, he takes the little ship upon his back, leans it against the foot of a tree upon which, like a nest, his house. He feeds himself with fish. He lives like a barbarian, happily ignorant of court intrigues, and of the things of this world, like landed property, favors, esteem, favoritism, fancied good, and the useless pastimes.

Many boats come alongside the ship with coconuts, bananas, comboyes, sugar-cane. They catch fish with their hands without any kind of tackle, taking them from the rocky ledges. No fish is safe except the crocodile, shark and caella. These they worship like gods, and on account of the fear that they have of them, and the harm they get from them, they offer them and sacrifice part of the fruits that they collect, as a sort of tithe. They put them in a boat which they dispatch under sail without anyone aboard to the high sea. It capsizes and sinks.

The natives of the Ladrones Islands are brown. Neither men nor women wear clothes. They are exceedingly pretty, firm and strong limbs and with such a tough skin that, naked and barefoot, they go into thorny bramblebushes, and walk through sharp rocks and rocky ledges, as light as roe-deer. They do not have money. They do not value silver or gold. They value iron. They fancy axes and knives.

A hanging, or several things can happen

The standard drop: between four and six feet. Meant to break the condemned instantly. This does not always happen and then, asphyxiation. 45 minutes without breath. Some of us who are experts say, Only death is next.

The long drop: between four and ten feet. The length of rope is determined by the weight of the condemned. In some cases, the force of the drop is such that the person's neck is severed. On the long rope, she is sending herself.

A condemned person's hands and feet are bound together. Normally, she would be blindfolded before the noose is placed around the neck. If the rope is too long, decapitation. If it is too short, lengthy strangulation.

The spinal cord is severed between the first and second vertebrae. Instant paralysis, an instant freeze, everything still. The bad news: she is not unconscious, not necessarily. Death by asphyxiation, death by strangulation, when the condemned person is very light.

More frequent than a rapid fracture dislocation of the neck is the closing off of the carotid arteries and the jugular veins. Cardiac arrest if the pressure is high. If the veins in the neck

are closed off, blood cannot drain from the brain, which is why when people are hanged, their faces become purple. Blood capillaries on the face and the neck will burst, and the tongue will protrude. Many people soil their pants. The body in blackout, with its convulsing limbs, dances a Samba. She has weighted herself to drop, to plunge, alone.

When a condemned person's heart stops beating, she is considered dead. The heart may continue to beat for several minutes after.

The island is there inside of me

As small in me as it is in the world, as it is in the ocean. For a long time, I pretended I had never been there. But now, sometimes, I swim the long journey back to it and find it the same.

The Discipline Principle

God's will for each young person is the mastery of subjects. Students should give themselves as

earnestly to their studies now as they will later give themselves to God. Students will not succeed in school without God. Good study habits begin with a proper attitude of the heart. Consider assignments as from God, and do them "heartily as unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:23). The following guidelines are not an exhaustive list:

1. Schedule a regular time for study. Study in a quiet place where thinking can be done clearly.

2. Collect material, eliminate distractions.

3. Before beginning any work, commit the study time to God in prayer. It is hoped that each student is a child of God and will be studying to honor Him. Place this study time into *His hands*.

4. Concentrate on the work at hand and refuse to entertain unrelated thoughts. THINK--for study requires a great deal of thought.

5. Be sure that assignments are completed.

7. Be curious.

8. Each student should make sure that all work is his own! Do not ask for help.

9. Students should be dissatisfied with any effort which falls short of their God-given ability.

Isa

Her brother is late. Her friends call goodbye, ask if she needs a ride. She waves them away, doesn't mind waiting. Isa drifts down to the school gate, swings on the post. The minutes tick by, the parking lot empties. She smiles up at the sky. From her bag, she pulls a stick of gum. Blows a bubble, smacks it flat.

From her office window, Mr. Dalway looks down. Sees the girl swinging on the post, her skirt rising in the wind, a flash of upper thigh. The teacher notices the small head tilting back absurdly to the sun. Such a carelessness in the gesture. Doesn't she know she's looking up at God in that brazen way.

The pinch on her arm is as of claws. Isa is pulled down. The teacher's angry face so close to hers.

Spit out your gum.

She says nothing, looks at his face, the jaw muscle flexing. The afternoon suddenly tired and bitter. She feels the muscles in her back tense as if from cold.

Spit.

She drops the gum from her lips to his waiting palm. Fingers close around the small, wet piece.

You're not only chewing gum, here, on school grounds, but swinging on school grounds as well. Who is coming to get you?

She shrugs, bites the inside of her cheeks until the taste in her mouth is metallic.

Will your father be happy to hear you've been insolent. Chewing gum. Swinging fences. How many infractions do you already have. Could this be a suspension, Isa.

She thinks he has been eating onions. She thinks he is fat and that his jowls are shaky and that underneath his shirt, he would be hairy and pale, that his belly would be tightly rounded, that his penis would be small and pink and useless and the thoughts repulse Isa enough that her mouth twists in distaste and she pulls her head back from him.

Mr. Dalway looks at the sneering mouth, the head reared back, and feels himself something disgusting.

I'm calling your father, he says and walks away.

The Discipline Principle, or This we believe

The Bible is the inspired Word of God, inerrant in its original writings. The supreme and final authority.

There is one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary and is just as truly God as he is truly man.

Man, the universe, and all things in the universe were created by the direct act of God in six literal days. Man was created in the image of God, but he sinned and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death which is separation from God. Man is born with a sinful nature and therefore is a sinner in thought, word, and deed.

The Lord Jesus Christ died for man's sins according to the Scriptures as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice and all who believe in Him are justified on the grounds of His shed blood.

All that receive Jesus Christ by faith alone without any works nor personal merit are born again of the Holy Spirit and thereby become children of God. God is the spiritual Father only of those who trust Christ as Savior and only those who trust Christ are spiritual brothers.

The Lord Jesus Christ not only died but rose from the dead, ascended into Heaven, and is now interceding on the behalf of believers as their high priest and advocate. He is the Head of the Church and Lord of the individual believer.

The Holy Spirit dwells within the believer guiding him into all truth and convicting him of sin.

The Lord Jesus will return to catch away all believers dead and living and that return is personal, premillenial, and imminent.

Heaven and hell are literal places. Those who believe in Christ will one day enter that eternal place of rest called heaven. All those who reject Christ will spend eternity in hell which is the eternal place of judgment where the flames are never quenched and the soul never dies but forever lives in agony and torment.

God's children should be separated from sin, the world, false teachers, and disobedient brothers. It is the responsibility of every Christian to evangelize the lost throughout the world.

Isa

The table is long, rough-hewn. On it, candles. A platter of venison cooked in lemon juice and red chili pepper. A heavy bowl of red rice. A tray of fried eggs. A pitcher of sweet tea. Her father sits at the head, gray hair in a ponytail. He eats looking straight ahead at the saints on the wall, fingers moving from dish to mouth, small pinches of rice and meat.

Her mother uses a knife to cut the meat into pieces for her little brother. The knife scrapes the plate, jaw clenching noise. The muffled sounds of the house girl in the kitchen. No one speaks. The dog, Marvel, scuffles around under the table. Marvel who had been rescued by Isa the previous summer. The old dog she had found near their house, dolefully licking its two dead puppies.

Isa keeps her hands in her lap. The dinner drags on. Her mother avoids Isa's eyes. Taps the knife against the table, lets it jitter there nervously between her fingers. When there is no food left on the table, except on Isa's cold plate, the girl pushes her chair back. Stands. The frogs are singing.

Her father says, Wait. He fixes his eyes on his daughter and she shivers involuntarily at the grain of rice stuck to his lip. Are you happy now? he says.

The Discipline Principle

Our purpose therefore includes:

1. Providing a solid rearing
2. Protecting from evil influences
3. Discipline
4. Building Christian principles
5. Teaching the Bible as the only truth
6. Developing God-given talents for later service in the community for the Lord
7. Providing a good, solid, traditional Christian education
8. Bringing the child to personal faith, bringing the child to the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior

The School has been established to help. The School has been established to fulfill the scriptural command to "train up a child." (Proverbs 22:6). We are in existence to train children. Education cannot save the child. We are admonished to bring up the child in the admonition of the Lord.

A private church-school education is no luxury, but an absolute necessity. Our children are facing secular humanism, immorality, and evil on every side.

We desire to see students come to Jesus Christ and be thoroughly trained and immersed in the Word of God. We are interested in building young lives to the glory of God.

The responsibility is ours. Each member of our staff is committed: to training students, to instilling purity.

To sum it up, we want to take your child and, with God's help, make him or her a well-balanced Christian who daily demonstrates a sound mind.

Isa

Night. No thought of sleep. She paces the house, her movements jerky. She thinks trapped. Stuck. Thinks misunderstood. Her teeth clamped together, gritted together. She thinks it will never change. She thinks of her married sisters, gone and remote. But also slow and fat. She thinks of going back to school. Wants to scream. Thinks, I hate this silence.

In her room, she pinches her legs and arms. Let me bruise myself, she thinks. She pricks the tip of her finger, smears the blood on a piece of paper. It will never change, she thinks. She will never be allowed to scream and shout. Her body quivers with energy. She thinks, I could scream and scream.

She walks again through the house, pauses by her parents door, eyes the sleeping forms. In the distance, she can hear the rumble of a jet plane. She thinks away. Thinks, If I could. If I could.

The Discipline Principle, or Communicable Diseases

We are faced with the challenge of providing a safe haven for students. Our purpose is to protect students. Protect students from exposure to mortal illness. Our school is not equipped to physically care.

Therefore, we are moved with deep sympathy for the sick. Therefore, we deny admission or require dismissal for the sick. The concern is infection. The concern is sympathy. The concern is transmission. The concern is serious. The concern is for the school family.

Children diagnosed to be carrying any serious or lethal disease, shall not be permitted.

This policy applies to diseases such as, but not limited to, Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), etc. We will test. Students testing positive for antibodies of Human
Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or who are infected with Aids Related Complex (ARC) are included.

In adopting this policy, the School recognizes that the state of medical knowledge about AIDS and other serious diseases is changing. The school will update the policy if new information comes.

Isa

Night. No thought of sleep. Isa sits up in her bed, arms around her knees. Outside, the frogs are singing bravely in the tall grass. Isa stares straight ahead, her eyes wide and hot. Am I happy now. She bunches the blanket in her hands, bites her lip and rolls the line over in her mind, Am I happy now.

From where she sits in the house on the hill, she can make out the breakers under the moon. Near morning, a plane takes off and, hearing its engines, she walks to the window, watches the wing lights blink in and out of the clouds. The plane climbs, disappears. The something sharp lodged in her chest seems to balloon inside of her; the world is entire oceans away.

Lights a lamp and studies her face in the mirror. Tries to smile. Her mouth stretches unnaturally wide in her face. What did I look like to Mr. Dalway, she wonders. What did he see. She brushes her hair, reddens her mouth with lipstick. Am I happy now.

Morning. The door shuts again and again. Everyone leaves. The cars pull, one by one, out of the red dirt driveway. First, her father. Then, her mother. Then, her older brother. Everything slow and quiet. The baby brother sleeps in his room, his neck damp with sweat. Isa's in pajamas, barefoot and silent over the tiled floors, hair in a ponytail, lipstick fading.

She moves from window to window, locking them. Walks out the front door, turns the key. They find it later in the grass, hot and dry. Twenty minutes to untie the rope swingset, to drag the heavy lines to the big tree. Thirty seconds to scale the knotted trunk. Bare toes curling the branch. A view of the sea. Am I happy now. Am I happy now. The

ponytail jerks above her. A view of the sea shifts, blurs. A few sails become the wings of a gull. Jet contrails expand, become clouds.

The Discipline Principle

Should any parent or student want to sue the school for any reason(s), they will pay for all legal fees, including the engaging of an attorney for the school.

Isa

There's nothing. She doesn't think anything. She is not asleep throughout the night, nor is she awake. They find the key heavy in her pocket.

The Discipline Principle

Valedictorian, Salutatorian, and Honor Graduates: The administration reserves the right to deny this privilege. If students have not exhibited an overall testimony for Christ, the administration reserves the right to deny this privilege.

The criteria are essentially based on the consistent demonstrated performance of using and developing God-given talents and abilities to God's honor and glory.

The Gardeners (1995)

Gather the fallen plumeria blossoms. Pluck the dry and brown hibiscus from the hedge. Rake up the rotten fruit. Cut the girl down from the tree, unable to look away from the swollen tongue clamped between her teeth.

What my mother doesn't remember

A plate flying like a discus from her hand, crashing above his head. A quintet of red welts swelling rudely down his back.

His calm voice saying Hannah come here and how yes I did go to him and even clung to him while avoiding her look while burying my face in his chest while asking She didn't hurt you did she Papa?

Nor does she remember their names, Natalie Monique Stephanie. The days we rocked together in the boat, like abandoned babies there in the boat, waiting. The route she paced out in the small cabin. The sails she endlessly repaired on her small sewing machine, long red seams on the thick white sails.

The Discipline Principle

President Award: students who demonstrate obedience, spiritual maturity, Christ-like manner. This award will be given to encourage them to live Christ-like lives in order to honor and glorify the Lord
Jesus Christ.

Dean's Award: students who demonstrate excellence in their academic achievements will be given this award to encourage them to pursue true knowledge of God.

The Discipline Principle, or a Bible based curriculum

The School uses the most complete, up-to-date, and relevant curriculum on the market for Christian schools. The best curriculum in the world. The textbooks are written from a Christian perspective, are indispensable. These publications repudiate the humanistic trend and aid in the molding of Christian character and the inculcating of Bible truths. The curriculum is Christ-centered.

We can know God and Christ only through the Bible. Bible is a required subject in every grade. From the Bible we receive direction for everyday. From the Bible we receive direction for the way to heaven and our only hope for eternity.

Merely adding a Bible class does not make that school a Christian school. Each subject is taught as it relates to the Christian life and God's Word. The Bible enhances and undergirds study. No other book can enrich the mind, heart, and life. We are privileged. This is our school's most necessary task. The Bible surpasses all other courses of study. The Bible forms moral and spiritual values in a day of moral decay and spiritual apostasy. Without the Bible, a student can hardly be considered educated.

The King James Version will be used. It will be well made and reliable. No other version is acceptable.

Isa

My mother says there must have been something else. Something more. Surely, she must have been dying inside all along. Maybe she hadn't spoken when she should have. Maybe she was angry. Maybe she was proud. Maybe she was ashamed. Maybe she had been standing on the branch for years until her legs went numb and she fell more than leapt.

After Isa jumps

Her mother and father stay in the house. The tree continues to grow. Her mother becomes religious. What religion, I ask my mother. My mother says she's not sure. Something about enlightenment. Maybe it's a cult. Something about pressing stones to your forehead. Becoming one with something. My mother says she feels forced to join, so she doesn't visit her or talk to her very much anymore. Isa's father works and does not join any religious cult. When I see him, he seems almost boyish with his ponytail and his gentle handshake. But then maybe I don't see him very clearly.

Silence and stories

We keep our secrets. Hold them for years and years inside of our bodies. An x-ray would reveal, lodged between bone and sinew, the whole story. But one day, we tell them. Speak the secrets reverently. We tell them as myth, as make-believe, and somehow as the only truth and the words themselves come out of us sounding as distant and unreal as snow. We tell them entranced, spell-bound, the listener forgotten and for a moment the story becomes new once again, unexpected, and works on us the same breathless effect it had so much time before.

My mother is Natividad Concepcion Dela Cruz, and she doesn't remember

The tape recorder collects silence. My mother stares at the silent television. Her home is the same for the last fifteen years. Just a room with green shag carpet, yellowing now just as leaves yellow in the fall. A large mattress on the floor, piled with pillows. At the foot of the mattress is the television. Her lower lip trembles a bit, and she bites down on it, shrugs. Tell me about when it was hard, I had pushed. The tape recorder gathers her tears, is shut off.

My mother doesn't remember

A plate flying like a discus from her hand, crashing above his head. A quintet of red welts swelling rudely down his back.

His calm voice saying, Hannah, it's okay and Hannah, come here, and how yes, I did go to him and even clung to him while avoiding her look as her arms went limp while asking She didn't hurt you, did she Papa?

She doesn't remember their names, Natalie, Monique, Stephanie. The days we rocked together in the boat, like abandoned babies there in the boat, waiting. The route she paced out in the small cabin. The sails she endlessly repaired on her small sewing machine, long red seams on the thick white sails.

This fight. Early morning with the water outside as milk-washed as the sky. A vacation house of empty rooms, of wind on weathered cedar shake. Me, in the west wing, tumbled from sleep by their voices. A dream of tracks in the snow evaporates. The rented house, the big glass window with its view of gray North Carolina sea and white water, unfamiliar.

A howl from the other room. I wonder about the neighbors, make my steps quiet down the dark hallway. Yesterday, I stepped on a cactus, uprooted the whole plant with my foot. Stood on one leg until someone saw me perched like a flamingo in the dunes. My father carried me home, his shadow lean and hungry in the sand, the plant shaking in my foot. My mother plucked the quills from my feet during sleep. A pile of long, toothy quills by my bed. Now, the small holes in my feet prickle as I pad over the wood floor.

Without sound, my parents would be dancers, their shoves and pushes as grateful. A bar stool wobbles on two legs. My parents are black silhouettes against the sun. Before the hard step on the cactus, I had been picking blackberries from the brambles of an empty lot. Collected a bucket full of fat berries. Fingers stained, lips purple. When my father carried me off, the bucket was left in the sand. In his lean shadow in the sand.

My mother leaps forward. My father puts out an arm. Her body against the light is that of a ballerina, toes pointed. The sound of the glass coffee table crashing is wildly musical. Even when my mother is a crumpled pile within the frame, I hear the tinkling. Stepping in the room, I must make a noise. When she stands and walks towards me, my mother's arms are wide open, the glass glinting furiously off her skin so that she looks brilliant sparkling formidable burning.

Day Sail

The unleashed sail is a torn piece of white sky. The nesting wasps tumble down in black bundles, loosening. The wind, salt-heavy, deposits gray scales on the skin. Today, I'll fish a blue Linckia starfish from the fire coral, keep it in a yellow bucket. It will float up lightly just above my palm: no fight. A small knife, and I cut off a single arm so the starfish and its arm will rest at the bottom of the bucket. This night, I will dream of wolves climbing up the anchor chain.

The island is a pile of coarse, young sand. A heaping tangle of kudzu. An unlit bonfire, graphitic twists of wood. If you were to press a finger to the wood, it would give a little. A cool swim, a thirty minute swim, to come across the two girls: blonde hair plastered to pale backs, long, loose, gleaming limbs rising. My father will fish a girl from the ocean when she cuts her white foot on the rock. You're so light, he'll say. Like nothing. He'll keep her and her friend, on our boat all through the night. With champagne under the inky sky, and music spreading over the boat and over the water all through the night until morning leaves them on the island.

The Linckia has no brain: the arms do all the thinking. It can happen: one arm will take charge. It has happened: the Linckia splits purposefully, splits deliberately in two. Into many. Into too many, and the pieces drift away. Irony: Oyster fishermen would chop them up and throw them back into their beds.

Brittle stars. Basket Stars. Serpent stars. Sea urchins. Heart urchins.

And feather stars are nocturnal, rolling up their arms during the day. Brittle stars

hide in the coral with their breakable arms.

The bleeding girl is an emergency. A call for help. A serious situation. The foot is white, is dying. An artery is cut, is spilling, is soaking the sand. Holding the girl like nothing, he tells my mother: Take off your shirt. My mother crosses her arms, makes her eyes big in her face. Out in the cool swim, the Crown-of-Thorns is chased by a puffer fish, by a giant triton shell. The Crown-of-Thorns grazes the coral reefs, leaves them white and dead. Tonight, even after the shirt is reddened and cast aside, my mother will hide away and cross her breakable arms.

The blue starfish arm in the yellow bucket becomes a comet.

--What was your nightmare? my father says.

--Of wolves.

--But we live on a boat.

My mother sews up the new sail, the sky, the SOS flag. My father hums, *my lover stands on golden sands and watches the ships that go sailing.*

Narrative by Quiros (1596-1637)

Sailors and soldiers have stepped ashore. Sailors and soldiers have found Indian houses built upon trees. Huts on the beach. Searched them one after another, found only wicker baskets and inside human leg bones threaded together and skulls. These are the bones of their ancestors, used as gods by these brutish people. They revere them. They know no others, except for the Sun, the Moon, the crocodiles and the sharks, inside which they believe are entrapped the souls of their dead.

To give an honorable burial to the bodies, they flay them and once the flesh is burned, they place the ashes in a jar full of tuba wine. Once well mixed they drink it. Leave the bones to hang in houses.

They mourn their dead. Hire female mourners. They mourn one another. They are each paid by another for their lament. At funeral ceremonies, they take much pleasure. Eat and drink in splendid fashion. The ceremonies last one week, drinking the day, lamenting the night. Each woman mourns by herself. Each woman mourns during the time assigned to her. She recounts the life, the deeds of that person by whom she is afflicted. Begins with the narrative of childhood, declaring the stature, exploits, jokes, effort, all things that do honor to the deceased. If what she narrates is witty, she laughs with the same fury that she had while crying. Everyone present laughs so much they raise a racket. Once the laughter dies down, they go back to their lament.

After Isa jumped

No announcement in the papers. No phone calls. Her jump is passed person to person. Her jump a whisper. The whisper does not reach my mother. She is not there for the nine days of rosary where everyone who knows drives to the house laden with gifts and food, with money and prayer cards. For the nine days of mourning in the dim funeral room, with people sitting cross-legged on the floor, moving rosary beads through their fingers, murmuring so that their voices sound like water, and where the saints lit by candles tower over everyone.

Laurena

I'm in the same town, which has grown bigger. I teach a couple of classes, mostly literature and writing, to kids more interested in business and science. Most of them have never heard of Saipan; they're surprised to know you speak the same language. I've put a dot on the map in the classroom to show them where it is. Right there, I tell them, stabbing my finger on the page. And they laugh and joke that there is nothing there.

Laurena

You should know that I live near the beach, but the ocean here is different. There is no reef, so it breaks right on the shore and the sand is coarser. A handful of the stuff in your hand would only look like so many broken shells. Where you are the water stays shallow for a mile and the seaweed stinks in the sun, here the water drops off fast. You couldn't walk ten steps before it was over your head. And because of that, it's colder. I wonder when the last time was you went into the ocean. We never see the sun go down on the water here, it sets on the other side of the country. But if you wake up early in the morning, you can catch it coming up.

Remember my first night back. You drove around and around the house where I was staying with my mother. I had no idea until you told me the following day, laughing like you had pulled something over on me. I still think about that sometimes. That you parked across the street for a minute, smoking a cigarette. That you watched me through the glass, what you could see of me. My shadow unpacking clothes.

This is how I remember it. You were giving birth and you asked for me and I didn't go. I remember that I was at the airport. That you were at the hospital. That I was boarding my flight as the contractions came on, as they cut you, right where you said they would.

I watched my mother drive away, before walking up the sagging steps round the side of the building. There was a small commotion when I knocked, Ben and Ella calling out in their children's voices, She's here, she's here! You greeted me at the door, half-dressed, and said, Oh, hi like you were surprised. You had changed a little after all, where you had once been

narrow there was a roundness to your form. And where your hair had once been a slippery black so hard to pin up, it was a now reddish brown, coarse and rough at the ends.

You're our Auntie, your son told me. He looked nothing like you. When I sat down on the couch and looked around, I saw the apartment was just two rooms and there were toys scattered on the floor and dished piled up in the sink. Fruit flies swarmed over a bowl of mangoes and guava.

They knew all about me, your children. They asked questions about where I'd been, but they already knew the answers.

Can we come visit you? they asked, jumping up and down.

I said something like, Sure, that would be nice.

Is it true you have a pool?

I looked over at you then, surprised.

You shrugged, no big deal, and said, I told them you had a pool.

I have a pool, I told them and out of the corner of my eye, catching your wink out of the corner of my eye.

Would we go on a plane to see you? the girl asked.

I said yes, that was the only to go about it and they screamed, On a plane, on a plane! until you yelled for quiet. When you said, You're not going anywhere, their faces became sullen, but you only looked at me and gestured toward your still unbuttoned blouse.

See, what these kids have done to me? you asked looking down at the drooping breasts, testing their weight in your palms. And they're making me fat too, you gripped your stomach and shook it at me.

Your daughter thought this was funny and she grinned at me so big I could see where she was missing some teeth.

I bet yours are still perky, huh? Staring at my chest. Have you had many boyfriends, Hannah?

A few.

But you wanted more, and you made me talk about them for at least an hour, and I promised to send you pictures.

This is just how we used to talk, you said.

I should have sought you out more after the first day we spent together. But, you have to admit, it was sad to find there was little to talk about. I didn't remember the songs you played for me.

That was our favorite song, you would insist.

I tried to talk about new music, new movies, but when you just waved a thin hand in the air and said, This is the only music I care about. This is the music of my life, everything else doesn't matter, I felt like that was a defense against something.

There was the illusion that we spent more time together than we did, but looking back, I see how you hung on the periphery of things. When we went to the fair, and our whole family came along, you were next to me for a time, but when we stopped to watch Tahitian girls dance on the small platform, I noticed you had gone. Your two children were holding my hands, everyone else we'd come with was there around us, but you had vanished. I waited for a while, thinking you had maybe gone to buy some candy, but as the time passed, I went looking. I left the kids there and walked in circles around the fair. It took a long time to find you, and while I never got close, I'm sure it was you, sitting on the hood of your car in the parking lot, smoking a cigarette. There was something childlike and remote in the way your knees were drawn up to your chest and I somehow I didn't feel like saying

anything.

The day I left, I knew what a mistake that was. The talk we had, sitting on a log under the banyan tree, should have come much earlier. My mind was already on the flight I had to catch in the evening. The early afternoon heat was strong and over your upper lip, a thin sheet of sweat had formed. Your shoulder against mine was hot like melting. Behind us, your daughter, Bella, made a game out of creeping up and hiding behind the trees. I would turn my head to catch her and she would laugh and then clap a hand over her mouth. Every now and then, you would scream without turning, Go away! You couldn't see her face, but she wasn't afraid; only she would tiptoe exaggeratedly then and put a finger to her lips, mouth, Sssshh. It was hard not to feel like she was just the long-ago version of you darting around.

We were there for so long that I could feel the sweat running down my back. At some point, you started talking but the white light of the sun and the softness of your voice lulled me and I didn't listen closely. So, it was no wonder I didn't understand you at first, when you said, I don't want these children. I looked back for Bella, but couldn't see her. The closest tree trunk was only a few feet away. I opened my mouth to speak, but you said looking straight ahead, I read something about a woman who drove her children into a lake, and I understood, Hannah, why she would do that. I understood.

I remember nodding, but I was looking at your bare feet, the way your toes were digging little holes in the ground.

You went on, in that same voice, The doctor has given me something for having these thoughts.

If I hadn't broken in to echo dumbly, Given you something? I don't think you would have told me it was lithium. I asked if there was something you wanted to do, but couldn't

because you had to take care of the children, but it was like you didn't hear me.

I could leave them, I could, was all you would say.

There was a rustling of leaves behind us and in one fluid motion you picked up a branch, turned and hurled it to where Ella's skirt peeked out from behind a tree. She gave a little yelp and went running toward the house.

I should have said something different, but whatever those words were, they failed me. The silence stretched and hung between us, it became solid.

Walking back, I was trying to find your hand, but you were already ahead of me.

Later, when I said goodbye to everyone, I was dismayed when you hung back. I really thought that maybe you wouldn't come forward. If you hadn't, I don't know if I would have. Is that terrible. But at the very last, when you came up to me, at a run, stumbling a little, I was relieved and surprised too. The tears made a hot wetness on my neck and I could feel how the sobs tightened the muscles in your back. We stayed like that for such a long time, with your arms wrapped so tightly around my neck that hours later, on the plane, I could still feel the ghost grip of them.

From Laurena

It's great being in touch with you like this now. As fulfilling and rewarding and happy as my life is with my children, my family, I sometimes sit still at the farm out on the grass and remember how happy and content my life was when I was younger and how I miss those days and you and our fights. I wonder how we managed to drift apart, it's like you were a dream. I know I know you but yet I don't, not anymore. And that scares me. You were, are, and always will be my connection to the past, a happy childhood, and the only one who I actually connected with and grew up with despite having siblings. I really miss you you know? I miss sharing my life with you.