

soft tropical rain begins to fall. In the steaming beams, the tens and twenties are counted out. Bob hovers nearby, so I buy some of his jerky as well.

When I look for the small woman again, she is gone. The reception guy says she hitched a ride to the north with a group of backpackers who were going to hike to Kalalau the next morning.

I drive north along the dark coast. The radio doesn't work, but there is a shark-shaped bottle opener on the key ring of my "new" car, so I pick up a six-pack of Hawaiian brews from a mom-and-pop minimart and continue down the winding two-lane highway. The drizzle thickens into a shower, then the shower blossoms into a gushing downpour so heavy I can't make out the center marker on the road. I pull onto a gravel path that curves into a cane field and park. I sit in the black, pounding rain, chewing sweet teriyaki jerky and chasing it with the local beer. It has a bitter aftertaste. Stephanie might have gotten a kick out of the jalopy or the beer, and certainly the dubious pork. She loves Hawaii.

A year ago, Stephanie and I came here looking for a monkey pod tree. Armed with how-to books, we were going to build a three-room tree house with kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom, the works, twenty-five feet off the ground. I had recently come into a modest sum of money—just enough to buy a monkey pod tree and a spit of land within the shade of its foliage. There would be a trapeze for her. A reading nook with a view for me. High in midair, a hammock to cocoon both of us. A world of our own, to leave behind all that was wrong between us.

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In the vacant, purple hour, ten degrees from dawn, the island is silent, the air sweet perfect. A cock crows in the valley below. You roll a joint and look out the window of your rented room, watching the sky change color. The mind rambles; there is a high indistinguishable from wisdom. You find yourself in aberrant company—and liking it. It is infectious, their dissipation, sense of liberty. They are nihilists, men to whom life has given nothing. And are obligated to nothing. Men of short fuses, neither proud nor ashamed of their disposition, undaunted by the fact that in the end, they will be reduced by men with property, profession, and progeny. You can see them, a decade from now,

dead, condemned, or given to drink and violence. Lives crushed by their own weight. But, before that, they have the ungoverned days, the aimless years worthy of envy.

I am subletting a room with a band of surfers, mostly riffraff and small-time crooks in their twenties. Tiffany and Mike hold the lease on this three-bedroom bungalow, and at any time there could be as many as fifteen people sleeping all over the house. Most days, it's just them, me, and Bill (the Big Island surfer and ganja cultivator). The rental of their spare bedroom includes the use of their array of toys: snorkel gear, mountain bikes, windsurfing rigs, body boards, surfboards, and kayaks. The accommodation also comes with two free weekly meals at the upscale bar-and-grill where Mike works as a waiter—if I don't mind sneaking around. I don't.

Every day before sunrise, the phone rings, and the series of calls begins as their network of friends report on the surf conditions around the island. Once the morning's site is settled, we pull on swimming trunks, still damp from the afternoon before. Then we stand in the gravel drive, apply lip balm, and slap on sunblock. Mike drives us down the hill in his creaky, rust-burnt truck. Tiffany loads the waterproof camera just in case one of the surfers catches a good wave. Bill and I bounce in the bed of the pickup with the boards. Bill grins lazily, winks, a cigarette in his mouth. We ride in silence.

Orange dawn, the red dirt road cuts a raw gash through the sugarcane fields. Dewy leaves hold glints of sun. Off in the distance, across the river, the cemetery lies patiently in a flowering meadow, awash in the sea breeze. Along the coast, daybreak surfs take the color of butter. The streets are waking up. People call greetings from passing cars. Islanders are stirring and cheerful. Mainland tourists have been up for hours because of the time difference. At a convenience store, we shuffle down the aisles barefooted with fistfuls of change to buy coffee and doughnuts. On the beach, a dozen hardcore surfers congregate. They charge, crashing into the water like young gods. Yesterday cleansed away by the cool sea. Tomorrow sits below the horizon and does not concern them. They play in waves that have traveled many thousands of miles from storms in the Bering Sea.

By ten in the morning, it is over. Those who have menial jobs have gone to them, glowing with sun and salt.

## SARAH BIANCO

*Jump #6, 2012*  
Oil on Panel, 16 x 16 in.



courtesy: the artist