

and infused with dried sweat, and covered in Luna's short, wiry fur. My own dog took sudden interest, digging her nose into the pile on the floor as if the story of everything I'd done that day were encoded in the multiple layers of scents I had picked up. I ran a cool shower and stepped in, letting the water flow over my head, down my arms and legs. A sharp, stinging pain flared up in the small scratches and cuts on my hands and forearms, where the jagged blocks had scraped repeatedly against my skin. The wall we'd managed to construct, after digging away a section of earth, turned out to be much smaller than I'd expected. We fitted the blocks together like jigsaw pieces according to their varying shapes, and packed mud into the empty spaces like mortar. In the end there were a few extra blocks, which we left in a pile for Harold to use on his next visit. With the truck empty now, we'd made much better time on the trip home, and having already told me all he wanted to say on the ride up, Harold kept the radio turned up most of the ride. Only later did it occur to me that Harold didn't bother to thank me for the help. In truth, I wasn't much help at all. I might have even slowed him down.

I went to the kitchen and lit two burners on the gas stove. On one I steamed a small pot of rice and on the other sautéed onions in a pan, added bits of diced chicken, asparagus, and a bit of curry paste from a jar in the refrigerator. At the end I added coconut milk from a can, lime juice, and dried mint. It was a meal that would never suffice for company, but for Catherine and myself on a Friday evening it would do. When Catherine arrived, we sat across from one another at the island counter, a glass of wine for her, beer for me, while Emily lay on the floor a few feet away, her eyes fixed on us as we ate.

We both learned to cook as best we could during our first few years together, looking up recipes, trying new things with a spirit of adventure that often led to dishes we ruined in one way or another. But eventually we settled into making what we knew would turn out, if not great, at least edible. The work week is long and exhausting. Predictability, in the end, won out over the risk of having to throw out an entire meal, along with the hour or two or three it took to prepare it, and end up foraging in the pantry for whatever might stave off our hunger.

"You'll never believe what happened today," Catherine began soon after we sat down, as she often does over dinner,

although she rarely, if ever, shares anything quite so unbelievable. However engaging or banal her stories, whether Karen accidentally hit reply-all when she meant only to hit reply, or Ben cracked one of the glass walls of the conference room when he threw a stapler during yet another tantrum, I always find it quite easy to believe what she tells me.

She seemed not to notice the way I winced when I moved too suddenly, or the sun on my face and arms, rare for a man who spends his days beneath the dim lights of a refrigerated building. My job yields few stories to tell, so it's a long time since she's ceased asking how my day was, even on the one day a week I'm at home without her. We spend so many of our waking hours apart, our longest stretches of close proximity to one another whiled away in the separate corners of our sleeping, dreaming minds. These moments, when we have the opportunity to bring back from our separate lives to our shared life the little details that form the context of who we are, of who we become, seem so necessary. Her lips continued moving, her voice falling pleasantly on my ears, but I wasn't listening. Instead, I watched the widening and narrowing of her eyes as her story moved onward, her hand waving in the air as she spoke, and I thought, this is the person, this imperfectly beautiful person, next to whom I woke this morning.

When she paused to take a sip of her wine, I reached across the counter and brushed my hand gently down her cheek. Her eyes met mine, as if noticing for the first time since she'd gotten home that I was sitting across from her, that it was I who sat across from her. She set down her glass.

"Are you okay?" she asked, smiling and cocking her head to the side. "Goodness, you look tired."

Through the window the evening light was fading.

"Come on," I said, taking hold of her hand. "Let's go outside. Let's watch the bats take flight."

**David William Hill's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *J Journal*, *[PANK]*, *Hobart*, and *Cimarron Review*, among others. David was assistant editor for *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*, an oral history book from Voice of Witness, published by McSweeney's. David is a native of Northern California, currently living in Hong Kong.

## ZACH WESTON

*Tidepool*, 2014

Black and White Film Photography, 16 x 20 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST