

This Island on which I Love You

And when, on this island on which
I love you, there is only so much land
to drive on, a few hours to encircle
in entirety, and the best of our lands
are touristed, the beaches foam-laced
with rainbowed suntan oil,
the mountains tattooed with asphalt,
pocked by telescoped domes,
hotels and luxury condos blighting
the line between ocean and sky,

I find you between the lines
of such hard edges, sitting on
the kamyō stool, a bowl of coconut,
freshly grated, at your feet.

That I hear the covert jackaling
of helicopters and jets overhead
all night through our open jalousies,
that my throat burns from the scorch
of the grenaded graves of my ancestors,
the vog that smears the Ko‘olaus into a blur
of greens, that I wake to hear the grind
of you blending vegetables and fruit,
machine whirl-crunching coffee beans,
your shoulder blades channelling
ocean, a steady flux of current.

Past the guarded military testing grounds,
amphibious assault vehicles emerging
from the waves, beyond the tangles
of tarp cities lining the roads, past
the thick memory of molasses coating
the most intimate coral crevices,
by the box jellyfish congregating under
‘Ole Pau and Kāloa moons, at the park
beneath the emptied trees, I come
to find you shaking five-dollar coconuts
(because this is all we have on this island),
listening to the water to guess
its sweetness and youth.

On this island on which I love you,
something of you is in the rain rippling

through the wind that make the pipes
of Waikīkī burst open, long brown
fingers of sewage stretch out
from the canal, and pesticided
tendrils flow from every ridge
out to sea, and so we stay inside
to bicker over how a plumeria tree
moves in the wind, let our daughters
ink lines like coarse rootlets
in our notebooks, crayon lines
into ladders on our walls
and sheets. Their first sentences
are sung, moonlit blowhole plumes
of sound calling pebbles to couple,
caverns to be carved, ‘uala to roll
down the hillside again, and I could
choke on this gratitude for you all.

This island is alive with love,
its storms, the cough of alchemy
expelling every parasitic thing,
teaching me to love you with
the intricacies of island knowing,
to depend on the archipelagic
spelling of you lying next to me,
our blue-screen flares their own
floating islands after our daughters
have finally fallen asleep,
to trust in the shape and curve
of your hand reaching out to hold mine
making and remaking an island our own.

—Brandy Nālani McDougall