

have thought of everything, just as people are starting to arrive. I ask her if she has strange dreams of my father, if Dima, her boyfriend, is behaving, if she is okay. She says she is, waits for me to follow up, and when I don't, she hangs up.

The music is blasting. Someone is doing lines in the bathroom and someone else is fucking in my room. I sit on the balcony, engage in some jokes, but am otherwise separate, on the verge of remembering nothing. Catharine comes up to me and touches my back with a coy softness. "Want to draw the stars with me?" she asks. "No. I am fine," I tell her. "I don't want to be touched when it storms." I am in a mood.

She is thin, as if her body is only a host. She wears torn hippie outfits, but her high cheekbones, the long, sanded-blond hair, pull her together into an angel, into what I want an angel to look like. Years of proper breeding. She is suffering, the first casualty of our wake. Tim leads everyone out to do a "walkabout."

Someone has mushrooms. "We gonna drop and walk about the golf course," he tells me. We live on the ninth hole. "We gonna open up the world, brotha," he says, "come on."

"I'll come down later," I tell him. I don't want to play. When the apartment is empty I go in and stand at the center of the living room, allowing the music, the techno bleeps and bops, to occupy every crevice of the space that it can take—then I hear something break in the bathroom.

We are on the verge. We are waking.

When I open the door, Adem is on the floor, his nose bleeding, but when I lift his head he comes to with a smile. "Great stuff, man," he tells me. I had given him the contact to my man and he has been snorting oxy's like a champ for the past two hours. "Living, brother. Living," he says. He is fearless, I think. He needs no one. "I love it, man," he says to me. "Ain't life grand..." In two years, when all of this is in the past, I will hear, by rumor, that he has died while chewing his own handgun.

"You almost had that wave, brother. One more and you would."

"Do you want me to get you help?"

"No, no." He sits up. "I'm good. Great. Living the dream. Want some?" he asks. "Want to ride the wave with me? I got you, man."

"No." I'm trying to keep it together. I try to keep it together without knowing where anyone of us is going.

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On the shore I see the darkness of the devil. The servant at his knees. Sand and water punish my body and I cannot tell them apart in the dark. All clocks are dead and the spell is cast. They will wonder where I went. In their "walkabout" they will return to the apartment. They will wonder where I am. Rory's car will be missing, one of the boards with it. Adem will still be living.

I step forward and forward, not sure who is calling my name. There is so little beach left. Just a disturbed black pool stretching out into the abyss, and I begin to run till there is no more ground, till none of this is solid, and I am forced to paddle and paddle until all the rage, all the ire, is wiped from me, till the heart is shallow. Till I am only a speck in the black. Then I turn round and ride my first wave to shore, living, just for that one moment convinced that there are no limits, no forward or back, that something out there is timeless and forgiving, that under the soft spell of remembering, we are free.

Nikita Nelin was born in Moscow, Russia and emigrated to the U.S in 1989. He has lived in Austria and Italy, and has traveled the U.S extensively. He received the 2010 *Sean O'Faolain* prize for short fiction, the 2011 *Summer Literary Seminars* prize for non-fiction, and was shortlisted for the 2011 Faulkner-Wisdon short fiction prize. His publications include *Southword Journal*, *Tablet Magazine*, *Elephant Journal*, *Rebelle Society*, *Electric Literature*, *Joyland Magazine*, and others. He holds an MFA in fiction from Brooklyn College, and is currently working on his first collection of stories under the title *Amirikana Dreaming*. He can be reached through nikitanelin.com

HOWARD IKEMOTO

Soft Color, 2013
oil on canvas, 54 x 43 in



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