

## ASHLEY YEO

Surf's Up Santa Cruz, 2018  
Mixed media on wood, 36 x 48 in



## KATE SCHATZ

# On True Love and Other Dreams of Miraculous Escape

An interview with author Micah Perks

**M**icah Perks: fiction writer, essayist, professor, and co-director of the undergraduate Creative Writing Program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, home of the banana slugs. Also: my professor, my advisor, my mentor, my employer, my very dear friend. Once—and only once—I was her kids' babysitter.

During my junior year of college, Micah asked me to babysit her two children. I was delighted to be asked, and to be able to go inside my professor's house. The kids had permission to play at a neighbor's house, so while they were out, I decided to lie down. Real quick. I popped a pain pill (I had terrible sciatica, long story). During my slumber, the children returned home and were frightened to find me passed out on their mother's bed. So like crafty children in a fucked-up fairy tale that Micah herself would absolutely write, they left the house in search of snacks. Intrepid big brother went door-to-door, declaring to neighbors that he and his sister were hungry, and alone, because their babysitter was asleep. Did I mention that Micah and her children lived in faculty housing? And that these neighbors were her colleagues? And that one of those colleague neighbors was obviously horrified by these beggar children, left to fend for themselves, and tracked down Micah in her Important Faculty Meeting to report that the children were feral and the babysitter was shit?

It tells you something about Micah that she didn't have me arrested, and that she not only continued to speak to me,

but she laughed, we laughed, she continued to advise me, and she read my earnest undergrad feminist stories with critical care.

Micah Perks is the author of four books. The latest is her collection of stories, *True Love and Other Dreams of Miraculous Escape*; the opening story, "King of Chains," was originally published in *Catamaran*. The stories in *True Love* are linked in clever, innovative, and satisfying ways—characters recur, relationships unfurl, and a delightful range of images and references pop up here and there. The stories are wry and honest, whimsical and caustic. Most of the stories are set in the present, with references to the 2016 electoral debacle, and one story is entirely written as a series of Nextdoor-ish posts. Yet the collection begins with an account of a surreal encounter between Harry Houdini and Sarah Winchester and includes a short piece set in colonial America—Micah's work is never removed from how histories shape us. As writer Aimee Bender says, no character in Micah's stories is "exempt from struggle and disappointment, and yet there is always a chance for transcendence, too." Kelly Link calls Micah "a writer whose stories are endearingly hardheaded and tenderhearted, and whose characters are so very alive that they practically escape off the page when you encounter them." I could not agree more.

Micah and I met at the end of August at Natural Bridges State Park, my favorite beach in Santa Cruz, after I'd spent the day at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk with my family. Kids zipped along the wet shore on boogie boards. My son found a hole in the sand and became entranced there, digging tunnels and sculpting hills. My daughter found a new best friend, and they jumped and played at the foamy edge of the sea. Posted signs warned of a dangerous rip current, and the lifeguard made several announcements reiterating the grave threat of the ocean's pull. I knew my kids were fine, yet I still found myself looking up every few minutes, feeling guilty that I'd been lost in conversation, certain that my children were getting dragged out to the horizon. Had I taught them how to swim in a rip current? Parallel to the beach, don't try to fight it. My mix of maternal paranoia and deep conversational satisfaction felt so apt. It made me feel like the mother in the penultimate story in *True Love*—the one who can't relax during a family visit to the Père Lachaise Cemetery, because she's certain her children will be lost (and when she does relax, they do indeed become lost, and her