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Chronic

BRANDON GALARITA

English 414 (Fiction Workshop)

Mentor: Dr. Shawna Yang Ryan

My short story provides glimpses into a family that is tarnished by the influence of ice, or crystal methamphetamine. I employ the modular style—a form that breaks expectations of time and place as seen in a linear narrative—to reduce the work to its essential moments, allowing both what is said and unsaid to be amplified. I created this work with the intention of highlighting the issue of meth use across the state of Hawai‘i, which brings danger to families, tears them apart, and impacts the fragile minds of children. I embrace the use of Pidgin—Hawaiian Creole English—as a staple of my work to plant a reader, including those who may be unfamiliar with this language, in the culture I have been raised in. I have seen the effects of this drug firsthand and in creating this piece I wanted to reveal one aspect of an issue that is not simply black-and-white.

Addie organized the closet, separating her dresses from Jerry’s t-shirts and jackets. She always wondered why he had an Army BDU coat. He had never served. It was more of a fashion statement, one that she had found attractive in high school.

She took it off the hanger and slid her arms in the sleeves. It was heavier, thicker than she remembered. She patted down the front, looking at herself in the mirror. She felt a slight bulge in the left chest pocket. She unbuttoned it, felt the inside, and pulled out a small glass pipe. Its bulb was stained black.

Her hands trembled as she carefully placed it back in the pocket, took off the BDU, and hung it in the closet as if it had never moved.

• • • • •

“Eh babe, you cold?” Jerry said. He had noticed she had begun to shiver. They had walked away from the party, and emerged out of the cane into a clearing that overlooked the small town they called home. All parties happened in hotel rooms or in the middle of the fields; in the fields anyone could drink, make fire, or smoke pakalōlō, and the cops never bothered to shut them down.

“No. I’m okay.” She wrapped her arms across her chest, warming her exposed arms.

“Ah. No bushet me, Add.” Jerry placed his Heineken on the red soil, took off his BDU, and wrapped it around Addie’s torso.

“Thanks,” she said, staring blankly at the nonexistent skyline, something she missed after moving from the mainland.

“How come you not drinking tonight?”

“I don’t know. I don’t want to.”



I was born and raised in Lahaina, Maui, and I spend most of my free time fishing, bodyboarding, or reading. I finished my

Bachelor’s degree in English last May, and I plan to pursue a higher degree in Education and eventually hope to write a novel centered in Hawai‘i. I wrote this piece for a Fiction Workshop course with Shawna Ryan and thirteen incredible peers who each gave me invaluable feedback. My biggest struggle in writing “Chronic” was working with a non-linear structure, attempting to capture the different voices in the family. One of the most interesting aspects of writing this piece for me was incorporating Hawaiian Creole English, commonly known as pidgin, and both making it understandable for my class—many were unfamiliar with the language—as well as authentic to my experiences in Hawai‘i.

“But, you always drink with me. You neva drink last time, too. What’s up with that?”

“I just wasn’t feeling it, babe.”

“What, you hāpai? Get bebeh?”

She shuffled in the soft dirt, dusting her feet an earthen red. “I don’t know. But I think...”

“Fuck.”

• • • • •

“Brah, you home?” Jerry said, holding his phone between his ear and shoulder. He flicked his roach on the road.

“Yeah, wassup?” Al replied.

“Shoots. I coming ovah.”

“Shoots.”

Jerry parked his truck where the bus ran during the day. He walked down the unlit street to Al’s place. He knocked on the termite-damaged trim, and dust poured out of the tiny holes like sand, wearing away at the wood just a little bit more. “Ho! I coming.”

Al appeared at the screen door, and unlocked it to let Jerry in. “Howzit, brah!” Jerry said, stepping into the house.

“Same shit, different day.” They moved into the living room that had only a small coffee table with a few chairs around it and a flatscreen tv on the floor. Al had been cleaning his .45; it was in parts on the table.

“So wassap?” Al sat down, and began reassembling the gun.

“Fuck, man, unreal. Add stay hāpai.” Jerry paced.

“No shet? What you going do?”

“Gotta stay here an take care, yeah? No can leave her by herself.”

“Fuck that. I’d dig.”

“Brah das so fuck up if I did.”

“Like clear your head?” Al pulled a small bag of crystals out of his pocket.

“Shoot. Fuck em.”

• • • • •

He placed the glass pipe between his lips, and carefully worked the flame under the bulb, melting the ice, evaporating it into an opaque plastic smoke that filled the garage. Across from him sat Kauvaka. His neck was covered in tattoos and has a tribal that split his left eye. “Fuckin’ good shit, ah?” He said.

Jerry coughed, and nodded his head. He passed the pipe to him. “Fuck. Going be easy for sell all dis,” Jerry said. He’d rather smoke it all. Every. Last. Rock.

“Brah no fuck around. No smoke em, ah. You smoke em all, I going come for you. Ten grand. Next time I come by your house, ten grand. Now you go.”

• • • • •

Kama stepped into the batter’s box. He lined his bat up with home plate and lifted it above his head, keeping his focus on the pitcher.

“Keep your eye on the ball, boy!” Jerry shouted from the dugout. He was assistant coach. It was only little league, but Jerry wanted his son to become a high school baseball star like he had been. He believed that Kama had a chance to grow tall enough since he was hapa haole. He hoped that if Kama was good enough, too, he could get a full ride scholarship to college, an opportunity he had passed on to stay on the island and take care of his son.

Coach Matt threw an easy ball. Kama swung.

Strike.

“C’mon, boy! You get em!”

Coach threw another, and Kama contacted the ball. It soared above the coach’s head, and bounced right into the second baseman’s glove. Kama didn’t make it to first base quick enough.

“No worries, boy, you get em next time!” Kama walked, dejected, into the dugout to join his teammates.

• • • • •

It was recess. Kama sat under a tree and munched on his peanut butter and jelly sandwich. “You like one bite?” He said, holding the sandwich up for his imaginary friend.

“No thank you. I’m full!”

“But mom made em just for us!”

“Just one bite, I guess. Thank you.”

Kama bit into his sandwich again.

“Do you know why Mommy and Daddy are fighting all the time?”

“I don’t know. Do you?”

“I think they’re fighting about me. I always hear them saying my name.”

“Maybe they’re fighting about big people stuff.”

“I don’t know. I just no like them fight anymore.”

“Me too.”

The recess bell rang, and Kama watched the other boys and girls run to the teachers who were waiting outside the classrooms. “I’ll play with you at lunch, okay?”

“Okay.”

• • • • •

“Ho! Jerry! Howzit!” Al said, pulling Jerry in for a hug.

“Not bad, not bad, brah! Fucken long time no see, ah?”

“Yah brah, just got out of da doghouse las’ month.”

“You must be stoked you out, ah?”

“Fo shua! Eh how’s your boy?”

“My boy good. He just wen start third grade. Fucka is smart. Garanz he got em from da mom.”

“Garanz. No ways he would get em from your dumb ass.”

They laughed.

“So what, you still selling?”

“Yeah. Jus wen pick up da addah day. Fuckin mean, brah.”

“Fuckin fiending, brah. Can sample?”

“Can, can.”

• • • • •

“Jerry you fuck. Open da door.” Kauvaka pounded on the front door. The crucifix above the door danced, swaying left and right.

“Come back latah. My boy stay heah.”

“I no give a shet. Open da fucken door.”

Kama lay on the living room couch curled under his blanket. “No worries, boy, nothing going happen to Dad.”

Jerry cracked the door open and Kauvaka shoved it in, forcing Jerry back. He had a short wooden bat. “Ten fuckin Gs. Right now.”

“Brah, I get em. I going give em to you tomorrow.” Kauvaka swung the bat. Jerry blocked the blow with his forearm. Kama saw everything.

“Fuck brah! What the fuck! I said I give em to you tomorrow!” He swung the bat again and struck Jerry in the side of the head, knocking him to the floor. Kama pulled the blanket over his eyes.

“Dis your last fucken chance, Jerry. Tomorrow. Or you going die.”

• • • • •

Kama nestled in his bed, warmed by his honey-colored blanket given to him by his grandma. He felt safe under it. He felt even safer with the door slightly cracked open to let some light in his room. There was no bedtime story tonight.

“What you fuckin’ mean you leaving me?” Kama heard his father through the thin walls. He’d become used to this tone of voice.

“I just can’t do it anymore, Jerry. Enough is enough. I’m done and I’m taking Kama with me.” Kama tried to cover his ears with the blanket, but it wasn’t enough.

“Fuck you, you not taking him!”

“Your dope ass can’t even take care of yourself.”

A slap pierced the wall and was followed by the falling of books and a loud thud, as if a body were shoved into the bookcase. The recognizable heavy slam from of front door shook the house and only quiet sobs made it through the small gap that linked the living room and Kama’s.

• • • • •

Addie gazed into the bathroom mirror, checking the blue and black bruises below her right eye and on her neck. They didn’t disappear beneath the layers of foundation and concealer. She put on sunglasses and entered the living room to check on Kama.

“Hunny, you put your shoes on yet?” Addie said.

“Yes, Mom.”

Kama hopped off the couch and Addie helped him put on his Power Rangers backpack. It was the first week of school, and Jerry wasn’t there, again. She hoped Kama made new friends already. “Where’s daddy?”

“Working, baby, he’ll be back after school.” She hoped he would be, if only for the sake of their son.

• • • • •

Kama pulled his favorite toys out of his toy box: Thomas the Tank Engine, along with his wooden train whistle, pieces of railroad track, a T-rex, and various Hot Wheels. He scattered them across a rug with printed roadways and houses, the Hot Wheels lined up for a drag race like when Daddy had brought him to the strip.

Addie hung the final pictures of Kama as a baby sitting on Grandma’s lap on the wall. She sat next to Kama, and played with the T-rex, bringing terror to the peaceful town. “Well, how do you like it, baby?”

“It’s okay,” he said, “But there’s one thing missing.”

“Oh yeah? And what’s that?”

“Daddy.”

Addie stopped terrorizing with the T-rex and looked at Kama. “Dad can’t come here. He’s not allowed to.”

“Why?”

“He’s not being a good daddy and the judge man said he needs to stay away for a while.”

“Why?”

“Because that’s what he has to do.”

“Why?”

Addie scooted next to Kama and wrapped her arm around his shoulders. “That’s just how it is baby.” She squeezed him tight. “That’s just how it is.”