



# A cardiac event

Illustration by Eleeza Palmer

Soft bits of flower  
Morning mist  
Stones on a sand road  
Familiar  
As a shirt  
As blood from a wound  
As food on a table  
Leaves on tiptoe  
Clouds tense  
The held breath of the day.

Feet advanced with heartbeat steadiness  
Into cane fields high over the ocean  
Sunfire scalding the morning  
Rising in a hot ball  
No surprise  
All was man-scale, comforting  
I was fifty, was vigorous  
Was hiking into the mountains.

Large birds  
Lost on the lathe of air  
Sharpened in the cold  
The climb turned steeper.  
There are faults in the Earth  
The mind makes myth of, cannot fathom  
Cataracts that end in steam  
Red fountains of molten rock  
Walls of water that swallow the shore  
Hungry black holes in the natural world  
And wide-eyed, mouths gaping  
We are drawn into darkness.

The pain  
Before I was lifted clear  
Cut short my breath

Was *kapu*,\* a breach in nature  
Could not end  
In my mind, I ran to the City of Refuge<sup>†</sup>  
But it was empty; a cold wind  
Blew through the stone teeth of the wall  
My chest torn open by the black fangs  
Of a triumphant, alien God.

—Alan Cohen, MD

\*Hawaiian for taboo, illegal, unacceptable.

<sup>†</sup>On the Big Island of Hawaii, when a person was convicted of a crime, if he was successful in reaching this city, he was spared the customary death penalty.