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Abide With Me

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Abstract

We got jobs and moved to the Islands, away from the dim hollow of a Continent. Set ourselves up in a modest bungalow across the street from a beach park. We assembled a pallet of Scandinavian furniture, hung mirrors, piped in soft music. When we looked out the picture window we saw, in the upper left hand corner, the blue skin of the sea. We saw surfboards attached to mopeds, tour buses, ambulances three times a day. We saw, sometimes, huge encampments. Family reunions. Bounce houses. Bands playing. Spear fishers cleaning their catch at the showers.

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Abide With Me

Nonfiction by Joe Plicka

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Set ourselves up in a modest bungalow across the street from a beach park. We assembled a pallet of Scandinavian furniture, hung mirrors, piped in soft music. When we looked out the picture window we saw, in the upper left hand corner, the blue skin of the sea. We saw surfboards attached to mopeds, tour buses, ambulances three times a day. We saw, sometimes, huge encampments. Family reunions. Bounce houses. Bands playing. Spear fishers cleaning their catch at the showers.

I was in love with the death-defying trunks of coconut palms, so thin and tall, thrashing carelessly in the onshore wind. With plumeria and wisteria and hibiscus. With gum trees and octopus trees and coral trees and hala trees and monkey pod trees. With the sheer green razor faces of old volcanoes. With people calling sandals “slippahs.” With people saying, “Hoh brah” and “Shoots den” and “Howzit?” With mounds of meat and ubiquitous trays of white rice at every gathering—rice like an inflated currency, a weather pattern, spilling everywhere and sticking to the bottom of my feet. With fresh papaya and lime. With my children snacking on dried seaweed and making friends named Aeiotea and Junior. With mangoes falling outside my bedroom window, thumping on the ground like distant thunderclaps. With the horses

and donkeys next door. Especially with the baby donkey and his football ears and Groucho eyebrows.

Even with the chickens, dozens of them, pooping on my driveway and waking me up at 4:30 am. With the flying ants landing on me in bed, rascals. With no air conditioning, sweating at the breakfast table, showering multiple times a day. With tsunami warnings. With outdoor appliances. With two-minute rainstorms and impetigo and insane car registration fees. I welcomed it all, a sacrament of wonder, life's full embrace.

And I went to work. And I came home. And I called my mother on the phone, and people made plans to visit. And weeks passed, and months. And it was great. And I went out one Saturday to pull weeds. And there was this bucket near the back fence that had been there since we moved in. Left there, some empty bucket of roofing tar or deck paint. And I got curious and tipped the lid off. And inside was a wet, brown, writhing preponderance of maggots. And I didn't recoil. And I could still hear the white scraping of waves across the street, and nothing rustled, and my kids were inside watching cartoons, and all I could think was *how*. And, *how did they find me here?*

Joe Plicka is a former editor of the journal *Quarter After Eight*, a family man, and a purveyor of poems, essays, and fictions. Some of his recent work is forthcoming in *Kugelmass*. He lives and teaches in Hawaii.