

## Hannah Landecker / POLYCHAOS

His letters come typed on small squares of paper. I can hear the insistent bell of the carriage return. "Can't you just see it?" he writes, "me sitting on a bed making typewriter noises."

Let me paint you a picture. He is light hearted. That is, he has a heart of light, imagine it as enclosed by ribs and flesh, illuminating that red cage, a liver, stomach, guts.

Let me make you a mask. Have you ever filled your fingernails with crescents of clay, and made one eye concave, one convex? Looking in or looking out. What is left now of his face comes out of my fingertips like water and furrows the clay. Being artistic is not a prerequisite for making things. Being artistic. You've been taught to think otherwise, but this really equals simply being. You make what you will. You can't help it, like sneezing. Sneezing as an artistic form.

Where have we got to? We have letters, on small pieces of paper, an inadequately described man with a light source instead of a pulse, a warped mask, and an aside on creativity as inadvertent explosions. I have been told there has to be a thread that ties everything together, however unlikely. I am dubious. Memory taunts us from up ahead until we are confused trying to remember what has yet to happen.

Fran, Rod, and I sit at a table for two in the window of Nina's. Fran offers me the sugar after dumping three toppling spoons into her cup. "No thanks" I say.

"Sweet enough already," mutters Rod quietly out of the side of his mouth that's facing towards me. Fran knocks the side of her cup with her spoon, rocks back and forth in time to the music playing in the cafe. Fran makes me think of frangipani blossoms, thick creamy blossoms sending fragrance through the dark on the stumble home down the back lane. In the hottest part of the day, the cicadas shrill so

loudly they outdo the traffic noise. I tell her and she smiles lazily. "You're a foreigner," she says, "these things will grow less amazing."

I don't think so. Even the words entice me to lick my lips. Frangipani. Cicada.

Fran's new flat is on the ground floor of an old building. White painted and furnished with nothing but a kitchen table, a drawing board, and a bed in the closet, it is a very bare space. Even the cupboards are glass-fronted, so you can see the bowls stacked there and the plates beside. Somehow this seems very personal. We eat green pasta and watch people go by the window. It begins to pour. An old volvo farts by, a hand out the driver's side window furiously working a squeegie back and forth across the windscreen.

She left him, and this was the strong thing to do. He lied and spent her money and they had "I don't know" for dinner for three years. I think she should concentrate on drawing hands. Her hands are very good. They grow out of the ground. They reach for pills, across sinks, into mirrors. They tease apart knots. She takes my hands, which have short stubby fingers and are stained with toluidine blue. "What have you been doing with these?" she asks curiously. For a second I think she can sense it somehow, my fingertips are coated with touching his skin.

Polychaos under the phase microscope is an eight pointed membranous star. You have to watch for a very long time, but if you have the patience, you will see the amoeba rearranging its pseudopods, one point retracting ever so slowly as another point swells and elongates. Polychaos moves by taking apart its skeleton and building it up again in a different arrangement. Very clever, I say. We watch video-enhanced images of the skeleton, made of microtubules, which grow unit by unit, or fall apart in the blink of an eye. The pointer taps the screen. "This," says the professor, "is a phenomenon called catastrophic disassembly."

I show Fran the tiny bottle labelled INSTANT OCEAN that I have

stolen from the protistology lab. We go out for a walk in the falling sky and the rain makes our hair curl. Tendril.

Rod's new home is in a tiny building in someone's back garden. A fancy shed, he calls it. His hands are large and the tips of his fingers are square. His hands are so large I feel that he blots out my whole body when he puts them on me. He is my architect of open spaces. He draws rooms and staircases. He is my secret until I realize that I am my secret, when careening around the corner and in the door I come face to face with Fran.

Sea urchins are small round spiny creatures. You can't tell male from female until you prod them and out comes either sperm or eggs. If you place the eggs in a well in a depression slide, and focus on one under the microscope, then add a drop of sperm, you see the tiny wiggling things swarm the comparatively huge round egg. They crawl over its surface in millions and suddenly the outer membrane of the egg lifts and puffs out, and you know one has penetrated. I tell Rod this and he can't touch me for a little while. "There are just some things you don't want to see quite so clearly," he says, eyeing me as if I was an egg. I wiggle my fingers at him and we laugh until I tell him I'm leaving.

I feel a certain affinity for sea urchins. Polychaos. Spines weren't evolved for decoration. On my way out of the country where your feet bruise frangipani petals in the back lane, I step into a photo booth and replicate four times. I look terrified. I am thinking about catastrophic disassembly.

I read the small pieces of paper, looking for threads. "I miss you but I don't write much. I wonder if I missed you more would I write more? Still stood still." He writes, in small typed letters. I can hear the ping of the carriage return. The mask is drying on the back porch. I wonder if she is still drawing hands. I am reassembling their faces, trying to remember and predict, what they will have meant. One eye looking in, one out. My architect of open spaces, my tendril beautiful friend. Complete collapse is the only way to build again.