

Touch Me

by Alan Stewart Carl

While Your Husband Grills

The blood from my palm runs across the rocky surface of the shell. I push the knife into the crease again, searching for a weakness, the one space where the two sides will gasp and then separate. You tell me it doesn't matter. *You've hurt yourself. I don't need them that bad.* But you've already said you love oysters more than God.

I find a hollow groove, push harder as the sweetness of grilling fat slides through the open window, carried with laughter. Your husband. My wife. Our friends. They will eat beef tonight. You will eat oysters. The blood trickles down my wrist. The shell clicks. Opens. I reveal the plump meat, pearlescent, brine dripping to the floor. You inhale, stepping close enough for me to feel your heat. I hold my breath. I lift the shell. You let me feed you the oyster.

While Your Wife is Away

Her photo is large on the mantel, eyes wide as if her wedding dress is too tight. You stand beside her, up there in the past, as your thigh brushes against mine in the now, on the couch, where the last note of Louis Armstrong hovers blue between us. I watch the light flash on the CD player, beating, anticipating another song, another album. My heart picks up the rhythm. You turn off the lamp. I can no longer distinguish her photo, the room. There's just the blinking of the light, pulsing like my thigh pressing closer and closer to you.

In the Heat

The motel sheets are hot with sweat, the room filled with the smell of us and a half-eaten dinner of chicken parmesan. Your fingers tangle in my chest hair, twitching just a bit when your cell phone rings again, singing about rainbows and lullabies, although no

one has slept, not here or in the 2 a.m. space from where your husband calls. I turn my head, wrap my mouth around your nipple, tasting myself on your skin. You knock the phone off the nightstand. It doesn't stop. Neither do I.

In the Chill

Leaves chase around our feet, the streetlamp's glow holding us inwards even as your face, three-days unshaven, is turned towards something outside the light. Your wife? I say again and you watch an oak leaf catch against your dirty sneaker, the dust from our hillside hike clinging to the laces. My calves ache from the climb. You said she knew, I say. You step towards me. *It's ... she ... You have to understand.* Your hand reaches for mine, carried on a gust, our fingers tangling like hair, then untangling, left apart. There is a scratch along your third knuckle from where you stumbled into brambles. I helped you stand. Kissed the wound. Tasted the iron of your blood. What more is there? I step backwards, breaking the surface of the streetlamp's light, watching you bury your hands in your pockets. I'm going to the hotel, I say. You still don't look at me. You won't be there when I wake.

After Everything Else

The last time they ever see one another, both are eating baked ziti at separate tables, a hundred other diners jammed between them. She is alone, fingers bare of rings for the first time in years. He wears his, resting the warm metal on his wife's thigh. They see each other, gazes stiffening as the waiters part and the noise drops. Neither smile. Nor nod. Nor look away. Together, simultaneously, they remember a motel room and take-out from the Olive Garden, how their mouths had tasted of garlic. How there seemed to be no time to brush teeth. Or to finish dinner with clothes on. The waiters step back between them, severing them. She leaves forty dollars on the table and walks away, her lipstick marking a half-full glass of

wine. He stares at his plate. His wife says, Isn't that Katy? Why don't we see her anymore? He lifts a bite of ziti to his mouth and chews away the answer.

