Maureen A. Sherbondy

Worry

I handed my keys over to Worry. He was a burly man with brillo hair that no woman would ever want to run hands through.

Worry took me on a wild ride.

"Watch the curves!" I yelled, holding onto the plastic pull in the back seat, as the car screeched and raced around the corner, spinning dirt and leaves into the air.

"Go with it," he said, eyeing me from the rearview mirror.

"Objects in the side-view mirrors are closer than they appear!" I yelled.

He stuck his thick arm out the open window and knocked the mirror off with one fierce punch. When he braked suddenly, for no apparent reason, the lumber truck following too closely knocked into our bumper. I screamed like a cat in heat, as lumber from the truck unbuckled from its ties and unloaded in a loud jumble on the side of the road.

"Are you crazy!" I shouted, hitting his headrest. "Too much Starbucks? Crack?"

"Hey, you're the one who gave me the keys. And your hands were shaking when you handed them over. If anyone is hyped up on something —it's you."

He turned to face me, staring me down. His eyes were so dark, it seemed as if there were no pupils. Then Worry floored the gas pedal and began driving with his knees. I closed my eyes, said a prayer, but was jolted again when he raced through orange cones, knocking down a *Do Not Enter* sign.

"Give in to me," he advised, handing over his whiskey flask.

"Let me out! I can't do it. I want the keys back, my life. I'm tired of you, I'll learn how to handle daily life. I'll do yoga, meditation, raki. I'll take warm baths scented with rosemary and wear those special soothing stones around my wrists."

"Oh, you think that will work! Huh!" He lit a stogy as the car flew through a flimsy gate, shot over a cliff, landing in water with a loud splash and thump.

The car floated forward like a boat.

"We're going to sink! Who will take care of my three children? The dog? My house? My sick mother?"

The car continued drifting for an hour until it reached an island. A turtle greeted me with a slow crawl; palm trees lined the entry point and led to a tropical garden filled with ginger, orchids, and hibiscus. I left the floating car and followed Worry along the dirt path. Parrots showed off their multicolored feathers in front of my eyes, and I felt my heart slow down for the first time in years.

"Here are the keys. Stay a while and chill out. Don't go home until your worry lines vanish, and your blood pressure goes down." Worry patted my back with his large hairy hand, then he vanished into the garden singing Reggae songs, one which sounded like *Don't worry, be happy.* I followed the line of cigar smoke with my eyes until I could no longer see the grey cloud.

• • •

I spent a year on the island, just breathing, singing, and resting. Then I climbed in the car that was docked to a palm tree. The car floated back to reality. On the road home, chunks of worry began to appear in my car. Are the kids all right? Who's been watching them? Who's been paying the bills? I gathered the worries like beads, threw them out the window, hoping I could leave them behind. Taking a swig of whiskey and bravery from the flask that was still in the car, my heart sped up when blue lights flashed in my rearview mirror; the scream of a siren filling my ears.

"You're littering ma'm. I'm going to have to fine you—$200," the officer said in a monotone voice after I stopped the car.

"You don't understand!" I hit the dusty dashboard with my fist. "I'm trying to relax."

But it was too late. My heart was now beating so fast it spun out of control, a hole opened in my chest and I watched as my heart swirled out of me, out the car window and into the sky.