

# How to Cope

**Chelsea Rathburn**

Develop watchfulness early.

Sort the detritus of the pockets to count bottle caps,  
check the opened bottles for water.

Listen for the key missing and finding the lock, for the call  
from the authorities. Sleep with one ear open.  
Look for their tell—the slight slur, the narrowing eyes,

a benign gratitude—and take them away  
the minute they begin calling everyone  
in the Mexican restaurant Pedro.  
They are now less than one drink

from rolling on the neighbor's lawn  
or curling into the fetal position  
to tell you they hate their life and everyone in it.  
The truth is, you like them more when they have been drinking.  
The truth is, they like you more when they have been drinking.

Deliver threats they won't remember in the morning.  
Accept explanations and subterfuge, as in "I don't have a drinking problem,  
I have a drinking and driving problem." Or, "It looks like someone's caught  
the Vino Virus again."

Construct elaborate proofs and theories:  
if there are 16 bottle caps, he must have offered to open someone else's beer.  
Perhaps she is allergic to wine. And though

you walk through the world expecting it to break, believing  
that those you love will always lie to you, tell yourself they never mean to.

Do not wash the vomit off the steering wheel. You have to draw the line somewhere.