

DROWNING ROOTS:  
A NOVELLA

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## CHAPTER 1. COUNTING SHADOWS

Morning glistened wet on Kā'eo's forehead, sweat resting in the edges of his eyes. He stepped out of his grandfather's car and looked around at the houses. They were bigger than the homes in Kahalu'u, even larger than those he had seen in 'Āhuimanu Hills. All of them fenced off by the thickest iron or bushes sculpted alive, growing out of manicured lawns, the grass just long enough to conceal the stumps. The sun occasionally caught the lens of a security camera, a winking glint, before it oscillated in the other direction. "Wea we stay?" he asked his grandfather.

Tūtūpapa closed the door of his station wagon. "You gon see," he said, pointing down the road.

They walked past house after house, each one more extravagant than the next. Stone effigies of koi streamed water into rippling pools overflowing with lilies. Angled glass connected roof to wall, large tinted panes, some etched with intricate patterns of plumeria and bird of paradise. Kā'eo was surprised when he noticed an overgrown parcel of land for sale, the price printed boldly on the sign. "You kiddin me, right?"

Tūtūpapa looked at the seven digits and laughed. "Crazy, ah? You can imagine I wen know folks wen live hea?" he squinted and straightened his faded cap. "Good surf back den," he said.

The street sloped to a dead-end, to a green railing fixed in concrete, the beach just past the barrier. Kā'eo leaned against the rail, "Since wen you surf?"

"*Try surf*, you mean?"

They both laughed.

"So wea we stay?" Kā'eo asked.

Tūtūpapa stood beside him and put a hand on his shoulder. "Ka'alāwai," he said.

Kā'eo looked down the beach, the waves barely rising before rolling up the shore. Not a person in sight. "You sure we stay da right place or wat?"

"Small kine slow, ah? But nevahmind all dat, we not gon stay dis side." Kā'eo looked at his grandfather, who had already moved past him and down the steps. "Ovah dea, you see um?" Tūtūpapa pointed west toward the ridgeline, lava rocks a quarter mile out. "Hele mai," he said.

Kā'eo followed his grandfather up onto the stone walkway that ran behind the estates and along its narrow length. He ran his hand along the walls, all of them higher than Tūtūpapa's head, dragging his fingers across gates made of worn wood, a kind he didn't recognize, brought in from the forests of some other place. Even the coconut trees were different here, stretching forever upward like spires of some forgotten time.

They stopped after the fourth gate, the slab split and broken. Tūtūpapa rocked a few of the pieces loose with his foot. Kā'eo looked over his grandfather's shoulder at the rebar jutting up from the tide pools where the walkway had once been. "How it wen get li'dis?"

"Folks wen come out wit hammahs, shovels, watevah fo broke um down. Like make um hard fo us get to da ocean. Das why gotta have da kine beach access, but folks no make um easy, ah?"

Kā'eo bounced his shoulders back, pushing his chest out, "Get one problem, ah?"

Tūtūpapa shrugged. "No consideration, no aloha, tink dey stay Elsewea, USA. I evah wen tell you da story bout my friend Henry Kalama?"

"Oh yah, Papa," Kā'eo rolled his eyes and laughed, nudging one of the stones into the water. "So wat den?" he asked, changing the subject.

Tūtūpapa kicked off his slippers and smiled. Pulled up the waist of his blue Birdwell's. "We go," he said.

The distance between the walkway and the ridgeline wasn't far, but Kā'eo could see shadows rippling beneath the blue. Tūtūpapa had already bundled up his tank top and hat near one of the gates and was sitting on the edge of the slab. Kā'eo stepped back from the water. "You tink I one Olympic swimmer or wat, Papa?"

Tūtūpapa laughed and slid off the edge, into the water. He surfaced a moment later, beard dripping, his hair glistening like whitewash. "Come," he shouted. Kā'eo threw his tank top next to his grandfather's bundle but held on to his slippers, sliding one onto each hand. "Wat'chu sked fo?" Tūtūpapa asked, treading water.

"Get rocks?"

"Small kine." Kā'eo stood on the edge and looked down again. "Eh, no worry, jus come already," his grandfather said, treading water. Kā'eo closed his eyes and pushed himself in, drawing his knees up to protect his feet. "Alright?" Tūtūpapa called out.

“Yah,” Kā‘eo replied.

“Keh, follow me.”

Kā‘eo wiped his eyes and started after his grandfather, stopping every few strokes to look for rocks. They cut east, away from the broken walkway, and then curled back west toward the ridge. When Kā‘eo looked up again, Tūtūpapa was sitting on a large stone, his feet submerged in a tide pool. “Easy, ah?” he remarked to Kā‘eo.

Kā‘eo let his feet touch the ground and, finding only sand, stood, the water just below his chest.

“Yo maddah was li‘dat, sked da rocks, yo aunty too.” Tūtūpapa smiled, creases spreading across his cheeks.

“I not one panty, Papa, jus wen hear stories. I no like wake up, coral growin outta my toes, y’know? Plus, who knows wat stay under dea.”

“He‘e, Puhī? You see dis?” Tūtūpapa raised his left leg and ran a fingernail down the cracks in his sole, “Rocks, hooks, wana spines right tchru my heel, still alive ah?”

“I guess,” Kā‘eo said, leaning back into the water, his hair floating on the surface like clumps of limu.

“Stay nice ovah hea, yah? Da watah. Can feel um, how clean it stay? Ka‘alāwai,” Tūtūpapa said. “Small springs undah all dis, ah? Fresh watah come up, hui wit da ocean.”

“Oddahwise stay dirty?” Kā‘eo smiled.

Tūtūpapa rested his left foot on his knee and picked at his heel. “I membah was one lake couple miles from my faddah’s house, da watah so lepo wen look like puddin skin all ova. Pilau, y’know, and folks still like wash clothes, *we* still wen wash clothes, but y’know why, ah?” Kā‘eo opened his mouth to respond, but Tūtūpapa was too quick. “Wea else you gon go? Wat else you gon do?”

Kā‘eo rolled his eyes. “Try find anada river maybe or, y’know, da sink.”

“Shet, back den hard fo pump um, y’know how long it wen take fo fill da bucket? Good luck, you spill one drop, lickens if my faddah evah wen see...” Kā‘eo let his body sink down. He kept his eyes open, watching the sun dance through the rippled lens, his grandfather’s voice distant and muffled.

In his head it was still Tuesday, the weekend was nowhere in sight. The classroom was quiet, some kids snickering to themselves, throwing glances his way. He was sitting

in his chair, picking away at his desk, at the soft wood he had worked out. Mr. Chock was walking toward him, Kā‘eo’s assignment, tagged with red marks, in hand. “This is a classroom, Robert, English is preferred,” Chock said. Kā‘eo sat there, mouth dry, tongue heavy, finding himself unable to speak.

His fingers grazed the bottom and he came up choking.

“And das da ting, guys like Harry Edwards no undahstand how important all of dis really stay.” Tūtūpapa stopped and looked at Kā‘eo, “You alright or wat?”

Kā‘eo coughed a nod.

“I jus hope by da time you get keiki, dis place still around.” Tūtūpapa stood up, “Gettin late already, we go.”

Kā‘eo pulled himself out of the water and up onto the ridge. As they walked, Tūtūpapa pointed at the lava rock landings peeking up off shore, one resembled a flat island. “Good place fo tchrow net,” he said.

Kā‘eo watched the salt sprays, the waves beating in rhythms of white. “I dunno about dat.”

“Can be dangerous, ah? But good fun.” Tūtūpapa crouched down, “See da waves, how dey rise up and den crash, you look em wen dey lift, look long enuff you gon see da papio.”

Kā‘eo looked, but saw nothing. “Yah?”

“Gotta use da senses, ah? Eyes, ears, li’dat.”

“I tink yo eyes gettin worse, Papa. Gotta have Ma call up da eye doctor, get’chu da kine trifocals.” Kā‘eo made two circles with each hand and put them over his eyes, squinted.

Tūtūpapa looked at his grandson and smiled, “You gon learn one day, I tell you. No can catch if you no can see.”

Kā‘eo hid his face and laughed. “Ho Papa, you one real brain, ah?”

“Kolohe, you,” Tūtūpapa said, grabbing him around the shoulders. “You young yet, plenny stuffs you dunno.”

They continued on down the ridge, the beach no longer visible. Weeds and grass tangled into the cracks. A banyan tree’s roots fell down over the wall and out of the ground, and the path was veined with razor sharp clumps of rock that pushed at the

bottoms of Kā'eo's slippers. He glanced at his grandfather's feet. "So how you wen get back hea?" Kā'eo asked, not quite sure if he remembered the story.

Tūtūpapa slowed his stride long enough for Kā'eo to catch up. "Y'know how my step-maddah was, make us kids go up da chimney on each oddah's shouldahs fo clean da soot off da walls. All us takin turns crawlin undah da house, lookin fo dead rats or watevah was undah dea, bumbai all us gotta spend da night undah da floorboards."

"Aftah my faddah wen make, she wen kick us out, all us kids. We had fo go one orphanage, ah? Maybe six months, I wen run away. Wen live undah one bridge, abandoned warehouses, train cars. Pretty soon, I wen meet dis guy, Abe Schmidt, nice haole guy, wen own one bar, he wen hire me fo do da kine janitorial stuffs: clean da dishes, sweep da floor, mop up wen folks no can handle." Kā'eo laughed. "I was proolly yo age, y'know? Fifteen, shet up to my elbows, but was different times den. Schmidt nevah care how old I was, he knew I was gon work hard. But wen da police stop by or da jarheads, had fo put on da haole, y'know?" Tūtūpapa straightened his back and pulled his trunks up over his belly button, "How you doin, sir? Wat I can get for you? Real propah talk."

Kā'eo could picture Mr. Chock's thin lips curling. He shook the image from his head. "I dunno, Papa, das pretty nuts. How you wen live tchru all dat?"

They had reached a point in the ridge where you could see the rocks had been altered, shaped into the back of a dock, a drainpipe running through from one side to the other; the mouth just large enough to swim through. "Y'know, I wen know dis kid Jimmy Soares, one of da firs guys I wen meet aftah I wen get out da Navy. He wen come out one day, wen get stuck in dat pipe right dea. Wen drown." Kā'eo looked at the pipe, confused. "Wat's worse, ah? Jimmy nevah even have one chance."

Kā'eo looked from the drainpipe to the little rock island just off the ridgeline, thinking about how easy it would be to slip on the rocks and disappear beneath the waves. He walked out until he was just above where the drainpipe penetrated the wall; close enough to see the barnacles that grew on the lip of the metal opening and the rust that ran along its surface. The water was darker here, blue and black. He looked down, making out the ribs of the ridge, points where he might be able to pull himself up and out

of the water or cling on as the waves pulled him back. Even here the water was clear, clean.

He returned to his grandfather's side and then they both walked along the path near the dock. The wall was even taller here, spidered in legs of moss and topped with scrolling metalwork, red clay rooftops looming just beyond. Kā'eo made out a balcony, a man and woman leaning against a railing. A camera flashed, then laughter, and another couple took their place. He counted at least twenty photographs, maybe more.

“Doris Duke's,” Tūtūpapa said, reading Kā'eo's mind. “Famous lady, big time tobacco, one of da firs haole wāhine fo surf da big waves.”

“Fo real?”

“She wen learn from Kahanamoku.” Tūtūpapa looked up at the balcony, “Jus wen open um up to da public.”

“Tours?”

“Shangri-La,” Tūtūpapa spread his hands out in front of him, presenting the horizon; he stuck out his tongue and blew a raspberry. “No give two shets if *dis* place get one history. Folks jus like see her five acres, how her and Cromwell wen blow up dis ridge. Fo one boat, can believe dat or wat? All dis fo one fucken yacht.”

Kā'eo stepped back and looked at the dock. He could see the shape of it now, imagining the vessel—ivory white, gold gilded hull, straight out of the re-runs of Hawaii 5-0—that may have been anchored there. The drainpipe had purpose: water lapped through the opening, keeping everything perfectly deep. A bow's length away, a set of stone steps had been carved into the ridgeline, leading down to the water, and farther off, where the property line must have ended, the ridge resumed its natural state, worn by the sea.

“Ovah dea stay Halemanō, house of da shark, and out dea, Black Point.”

“My friends wen tell me about dis place, stay legendary. You wen come out hea, Papa, like fo real kine?”

“Wen feel like I was one of da rocks, I wen stay out hea so long. Maybe even wen look like one den, ah? Not now.” Tūtūpapa thumped his stomach. “Stay nice out hea, ah?” he asked.

“I dunno.” Kā‘eo ran his toes over the smooth contours of the stones beneath his feet, “I guess you hear about Cromwells and you no tink photo ops, ah? I mean, dis not Waikīkī, kinda feel more sacred den dat.”

Tūtūpapa nodded. “Still Ka‘alāwai to me, y’know? Can still come swim, tchrow net if you like, feed yo ‘ohana, ah? Can still sit on da beach and remembah how it wen feel da firs time you wen catch one wave or honi da girl you was checkin out.” Tūtūpapa smiled. “Can still get one shave ice and talk small kid times, y’know? Good times.”

Kā‘eo nodded.

“But you smart, akamai, you gon learn.” Tūtūpapa reached out and ruffled Kā‘eo’s hair, “You not gon be sked da rocks yo whole life.” Kā‘eo smoothed his hair back. “Y’know why I wen bring you out hea?” Tūtūpapa asked.

“Tchrow net you said. I figgah was about time, been like couple years since you wen tell me you was goin show me how. Ma tinks we jus gon talk shit and tell dirty jokes. Pops stay jealous he had fo work.”

They both laughed.

“One important ting da land, y’know?” Tūtūpapa began. “Like you wen say, stay sacred. You like learn fo tchrow net, you gotta respect da land, gotta learn da mo‘olelo of da wahi. Gotta know wea you stay. Undahstand dat place.”

“Get experience, ah?” Kā‘eo nodded.

“Like anything, y’know? Keep da mind sharp,” Tūtūpapa tapped his forehead. “Pay attention, look around, stay da same way wen you finally stand on da rocks wit da net in yo hand. Wen you finally feel da fibah, you gon know da weight, how it gon fall wen it hits, and sometimes you not.” Tūtūpapa looked over at his grandson, “Yo maddah wen tell me you wen start fo write.”

“Yah,” Kā‘eo hesitated, “not really.”

“She wen say you was gon entah one contest.”

Kaeo folded his hands in his lap. “Never wen turn um in yet. I get one idea, y’know, but da teacher no tink it stay good enough. No matter anyway, I no tink I can even write um right.”

“Write um how you like write um.”

“I dunno.”

“Eh, you tink I do?” Tūtūpapa placed his hands behind his head and looked toward the horizon, “Wen I wen open up da restaurant wit yo Nana, everybody like talk stink, how you say, criticize da way we wen choose fo do tings. But I tell you wat, nobody wen get dat right.”

Kā‘eo looked down into the water. In the reflection, his hands were shaking. “Dey say tings, Papa, even da teachers like talk stink. Dey no tink I stay good enough, dey tink I one loser, y’know? Cuz da way I talk.”

“And wat’chu tink?”

“Fuck em, I guess,” Kā‘eo laughed. “I mean, das most days. I dunno, Papa.”

Tūtūpapa got up and sat in the shade of the wall, cleared a spot for Kā‘eo beside him. “Dea always gon be people try fo hold you back, y’know dat? Plenny of yo Nana’s friends still like talk shet to dis day bout how Nana had one chance fo marry one rich Japanee, fo have one house out hea. Aloha to all dat bullshet, y’know? No get time fo worry bout all dat.”

“Fuck em den?”

“Eh now, ” Tūtūpapa winked. “Wen it comes down to wat feels right, you gon feel um in yo na‘au, in yo gut.” A wave rose and Kā‘eo thought he could make out something below the crest, a fish or a shadow, a sliver of movement. Tūtūpapa continued, “Even wen you unsure, you da kine: you wiggle da stones, you taste da soup. You test da watah, you watch da waves. If da only ting dat stay keepin you back is someone tellin you you no can, den da only ting keepin you back is yo’self, undahstand?”

“You nuts, Papa, like fo real kine.”

“Jus no tell yo maddah I wen give you permission fo tell yo teachah off, keh?”

Kā‘eo shook his head. “I keep tryin fo see wat’chu stay lookin at, but no can.”

“Maybe gotta look closah,” Tūtūpapa said, pointing to his brow. “You remembah today, you remembah who you like be, wat kine person you like become. Same way wen you write da sports section or watevah you decide fo do, ask yo’self if das who you like be. Cuz no mattah if yo parents wen raise you behind glass down Hālawa or dey wen grad Punahou, you are wat’chu make of yo’self, undahstand?”

Kā'eo could hear the coconut trees behind them moving in rhythm with the waves. He imagined the wind whispering secrets of the ocean into the leaves and over the walls and into the houses. "How about wen you was one kid, Papa?" Kā'eo asked.

Tūtūpapa laughed and sat down, his legs dangling over the ledge like roots. "I dunno. I guess maybe long time ago, Peter Maivia or Afa Anoa'i, guys you prolly nevah wen hear of. I tink everybody stay li'dat, have their idols. But aftah I wen grow up, was jus happy fo be alive, y'know? Get by, day-by-day and go from dea. Wen I wen marry yo Nana, I wanted fo be one good husband. Wen I wen start da deli, I wanted fo be one successful business man. Wen we wen have yo maddah, I wanted fo be one good faddah. Eventually you jus hea, and all you get is stories, da good ones and da bad ones too. Da important ting is you nevah fo'get which ones mattah mos, ah?"

Kā'eo listened to the wind and the sound of the water. He stared out at the ocean. "Yah."

Tūtūpapa looked at his grandson. "So wat was it?" he asked.

"Hmm?"

"Da kine, watevah you like entah?"

"Jus one stupid story, y'know? Nutten special, jus was talkin wit Miss Takayama, you know she gon close Goodie Korner?"

"I wen take all you kids dea, da bes peanut candy, period."

"Not gon be da same, Papa."

"Tings gon change, das part of it too. Believe me, I know. You young yet, you gon see, tings gon be alright. You gon be alright."

"Yah?"

Tūtūpapa squeezed Kā'eo close, then stood up and began to walk towards the other side of the dock. "Come," he said.

Kā'eo followed along, walking slowly, watching his feet as he moved behind his grandfather who seemed to float over the stones. When they reached the other side, Tūtūpapa took Kā'eo by the shoulders and brought him to the edge. "Ready?" Tūtūpapa asked.

But Kā'eo was already in the air, the wind pushing him toward the sky as he dropped down into the sea. The water swallowed him whole and Kā'eo felt his feet touch

bottom, his toes dancing against the rocks. He surfaced and looked for his grandfather, catching a glimpse of him just below the waves. When Tūtūpapa rose, they swam to the steps and sat there catching their breath.

“Can feel um, ah?” Tūtūpapa laughed. “You get um, no be sked.”

Kā‘eo nodded, breathing salt air into his lungs, his body reverberating with the memory of the tide. He leaned forward and slipped back in, pushing himself to touch the stones, to count the shadows and make sense of their shapes. When he surfaced for the second time, all he heard was laughter and the rhythm of his grandfather’s voice. The ocean clinging to his lips, caught on his tongue.

## CHAPTER 2. DROWNING ROOTS

Kā'eo's right palm was damp brown, the skin on his left red and raw. He rubbed both hands together and held them to his face, the smell of ground 'awa root filling his nostrils. He whispered the words he had memorized, "E hānai 'awa a ikaika ka makani," and removed his hands, a prickle running down his spine. He tied his hair back and picked up a shell from the table, then scooped the 'awa into a wood cup, brown settling on the surface before sinking below.

He moved from the kitchen and into the heart of the cottage. There was a dictionary and an open journal on the floor, the pages of the journal filled with scrawled chicken scratch. He knelt and spoke into the cup, "E hō mai," and then brought it to his lips. The 'awa was like dirt flooding over his tongue, like river water after a heavy rain, and he swallowed quickly. Over and over he heard the word until the cup was empty and he spoke it: "Ike," *knowledge*.

He put the empty cup on the floor and looked around the cottage: tables covered with fibers and lengths of scrap fabric, nets hanging from the ceiling, a bookshelf sagging to the floor, and a stack of boxes his professor, Ms. Fujii, had never bothered to move. In the corner was a small bed, his clothes in a pile beside it. Kā'eo made his way to one of the tables and found an old textbook. He picked up the text and then sat down with a handful of coconut leaf he had brought with him that day.

It had been awhile since Kā'eo had practiced weaving. He took one of the leaves and separated the spine from the leaf, then split that piece into two. After ten minutes and four spines, he closed the book and walked over to the window. Looking at the sill, he noticed a small fish that he had once woven; now so tan it was almost white. He held it in his palm and closed his eyes, feeling the warmth of the 'awa brewing in his stomach.

The first time had only taken a few minutes: he had finished two cups and was running his tongue over his gums. Ms. Fujii, dressed in a navy blue sundress, her black hair pulled into a bun, had begun to pass out material. "In old Hawai'i," she said through thin lips, "the task of weaving was performed by the wāhine, usually in groups, and often leading to the exchange of stories and daily affairs."

The class, all eight of them, was sitting in a circle on the floor of the cottage. One of his classmates, Chloe, had already begun to work the fiber. Kā'eo, sitting beside her, watched her hands.

“Mr. Teixeira?”

Her movements were confident and delicate, the material moving through her fingers with little effort. She wore a thin gold band on her right ring finger, the maile pattern just visible, nearly worn smooth. He could hear her humming softly between breaths.

“Kā'eo?” He stopped and looked up, Ms. Fujii standing over him. “Are you alright?” she asked.

“Sorry, ah?” he said, and picked up the fiber near his feet. The whole class laughed. Chloe just smiled.

“It's believed that 'awa can bring 'ike, knowledge, but it can bring other things as well,” Ms. Fujii looked at Kā'eo and sat, “like drunkenness. Which is why when missionaries arrived in 1820, the planting of 'awa was forbidden. Some still share their views today.”

Kā'eo enjoyed it, drinking 'awa and working in the cottage. Ms. Fujii gave extra credit for any of the students in her lā'au lapa'au course that wanted to use the space to further explore the culture, and Kā'eo and his classmates took full advantage. They would often drive up and study or do homework there, rotating who would bring the 'awa powder.

Eventually the semester came to a close, most of the class graduating that spring, leaving only Chloe and Kā'eo to enjoy the summer months, Ms. Fujii sometimes joining them if the mood struck her. Their conversations often drifted away from academia, the three of them talking story, Ms. Fujii chiming in with tales of the mainland: what it was like growing up there, how different it was to wake up in the winter months and see the ponds frozen over, everything ice.

“When'd you move here?” Chloe had asked one day.

“Well I always had family here. My grandparents bought this land when Kāne'ohē was still dirt roads, but I moved here when I was a freshman in high school. This room

used to be nothing but bags of dirt, fertilizer, all kinds of tools. I loved it out here, so much to explore—all the plants, the river.”

Kā‘eo nodded, “I wen go down dea, stay real peaceful, remind me of Ka‘alāwai.”

“Where’s that?” Ms. Fujii asked.

“Dis place down Diamond Head. My Papa and I always wen go.”

Ms. Fujii smiled. “I always felt a connection to nature. My mother was the same way, always in the kitchen with her herbs. I used to sit there with her, drinking mamaki tea and talking story. She always wanted to make a nursery back here.” Ms. Fujii looked at the both of them, “You guys are here so often, have you ever considered *growing* ‘awa? It’d be easy enough to clear some space for you, not like this land is getting much use.”

“Fo real?” Kā‘eo asked.

Ms. Fujii shrugged. “The only way to learn how to make a lei is to string the flowers, right?”

Kā‘eo stood and raised his cup. “Ike,” he said, and then downed every drop.

The first time had only taken a few minutes. Now, Kā‘eo could never be sure. It crept up on him, that feeling: nerves no longer on end, his muscles beginning to relax, his body forgetting itself as if lost in the current. Yet his mind would tread water, focused on the movements of his limbs, then everything would seem clear, visible in that in-between.

The sunlight was fading and the wind had picked up, a gentle breeze stirring the corners of the room, and he could hear the far off sound of the wind-chime that hung from Ms. Fujii’s lānai. He had come up to the cottage in the hopes of making a gift for his grandfather, something to show his dedication to what he was learning. Kā‘eo looked at the coconut leaf fish and wondered what was going on in his mind when he had made it, why he had weaved it in the first place. He looked around the room. Still, he could think of nothing.

The rain came slowly, muted *pick-packs* against the windows. Kā‘eo sat and listened, no longer feeling the knots in his back or his own frustration. After awhile, the rain began to slow to a drip. Kā‘eo felt as if he could hear each raindrop streaming off the roof, spilling puddles in the grass. He stood up and walked to a window overlooking the

river and again he heard it, a thumping. Outside, he made his way around the cottage, listening, until finally he found it, an ipu lying in the dirt, raindrops falling against its shell.

They got to work the next weekend, Kā'eo preparing the soil and choosing the plants, Chloe watering and weeding. He had a friend who owned farmland in Waikāne and they were able to transplant some of the older plants, buying a few younger roots to nurture themselves. They spent every other day at the cottage, caring for the 'awa, weaving and talking story; eventually, Kā'eo found himself at Goodwill, hauling a mattress through the brush. Chloe was better at working the material, and she did her best to teach Kā'eo, taking his hands and showing him how to fold the pieces into place. Kā'eo made simple things, objects he remembered from elementary school: fish, swords, a bird.

"It's your kuleana," she told him one day. "Your responsibility to who you are."

Kaeo laughed. "You tink so, ah?"

"I think it's important." She looked down and away from Kā'eo, "I know my parents never took the time with me and I wish they had."

"I tink dis jus one part of it, y'know? I mean, I no remember my Papa doin dis kine stuffs."

"My dad worked a lot, sometimes two jobs, and my mom took care of the housework and me. My mom had to clean toilets to help pay for my tuition."

"Coconut leaf no cost big dollars, go library get one book or da kine VHS."

Chloe laughed, laying the material in thick double wefts. "They wanted me to concentrate on school. English, math, science, the *important* stuff, y'know? Guess they didn't understand the importance of *this* kind of education. At least not when you got bill collectors calling so often you're afraid to pick up the phone or open your mailbox."

Kā'eo nodded and tried to follow her movements. Sometimes he'd watch her for a while, then move to one of the tables and work through the pages of the Hawaiian dictionary he had picked up at the swap meet.

"Why'd you stop?" she asked. Kā'eo looked up, confused. She nodded toward an open box filled with papers and notebooks, underwear, what she imagined had filled his top drawer at home. "Writing," she finally added.

“One long story,” he said, earmarking a page on pono. “Let’s jus say I wen get sick of folks tellin me wat I can and no can write. How fo write. Had fo change high skus cuz of dat shet.”

“I thought you went to Kamehameha?”

“I went Kasso da first tchree years, one of da teachers wen accuse of me of plagiarism, wen try fo expel me. He wen try fo tell my faddah fo enroll me in night sku, maybe I get one chance fo get into da labor field early.”

“That’s what the teacher said?”

“He wen try fo hold me after sku too. Fo practice how he like me write. Can believe dat shet? I finally wen get sick of it, tchrew one fuckin desk at him.” Chloe sat, silent. “But das not why I wen stop, I jus not dea yet, y’know? Get plenny *important* stories get nutten fo do wit me, I jus waitin fo figgah out how fo write one dat does. One fiction das not.”

“Is that why you took Fujii’s class?”

“Dat and gotta get da right credits, ah?” he laughed. “Degree requirements. But it feels good too, doin someting dat matters, das about Hawai’i.”

“I feel the same way. I guess I’m just surprised, the way you talk about your grandfather, I figured someone in your family had taught you.”

Kā’eo turned his notepad sideways and started to doodle. “I tink my Papa was into um long time ago.” Kā’eo glanced at Chloe and started to sketch her hair, long waves of black falling onto her slender shoulders. “Was weird, da first time I wen taste da ‘awa, I wen start fo remember all kine stuffs from befo. Actually, jus dis one time: my Papa, my uncles, all of em drinkin ‘awa, talkin story. Never even thought I wen see ‘awa befo, den all of a sudden all da memories wen come back.”

Chloe put her work down, leaned back and let the sun shine across her naked collarbone. She began to hum, soft and slow. “What’s so weird about that?”

Kā’eo listened, trying hard to decipher the melody. He let his pencil slip down further. “Like I said, my Papa, he not li’dat. He not into weavin and craftin, and da kine cultural aspects. He know how fo make net, he know da stories, but not like he was really about all of dis. I mean, he wen spend most his mornings down da pier, drinkin and talkin story. He wen tell me more about da guys he wen grow up wit den any of dis.”

“But he’s Hawaiian, right?” She tucked a stray hair behind her ear.

“Been hea his whole life.”

“I didn’t ask if he was *local*, I asked if he was Hawaiian.” Chloe smiled, then picked up her work and examined the pattern with her fingertips. “Well even Ms. Fujii knows this stuff, and she isn’t Hawaiian.”

Kā’eo shrugged his shoulders and put his notepad under the dictionary. “I’ll be back, keh?”

She nodded, “Keh.”

Kā’eo went back behind the cottage, to the ‘awa patch that they had planted months before. He touched the soil with his hands and then dug his fingers part of the way into the earth to feel for moisture. He dusted the dirt off his palms and walked around the small patch, picking out weeds as he went, occasionally looking up through the treetops for a glimpse of sun. When he was done he went into the cottage and began to prepare some of the ‘awa root they had purchased.

“Hea,” he said, passing Chloe a cup. She drank half and put the cup on the floor. “Gon be happy wen da ‘awa we drink stay ours.”

“Definitely.”

“Jus feels good, y’know? Have one part in da process. I tink das wat I like do, if can. Not jus ‘awa though, maybe can learn oddah stuffs too, kalo li’dat; start one lo’i. Maybe das my kuleana, ah?”

“Maybe write about it?” Chloe took his hand and led him down to the floor. “You should bring your grandfather here, show him.”

“You tink so?”

She smiled again, “Yeah, why not?”

He looked at her over the rim of his cup and nodded, “Keh.”

Kā’eo waited until the ‘awa had begun to grow above ground before inviting his grandfather up to the cottage. He told him nothing about the place other than where it was, and that it was where he had been spending much of his time. “How you afford um?” Tūtūpapa asked when he arrived there that morning.

Kā’eo shook his head. “Our kumu’s place, she no care, told us use um how we like as long as we no use um fo trouble.”

“Wat da hell you use um fo?”

“Jus stay one interest, y’know? Figgah, wit’ out one place fo practice, how we gon learn?”

Tūtūpapa bent down and touched the lauhala mat. “You good, too bad yo Nana nevah live fo see dis.”

“Das Chloe, not me.” He crouched down beside his grandfather, “You never told me Nana plaited?”

“Her maddah did. Das how was back den, but her faddah could make one mean tchrow net, bettah den any I evah made.” As they left, Tūtūpapa saw the beginnings of Kā‘eo’s ‘awa patch, “Wat’s dat?”

“Dis wat I really wen like show you.”

“Wat da hell fo?”

“Why buy um wen we can jus grow um hea? I better at dis kine stuffs. One important ting, Chloe tinks it stay my kuleana.”

Tūtūpapa started up the path leading away from the cottage, but then stopped and turned around. “Remembah long time ago, I wen talk to you bout who you like be?” he asked Kā‘eo.

“Yah?”

“Well, too much of anyting no good. Too much ‘awa, not enuff hea.” He pointed to his head. “Stay away from dis shet, undahstand?” Tūtūpapa grabbed one of the stems.

“Is everything alright?” Chloe appeared at the top of the path, a silhouette against the sunlight streaming through.

Tūtūpapa let go, the tops of the roots already exposed. He looked at her and then back at Kā‘eo. “You remembah,” he pointed at Kā‘eo, and then made his way past Chloe, muttering the word hūpō under his breath.

Kā‘eo didn’t bother to run after his grandfather, he didn’t know what to say and, the truth was, he didn’t understand his grandfather’s disappointment and anger. Chloe took to making the ‘awa while he tried to explain to her what had happened. He sat on his bed looking out the window. “I never seen um act li’dat befo,” he said.

Chloe lay back against the wall and took a sip from her cup. “Alotta folks are like that, think it should be illegal. Numbs your gums and your mouth, must numb your brain.

Like Fujii said, it's that old missionary frame of mind. My uncle was like that, my grandfather too. My father was different though, 'open minded,' he would say."

"You had 'awa befo?"

"Once. My father isn't Hawaiian, he grew up in California. So when he first heard about the stuff, he thought he was being cultural, y'know, cuz my mom is hapa. I remember my mom's face when she saw it, she fucking flipped. She told my father, why you waste money on that shit, and then dumped the whole thing down the drain."

"Was cheap or someting back den?"

Chloe ignored his question.

Kā'eo walked toward the bookcase and pulled out one of their textbooks, flipped through the pages and, when he got to a section on 'awa, laid it on the table and traced the sentences with his fingertip. "He wen look at dat shit like was one fuckin drug or someting, like we was growin pakalōlō back hea."

"People think it's sacrilegious, like you're killing yourself or something, when really it isn't a big deal, y'know? I mean we got 'awa bars in Honolulu. The university is even thinking of starting a festival. It's just that old way of thinking."

Kā'eo laughed. "Let um cool down, ah?"

"Let him know how you feel. What else are you gonna do?"

Tūtūpapa never came to the cottage again. Instead he would make excuses or change the subject whenever Kā'eo tried to bring it up. A few months after Tūtūpapa's visit, Chloe and Kā'eo had decided to make a throw net, and Kā'eo decided to visit his grandfather, hoping he would help gather olonā. "Wen you gon start fo write again?" Tūtūpapa asked from the pocket of his recliner. "You was good, y'know dat? You wen make Miss Takayama proud."

"I no like write fo oddah people, about oddah people, anymore. I like do someting real, Papa."

"Den no do um. Write bout yo'self. Write bout dat time you and yo braddahs went futtin around downtown and you saw yo friend, wat's da name?"

"Kalani."

"No, no, was *Leilani* dat night, ah?" Tūtūpapa slapped his knee, "Dat buggah, hangin round his sistahs plenny."

Kā'eo sat on the carpet, pulling at the loose strands. "So you gon come wit us or wat?"

"Wea?"

"Up da mountain. I like you come, you get more experience wit dis kine stuffs."

"Why you still doin all of dis?"

"Wat'chu mean?"

Tūtūpapa took his glasses off and pinched the bridge of his nose. "All dis olonā and weavin mats, you was nevah into all of dis befo. Dis wat you like do da rest of yo life?"

"I dunno, maybe."

"Couple years ago, was all bout makin someting of yo'self, now you like work yo ass off in da fields, fo wat? And all da money yo folks wen spend on yo education, how bout all of dat?"

Kā'eo looked up at his grandfather, "I jus doin like you wen teach me, wat feels right."

"Sure nutten messin wit yo head?"

"Chloe get nutten fo do wit dis."

"I not talkin Chloe, I talkin dat shet you growin out dea." Tūtūpapa sat back in his chair and crossed his arms. "Wat'chu tink, dat stuff make you mo Hawaiian or someting? You tink drinkin a little 'awa, weavin some coconut leaf, make you anada person? You and yo girlfriend."

"Chloe no stay my girlfriend, Papa. I told you already."

"She stay someting."

Kā'eo looked down. "You no understand."

"You no tink I know bout dis stuff, you no tink I wen know guys wen drink dat shet all day long? Wat you no get is all dat jus rubbish, jus stay some classroom bullshet, stuffs fo get people fo feel like dey gettin back to da 'āina. Jus like my friend Vince Carvalho, born again—."

"I no get time fo your stories, Papa," Kā'eo interrupted. "I goin, keh? If you change your mind, give me one call."

Tūtūpapa looked at Kā'eo, the red around his eyes and the yellowish tinge just beginning to blossom on the tops of his cheeks. "You still usin um? Da 'awa, can tell already. Heavy now, ah? Couple times a day?"

"Das really why you no like go wit me?"

Tūtūpapa nodded. "Tell me why, how come you no can jus go do um sobah?"

Kā'eo walked out of the room and paused when he reached the screen door. "You know," he said, walking back into the hall, "I gon show you, somehow I gon make you see."

Tūtūpapa pushed himself to the edge of his recliner and looked at his grandson. "Maybe you tink doin dis make you mo in touch wit wat'chu weave and work, but it nevah gon be li'dat. No mattah wat you drink or wat you do, da only ting dat mattahs is right hea," he put his hand on his chest.

Kā'eo looked at his grandfather and nodded. "You gon see."

The ipu's shell was sand-colored with patches of dark brown and although it had been left to the elements there were no cracks or signs of damage. Kā'eo moved it around in his hands and wondered where it had come from, if it had been Ms. Fujii's or one of her students, if it had been grown near the cottage. Had it ever been played? He sat down on the lauhala mat and cradled the ipu's neck, then thumped the bottom. Water splashed against the inner wall of the gourd's belly, *thump*, and again the tiny rush.

The sound reminded Kā'eo of the ocean. Every time he hit the gourd, he imagined the waves crashing against the hull of a boat, or a canoe. Wa'a, he thought, picturing the vessel making its way over the sea. After a few moments of playing the ipu, he felt the ocean breeze on his cheeks and face, and his body became loose and fluid. The ceiling was swallowed and replaced by a black sky.

He was everywhere and nowhere at once. Then he saw it, a wa'a kaulua carrying a group of young men. They were just shades at first, but when the vessel drew closer, Kā'eo saw himself, struggling to keep pace with the others, his hands shifting on the paddle, his posture less poised and prepared.

He followed as they made their way along the sea, his attention fixed on the image of himself. "Pūpūkahi i holomua," the men shouted, all except the image of Kā'eo,

who was still trying to keep up. “Pūpūkahi i holomua,” the men said again, and again Kā’eo watched himself struggling to understand, paddling harder and with less rhythm.

Kā’eo could see rocks jutting up out of the ocean and a ridgeline in the distance. The men stopped paddling and one of them spoke to the image of Kā’eo. He looked at the man and shook his head, and again the man asked. Uncertain, the image stood, then lost his balance and fell into the water. Kā’eo saw himself struggle and try to make his way back toward the boat, but the man laughed and threw his paddle into the water. The men grabbed their paddles and turned away from the cliffs, the wa’a disappearing in the distance.

Kā’eo began to swim toward the shoreline, the distance growing with each stroke. Finally, after what seemed like years, the image raised his head from the water and reached a hand out for the rocks. His palm slapped the surface and he opened his eyes, no closer to the cliffs than before. He treaded water, looking around for any way to reach the shore, or for the wa’a, making its way back toward him. Kā’eo could see himself growing tired, more and more of his body sinking into the sea. He held his head above water, waves crashing against his face and, just before his head fell below the surface, there came a whisper.

He awoke, the room drenched in darkness, the sound of crickets filling his ears. He was on his back and could feel his heart beating quickly. He felt for the wall, flipped the light switch and then looked around the room. The lauhala mat he had been laying on was crumpled, and the dictionary had been kicked in the corner. He found the ipu just beneath one of the tool tables, the side completely split, a puddle formed under the gourd. ‘Awa had never once caused him to hallucinate and he wondered if he had experienced a hihi’o. Pūpūkahi i holomua, he pulled a few books from the shelf and, after working through the pages, recited a definition: “Unite fo move fo’ward.” Unsure of what to think, he began to straighten up the cottage.

The vision occupied Kā’eo’s thoughts that night. Every time he seemed close to sleep, the paddlers would slip into view, the young men shouting as they carved their way through his mind. When he finally fell asleep, he dreamed that he was swimming toward the cliffs, fighting against the waves that continued to pull him back. The next morning, he called Chloe and asked her what she thought.

“It’s an ‘ōlelo no‘eau, my paddling coach always used to say it. The rest though, I dunno, you could look in the books, but I doubt they’ll tell you anything.”

“Wat den?” Kā‘eo said.

“Call Ms. Fujii?”

“I gon see my Papa.”

“How’s he gonna help?”

“I dunno, can jus feel um.” Kā‘eo ended their conversation and went out into the yard to pick some papaya, then jumped in his truck and headed out to his grandfather’s home.

“Shet, wat’chu doin hea so early?” Tūtūpapa asked when Kā‘eo arrived at his door.

“Wat I doin hea at all, you mean?” Kā‘eo smiled and held out the papayas, “You wen eat yet?”

“Jus wen get back from da store, get Podagee sausage, rice from las night too. Sit,” Tūtūpapa said.

Tūtūpapa made the eggs and Kā‘eo prepared the papaya. After both had made their plates, Tūtūpapa poured guava juice into two glasses and they both went out onto the lānai. “So wat? I know you nevah come all dis way fo sample my famous Podagee scramble.” Tūtūpapa said.

Kā‘eo took a sip of his juice. “Someting been buggin me and I tink was one sign fo come see you.” He looked away, “I was up at da cottage last night and I—.”

“Wat?”

“Tink I had one hihi‘o.”

“One wat?”

“One vision, one dream.”

“Oh,” Tūtūpapa smiled so big the top of his glasses met his eyebrows. “Da huaka‘i pō come see you?”

“I serious Papa, was weird. One minute was playin dis ipu, den da whole room wen fill up wit water, wen feel like was part of da ocean, y’know? Den dis wa‘a wen come by and I wen see myself paddling.”

Tutupapa just stared at Kā‘eo. “Part of da watah?”

“Yah, but was in da wa‘a too,” Kā‘eo said.

“You nevah paddle befo.”

“I know, and could tell, cuz no can grip da hoe correct and no can keep up, y’know? Den, we wen get to these rocks and was one huge fuckin ridge and one of da guys he wen yell at me, he wen keep shoutin pūpūkahi i holomua.”

“Unite fo move fo’ward,” they both said in unison.

Kā‘eo looked at his grandfather, “How you know?”

“One Hawaiian proverb, nowadays you hear um all da time. Paddlers, politicians...”

“Das what Chloe wen say.”

Tūtūpapa shrugged his shoulders.

“Wat about da rest of it, what about da ridge?” Kā‘eo continued to describe what he remembered.

Tūtūpapa laughed. “All dat time wit yo books, you wen fo’get, ah?”

“Wat’chu mean?”

“Ka‘alāwai, watevah you wen dream, das Ka‘alāwai.” Tūtūpapa shook his head, “I wen warn you bout ‘awa, stuffs no good. Got you dreamin up magic ipus and da kine visions.”

“It’s not da ‘awa, Papa.”

“How you know?”

“I jus know, keh? Was different, felt real.”

“Bullshet.”

Kā‘eo set his glass on the table. “You know, ah?”

“Wat’chu mean?”

“All dis bullshit, all dis ‘awa dis, ‘awa dat, all shibai.”

Tūtūpapa took a large swallow from his glass and placed it on the table beside Kā‘eo’s. “Like I wen tell you befo, too much of anyting no good.”

“So how much stay enough, huh? How much ‘awa you wen drink befo you came one righteous guy? I remember you and Uncle Reggie dem, fuckin ‘awa bowl so full it wen stain da table.”

Tūtūpapa's expression was solid, steady. "I nevah wen drink 'awa, nevah. Yo Uncle Reggie, he da kine, local wen he like be, wen da situation wen call fo um. He wen bring dat shet my house one time, one time," Tūtūpapa held up a finger, "but I nevah wen drink um. You remembah how full da bowl was, why you tink da buggah wen stay dat way?" Kā'eo was quiet. "Wat da hell it mattah anyway?" Tūtūpapa asked.

"I dunno."

"Wat'chu mean?"

Kā'eo looked at the floor and took a deep breath. "Dis whole time, wenevah I wen translate someting or wen try fo weave someting, dat one moment, nutten else you do, all dis bullshit, das wat wen keep me goin. I thought, nah, das jus cuz he stay older. All dat time he wen spend in da Mainlan, he wen forget wat it means fo be like me and Chloe, fo have one kuleana."

"Dat 'awa fuckin wit yo head, boy, I tell you dat. And yo girlfriend—."

"Nah, I see um now, I understand da dream. Dat ridge, I no belong dea, I no belong wit one old man who drink guava juice outta one carton fo honor who he is."

Tūtūpapa stood up, "You not tinkin straight, you need some watah or wat?"

Kā'eo pushed his chair out, got up and opened the screen door. "I gon leave, keh? I sorry I wen show up," he said, walking inside.

"You gotta stop dis already. You dunno wat'chu doin." Tūtūpapa walked in after him. "Wen was da las time you wen talk wit yo faddah, huh? Wen kiss yo maddah on da cheek? Mark stay askin bout you, y'know? Wat's next Kā'eo? Wat I gon say wen Elani start fo figgah um out, wen he start fo ask what da fuck stay wrong wit his braddah?"

Kā'eo opened the front door. "Fuck you."

"You stay da kine obsessed, Kā'eo."

"You deaf or wat?"

"You listen to yo'self, wat'chu sayin right now? So pa'akikī, you fo'get wat mattahs, ah? You jus gon tchrow yo whole family away? Show some respect. Fo wat, one girl?"

Kā'eo stopped. "Wen dey ask wea da fuck I am, you tell em wea I like be, keh? Uncle Reggie local wen he like be, Vince Whoevers one born again nutten, well wen da

fuck you gon teach me fo do mo den fish? Wen da fuck you gon teach me how fo *make* da net?” Kā’eo unlocked his truck and got in.

Tūtūpapa walked to the front door. “Pūpūkahi,” he said. Kā’eo rolled up his window and reversed out of the driveway. Tūtūpapa ran out to the road. “Pūpūkahi,” he yelled again, the lettering on Kā’eo’s tailgate unreadable in the distance.

Kā’eo wove through traffic. He sped through yellow lights, and when he got onto the freeway, continued in fifth gear until the Kāne’ohe exit. Waiting at the intersection of Kahekili and Likelike Highway, he noticed his journal peeking out of his book bag on the passenger seat. He picked it up and flipped through the pages, the first few filled with words on words, the ink overlapping in straight strokes and brief curls. Then the pages emptied, white space and doodles, so many caricatures of Chloe he could almost hear them hum. He flipped back to the last thing he had written: pono.

Someone’s horn blared and then his phone rang. Kā’eo yanked the wheel to the right and slammed on the gas. “Yah?” he said, pressing the phone between his cheek and his shoulder, checking in his rearview to see if any cops had caught his illegal turn.

“Are you alright?” Chloe asked on the other end, “I’m guessing the talk didn’t go well.”

“Wea you at?”

“Home.”

“I like see you, alright, wea da hell your house stay?”

“I’ll just meet you at the cottage, okay?”

“Nah, I like pick you up, should I turn on Kam?” She paused. “Turn?” he asked, louder this time.

“Yeah,” she said.

He did, cutting off another car. “So wat? Wea I gotta go?”

“You know, I’ll just walk down to the bus stop.”

Kā’eo laughed, “I jus wen pass Hawai’i Memorial.”

“Seriously, just turn around and I’ll meet you there.”

“Eh, jus let me pick you up, keh? Fuck, not like I some stranger or someting. Why you bein so damn secretive anyway?”

“I’m not.”

“Fo real though, wat’chu get fo hide?”

She sighed and told him the directions.

After passing the cemetery and reaching the intersection of Pali and Kalaniana’ole Highway, Kā’eo followed Chloe’s directions into Maunawili valley. With each turn, the houses seemed to grow in size; some fenced off while others displayed signs indicating the home security service of choice. Kā’eo’s pick-up sputtered along, and he remembered riding in Tūtūpapa’s station wagon, the looks they got as they drove to Ka’alāwai, to Cromwells.

Chloe was waiting on the side of the road when he drove up, a huge two-story looming behind her. He had always imagined that they had come from a similar place. In a house near rivers and streams, the ground so moist he could smell the wet through the walls. Kā’eo pulled his truck onto the grass and got out.

“Happy?” Chloe asked, her arms crossed.

“Fuckin Maunawili, huh? How many toilets your maddah wen clean fo afford dis place?”

“I don’t want to hear it, alright, let’s just go.”

“Nah, nah,” Kā’eo said, looking at the smooth stones that lined the driveway.

“Wat your parents really do, huh? Dad work two jobs my ass.”

She made her way to the passenger side. “Let’s just go, keh?” she pulled on the door, but it was locked.

“Nah, why go? We jus stay hea, fuckin palace up dea, ah?” Kā’eo started to walk up the driveway; Chloe caught up to him and grabbed his arm.

“What’s your problem?”

“Problem? You da one like push me around. Why you gotta lie fo? Wat school you really wen go, Punahou? Iolani?”

“You’re being ridiculous.”

“I get it, too good fo me, ah? No wonder you never like invite me up hea, no wonder you wen lie, too fuckin good fo one moke outta Kahalu’u.”

“Get in the fuckin car already.”

Kā'eo spit on the ground. "Funny, y'know, talk all your high maka-maka bullshit about da 'āina and your kuleana, guess stay easy when your fuckin family can buy all da culture dey need."

"Shut the fuck up."

"I jus sayin, you talk all dis shit, actin like your whole life your hands in da dirt, wea your hands really been, huh? Wat da fuck you really do?"

Chloe pointed up the driveway, in the direction of mango trees and plumeria blossom. Kā'eo could hear the sound of moving water beneath his breath. "This...this isn't me, alright?"

"Nah, das you, all dat oddah shit stay someone else."

She crossed her arms. "You know, I used to think alotta things about you. I used to think you were just confused but really you're just fucked up, playing pretend with your dictionary and a soapbox your grandfather gave you. Fucking hopped up on some shit you can't handle."

Kā'eo slapped his knee and started laughing. "You gon bring up dat shit too, huh? *You?* Y'know, I guess we all wen learn someting today." Chloe turned her back and walked away. Kā'eo continued to laugh. "Pūpūkahi i holomua," he yelled at her back, "unite fo what? Fo'ward wea?" She turned to look at him from the top of the driveway. "Wat, huh? Wat'chu get fo say?"

"You want a proverb, Kā'eo? How about this one: 'O ka makapō wale nō ka mea e hāpapa i ka pōuli," she yelled. "Where the fuck are you?"

Kā'eo smiled and shook his head, his jaw and stomach sore. Chloe was already out of view, disappearing into that other world. He got in his truck and drove, switching gears by the sound of the engine. The radio was barely audible and Kā'eo sang whatever songs came on and when he didn't know the words he'd make up his own. When he came to a red light, he sung louder, sometimes looking into the car next to his, dedicating a verse to the lucky lady, or stopping mid-sentence and giving a shaka to the man in the driver's seat.

He drove for a while, eventually drifting off, not paying attention to the streets or the world around him. When he heard gravel under his tires, he stopped suddenly, not realizing where he was until he heard the wind-chime from Ms. Fujii's lānai. He parked

beside the trashcans and got out. Ms. Fujii was on the porch stringing together paper flowers with a piece of thread. “Good afternoon,” she said.

He looked at her and then to a plumeria bush beside the steps where she sat humming a familiar melody. “Aloha ‘auinalā, kumu.”

“What brings you here today?”

“Cruisin, y’know?” Kā‘eo was already at the back gate, but stopped, Chloe crossing his mind. “Dat song, you know da name of um?” he asked.

“Andy Cummings,” she said. “Waikīkī.” He nodded and watched her string the last flower and tie the end. He unlatched the gate and passed through without another word, leaving his slippers where the dirt began.

The ground was soft from the morning rain and Kā‘eo could feel mud clinging to his feet as he made his way down to the cottage. When he reached the small building, he went around the back to the ‘awa patch, where three or four plants stood tall. He grabbed the tallest of them, pulled it from the earth, and carried it into the cottage, leaving a trail of dirt behind him. Inside, he cleared the table with one arm and dropped the plant on the surface like an animal carcass, and using only his hands, separated the roots from the stalk. He grabbed a knife from another table and cut the roots into chunks, then put a handful of pieces into his mouth until his chin was moist with bitter juice.

The effect took only minutes, Kā‘eo tried to wash his face in the sink but it did nothing to dilute the numbness running through his limbs. He left the cottage and rounded the ‘awa patch, not stopping until he found the small trail that led down to the river. When he reached the bank, he kneeled down and submerged his head in the water.

Face dripping, he lay down in the mud and looked up toward the sky. After awhile, evening came and somewhere in the back of Kā‘eo’s mind he could hear an ipu being played. He was there again, in the water, but this time there was no sign of the wa‘a, and the cliffs were so distant that he could not tell the shoreline from the sky. He could feel his arms growing tired, and the waves crashing against his face. *Pūpūkahi*, he thought they whispered, but when he woke, his head just above water, he had already forgotten what they had said.

## CHAPTER 3. THE EMPTY PARTS

Kahalu'u was a deep black, signs of life cast in the flicker of a streetlamp. Kā'eo and his father sat just beyond the glow, under the cover of the garage, both leaning back in the creak of lawn chairs, watching termites gather around the streetlight above. An open cooler sat between them, silver cans floating in a sea of ice. Pops reached for one and offered it to his son. Kā'eo opened his mouth to say something, then closed it and took the can.

Pops was still in his uniform. His fluorescent yellow union t-shirt streaked with dirt, his blue jeans dusted red by the 'Ewa plains. "You always hated the damn things," Pops said, watching the termites.

"Wen I hear one good reason da buggahs still around, I gon change my mind, until den, fuck em." Kā'eo pushed the tab back on his can and took a long draw.

"Nasty mouth, too."

"Eh, I gotta get someting from you, ah Pops?" Kā'eo waved a termite away, "Fuckin things."

Pops glanced at his son, watched him drink. "Howzit anyway?"

"Alright, stay lookin fo work right now. Not sure wat I like do yet."

"What about the museum?"

"No time fo fool around, could be makin double in half da time workin construction, you know wat I mean."

"Bus ass, y'know?" Pops raised an eyebrow, "plus, you were getting by."

"Eh, I jus like do someting different, y'know?"

"Kids seem to enjoy it. Aunty Cindy took her daughter, said she had fun, learned plenty. Maybe you could just do it part time, or just weekends?"

"Pop?"

"Yeah?"

Kā'eo ran a hand over his buzzed scalp and reached for his beer.

"Just saying, you got experience, knowledge. Gotta use that degree for something, right?"

"No need one degree fo make money."

Pops looked at the houses cast in darkness, sprawling difference up and down the street. “There’s opportunities, just gotta look. Y’know when your mother and I came here, was just dirt—.”

“I done lookin, alright?”

“Alright.”

Kā’eo finished his can and threw it in the box. Reached down and pulled up another. “Tink Ma gon be okay?” he asked.

Pops watched a termite land on the top of the cooler lid. “Hard, yeah? I don’t think any of us expected it, but she’s gonna get through it, she knows he’s in a better place. We all do.”

Kā’eo watched it crawling toward him, “She wen sound bad on da phone, like she not gettin much sleep.”

“Some nights are better than others. She likes sleeping in that old rocking chair on the lānai. Your Papa made that chair, y’know? For your Nana when she was pregnant with your mother. Got the koa from some guy down Hawai’i Kai, just had it piled up in his garage.” Kā’eo ran his fingers over his sandpaper cheeks and then down to his chin, tracing his jawline. “He built alotta things, even helped build the house.”

“Yah, yah, dug da ditches and all dat, how many times I wen hear all of dat already.” Kā’eo looked back at the cooler lid but the termite was gone.

“Built a boat once too.”

“Wat boat?”

“Nothing too crazy, something to go out on the bay with, sandbar, dive. His friend put money down for the deli, so Papa helped him fix up his old catamaran. Ended up being a pretty nice piece of work, still floating down the pier. Big fucking yellow thing.”

“Wat dey wen name um?”

“I dunno, one Hawaiian name.”

“One name important, especially if it stay Hawaiian,” Kā’eo said.

“It’s been awhile since I seen it.” Pops leaned forward in his chair and looked at Kā’eo, noticing the soft slope of his shoulders. “Your mother was always happy you learned Hawaiian.”

Kā’eo spread his arms across the back of his chair. “Papa never was.”

“Your grandfather was proud of everything you did.”

“I not young anymore, Pop.” Kā‘eo let his left arm fall but kept his right cocked loosely, “Papa never gave two shits about wat I like study. If it never wen go wit his not-like-befo beliefs, he never care.”

“You know better than that.”

“I know Pop and you no need worry. Had couple years fo deal wit his bullshit. Fo figgah um out.”

“Still—.”

“Still wat? Treat somebody like one kid, pretty soon dey start fo ack like one.”

“Is that why you left?”

Kā‘eo looked at his father and smiled. “Eh, get busy, ah? Plenny stuffs goin on, stay hard, I know you can understand dat.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nutten,” he tipped his can back.

“It’s family, y’know?” Pops put his beer down. “For alotta folks, even nowadays, ‘awa isn’t something you go and mess around with. And what were we supposed to think?”

Kā‘eo closed his eyes. “How many times I gotta say um, was my choice, y’know? No matter you tink stay right or wrong.”

“It’s our job to look out for you.”

“Wat about dis?” he raised his beer.

“What about it?”

“You tellin me dis stay any better?”

Pops shook his head. “Different though.”

“Da only difference was I was tryin fo do someting and you folks like intrude on um, criticize um, cuz wat you wen tink. Ma happy I know ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i? Well shit, I got sick of learnin um from someone else.”

“We taught you what we knew. Your grandfather always took the time.”

“Fuck ‘awa already, I done wit dat too.” Kā‘eo leaned back and watched another termite join the fray, “Funny, y’know?” He held his can just below his lips, “Fo all da bullshit you folks wen give me, bein up in dat cottage was da closest I ever wen feel to

Papa since small kid times. Was jus...I jus wen feel closer... closer to myself, y'know? Was like he was wit me too."

"You ever tell him that?"

"Plenny times, but he no care."

"It's just hard, y'know? You're talking about how you're learning about your culture, and that's easy to understand, but who are you learning it from? How, cutting class, not coming home? Spending all your time with folks we never knew about."

"Experience, Pops, das how I wen learn um."

"If you were interested, you could've asked your grandfather, not some professor with an ethics issue."

"Never felt li'dat, y'know? I mean Ms. Fujii, she small kine nuts, one Japanee tryin fo teach Hawaiians how fo be Hawaiian, but dea were others, kumu who took da time fo help me understand, fo show me how deep our roots go. Fo help me trace myself back to Hāloa, fo help me see how red da kalo bleed. But wen I wen try fo get Papa involved, he never have fo ack li'dat. Why he gotta judge me fo wat I like do? I never wen judge him. All dat shit about support wen fly right out da fuckin window den."

"You never came to us. Your mother and I, we could've talked to him."

Kā'eo leaned forward and stared down at his shadow stretched in the lamp light. "No lie, Pop, you knew."

Pops looked up the road, away from his son. "We might not have supported you, but we would've listened. Heard out your side. We got you into Kamehameha."

"I was one junior, Pop, felt like one freshman."

"It was more than your mother had. More than Papa." Kā'eo reached for another beer, popped the tab. The sound echoed in the night. "We tried to do what was best."

"I know dat."

"He loved you."

"I know dat too."

Pops watched a termite land on his son's shoulder. "And you still don't understand?"

Kā'eo caught it, opened his hand and looked at it in his palm. "I knew plenny kids growin up, their folks wen act like dey stupid, like wat-da-fuck-stay-wrong-wit'chu kine.

But was never li'dat fo me, I thank you guys fo dat. Even after all dat bullshit wit Chock. Fuckin people tinkin I wen cheat, like I really stupid enough fo fuck up. Fo what, hundred bucks and my name in da newspaper? Even wen Chock wen try fo press charges, you guys was right dea. You guys wen tell me I wen deserve better, dat I get one talent he no can see. You wen send me Kamehameha, told me was gon be one better fit."

"Better than where you were."

The termite's wings fluttered, its body twitched. Kā'eo put a finger to it and held it still. "Wen feel weird though. All of sudden I wen start fo ask myself all kine questions about who I stay? One girl I was goin sku wit knew their mo'olelo mo'okū'auhau by heart. And who am I wit my Pidgin tongue and my English first name. *Robert*, dey wen call me, and I wen tell em, jus like I wen tell Chock, *Kā'eo*, like I really wen know da bones behind it. I wen make up stories about bein one tough guy from Kahalu'u. Tellin em we go make beer runs down Hygenics, or catch da bus down Mānoa fo see if we get chance fo fuck some private sku chicks."

Pops held his hands together. "Why didn't you tell us?"

"Jus had fo deal wit em, y'know? Dat was da kine nobody years, cuz nobody matters. Fuck anybody if dey like call me names. Fuck anybody if dey like question who I stay. But wen I wen start fo figgah shit out and wen start fo learn about who I really am," he wiped the termite off on his shorts. "Das wen you guys like say someting. Das wen you guys like ask me wat da fuck my problem is. Das wen you gotta ask wat stay wrong wit *me*? And wat'chu expect me fo say to dat? Wat we really get left fo talk about?"

Pops was silent. He rested his beer on his knee and sat there, his eyes closed. Kā'eo nodded and did the same. The light flickered out, and in the darkness the termites were almost invisible.

"Y'know when I first met your grandfather," Pops began, "he used to call me Podagee boy. Never used my name, just Podagee boy. I'm not gonna lie, I didn't know shit about what being Portuguese meant. Still don't. At most, it was the rooster your grandmother kept by the kitchen sink, y'know? Or the stories she brought home."

"You learn mo from da joke books den da history books, ah?"

“Maybe that was it, I dunno. Maybe it’s about realizing there isn’t much difference between being Haole and that, but I had alotta pride in my name. I knew *Marcelo* was Portuguese, I knew my great-grandfather gave me that. So the next time I went over to pick up your mother, I confronted him about it.”

“Wat he wen tell you?”

“He took me out back, sat me down right underneath the mango tree. Podagee boy, he said to me, what does your name mean? What’s the history behind it?”

Kā’eo took a sip from his can. “Fuckin Papa.”

“What the hell was I supposed to say to that, y’know? Was hard, but I understood what he was trying to say to me. I was young and cocky. I had to earn his respect, y’know?”

“I was his grandson, his blood, I gotta earn his respect?”

“When you begin to change, when you forget about the people you love, what are we supposed to think?”

“People change, y’know? Priorities change.”

“Certain ones don’t.”

Kā’eo dropped his can in the box. The streetlamp buzzed, flickered, popped. The light returned, dimmer now. “No ack like he was one saint, Pops.”

“I’m not.”

“How about all da times he wen lock himself up in da deli, sleepin on da floor cuz Nana wen call da cops. How about wen he wen get one DUI wit Ma in da backseat, she was like what tchree years old, dat sound like family to you? Dat sound like he was makin da right decisions fo da people he wen care about?”

“That was a long time ago, Kā’eo.” Pops put his can down on the driveway.

“I wen make my choice, y’know? Fuck all da oddah shit, he should of jus given me one chance, should of jus let me figgah um out and be done wit it. How many chances he wen have befo he wen get um right?”

“You don’t think he knew what it was like, you don’t think he was trying to save you that mistake? Two years, Kā’eo, how much did you miss?”

“I dunno.”

“Mark graduated. His first serious girlfriend.”

“Da first one hard, ah?”

“Tihani and him doing good though, on and off in the beginning, but that’s how it is. You know, don’t you?”

“No matter if I do.”

“But it does, and that’s the point. He could’ve used your advice, could’ve used the brother he grew up with.”

Another termite joined the others. Kā’eo looked at the palm of his hand again. He could still see the smear where the termite had been. “How was I gon help him figgah shit out, was still tryna deal wit my own shit.”

“Could’ve at least talked to him.”

Kā’eo closed his hand into a fist. “Why you tink he like talk to me, Pops? He get you.”

His father looked at him. “Just say it.”

Kā’eo shook his head. “I had Papa, and Mark had you, no fuckin secret dea.”

“I was there for all you kids.”

“I know, but he da second kid, ah? Da middle child jus like you, even get your name.”

“I treated all you kids equal.”

“I not sayin you never, but you da one wen connect wit him. First fight he wen get into at school was about dat Podagee shit. Kids tryin fo bully fuck him around, and I swear da first words outta his mouth was da same shit you always wen tell us all those years: Portuguese not Podagee. Den, *crack*,” Kā’eo smacked his right fist into his left palm, “fuckahs all on da ground.”

“I tried to do things with all you kids, share with all of you. Took you movies, park, drives around the island. Places I used to eat when I was a kid. Cardboard slides down Kaka’ako. Crabbing in the summer time.”

“Who wen learn fo fish first, who wen buy um his first reel?”

“Was his birthday Kā’eo.”

“Not da point.”

“What is?”

Kā'eo looked away from the streetlamp, down to the cracks in the concrete where his father's shadow fell over him. Kā'eo shook his head. "Nutten."

"We were young when we had you, we didn't have alotta time to spend between jobs. You think we wanted it that way?"

"I know."

"It's no excuse, I know that."

Kā'eo nodded. "I jus sayin, Mark never wen need me."

"He didn't need a father, y'know? He needed a friend. A brother."

"Yah."

Pops picked up his beer, and then put it inside the box with the empty cans. "You still talk to Chloe?" Kā'eo shrugged. "She still here?"

"She wen go Mainlan, get her masters or some shit. I dunno, never wen talk wit her long time. See her friends around sometimes."

"She seemed nice, good head on her shoulders."

Kā'eo reached for another beer. "Fuck her."

"She came by the house a couple times, she was worried about you."

"Yah, well wea da fuck is she? Elsewea, prolly fuckin some Haole wit one business degree," he took a short draw. "Da only ting she was ever worried about was herself. She was da kine I talkin about, all high maka-maka come time fo Merry Monarch but still like stay da Hilton wit one ocean view."

"You really think you're any better?"

Kā'eo laughed. "You tink I know?"

"I was hoping you did, everything you gave up."

"You so dramatic, yah Pop? You so about all da heartache and da tears, like I one murderer or someting, like I wen leave all these bodies fo rot. Everybody make mistakes. I no can blame her, really, but dat no mean I gotta ack da kine about dat shit."

His father paused. "You aren't a kid anymore."

"And wat? You tink I dunno Ma still worry about me? Tink I dunno you look at me like I one fuckin failure? Dat Mark fuckin hates me?"

"Do you even care?"

“I’m hea, ah? You no tink I wen try fo delete da messages on da answerin machine, I wen try fo tchrow da obituary section away? Y’know wen folks wen ask about Papa, my first instinct was fo pretend, fo ack like I never know shit.” Kā’eo smiled over the rim of his can. “So I wen lie. I wen make up how many stories. Better den tellin folks he was in one hospital, tubes running tchru his chest, waitin fo one docter fo tell um he dead. Fo wat, so we can burn his bones so folks can piss and shit and build on his iwi? I not complainin, y’know? Not like we get one choice. I rather be ashes in da water den in da cement downtown.”

“It’s what he wanted.”

Kā’eo nodded. “I no doubt dat.”

“If it was important to you, then you should’ve been there. Of all people, it should’ve been you.”

Kā’eo leaned forward and put his beer on the ground. “Papa’s dead, Pop. Ma stay one zombie right now, Mark out workin fo move da fuck outta hea, and wat da fuck we doin? Gettin drunk. Maybe I should be happy, ah? But I not. We talkin two years, why he never say someting, why he never call?”

“You wanna move on? You wanna be happy?”

“I dunno.”

“I don’t know either, Kā’eo. Why are you here, if not for him? Why you here, if not for your family?”

“Jus tryin fo do wat stay right, tryin fo make tings pono fo a change.”

“That’s a start.”

Kā’eo picked up his beer and slumped back into his chair. Looked down the road. “Howz Elani?”

“Glad to be out of high school.”

“Goin college?”

“Windward.”

“He one smart kid. ”

“He look up to you, y’know?”

“I dunno about dat.”

“He dug up some of your old writing, some of your old stories. He’s always going through your stuff looking for something.”

“At least somebody gon read dat shit,” Kā’eo laughed. “No can even believe Chock wen try fo pull da same shit on him. You figgah all da trouble he wen get himself into, he would of jus shut da fuck up and teach, y’know?”

“He just thinks he’s right. Probably still does.”

“Fuckin idiot, what he is. Anada fuckin teacher tryin fo tell kids dey stay lesser than. Show mo concern fo how we speak than wat we learn.”

“I went down there the first time, y’know? When he was giving you a hard time. Went down and gave the whole school a piece of my mind.”

“Always da diplomat, eh Pops?”

His father nodded. “I’m sorry I never spent more time with you when you were little, maybe it wouldn’t have been an issue, y’know?”

“Eh, wat’chu gon do. You and Ma had fo work, ah? Elani jus lucky, readin so much. Look at Mark, he wen spend mo time wit you folks den me and still da Pidgin thick. No can complain though, das home to me. Das Papa to me, da words.” Pops nodded. “I miss him, y’know? Papa.”

“We all do.”

Kā’eo let his head fall back toward the sky and closed his eyes. “Was two years, two fuckin years. Wat you do wen it stay too fuckin late, huh? You take tings fo granted and shit li’dis happen.”

Pops dug in the pocket of his jeans and pulled out a key-ring. He held it out for Kā’eo, the two keys dancing in the light. “He was gonna show you that boat before he died.”

Kā’eo took it from him and ran his fingers over the blemishes in the metal. Picked at the rust. “Wat’chu mean?”

“Left um to you.”

“Wat about his friend?”

“Died a couple years back.”

“No kids?”

“Nope.”

Kā'eo looked at the keys again. "Wat da fuck I suppose to do wit um?"

Pops shrugged. "Relax, take some time to think, figure things out. Maybe a second chance?"

"I dunno, Pop."

"What?"

"Jus not dat easy, y'know? Feel like wat stay da point to any of dis shit wen I been out in da water so long already jus tryin fo stay afloat. Wen da fuck I gon be able to take one breath again wit out swallowin salt?"

"You gon do um, son. Just gonna take time, couple steps forward, y'know? Cannot rush things."

"And wat if it no can wait, huh?" Kā'eo dropped the keys in his lap and took a large draw from his beer. "Y'know, wen I wen find out about Papa, da first ting I wen do? I wen drive down to Ka'alāwai. Been so fuckin long, had fo call one friend of mine fo get directions. Da first time Papa and I wen go out dea, was so afraid of everyting, da rocks, da water, y'know? And I remember dis little rock slab, jus a little ways off da ridgeline. Small fuckin ting, wen look like one manini Moloka'i. Good place fo tchrow net, Papa wen say, and I remember him tellin me how wen da waves rise, you gotta look fo da fish, you gon see their shadows, but y'know wat Pops?"

"What's that?"

"I still no can fuckin see em, wat does dat tell you?"

"I dunno."

"Das da ting, Pop, I dunno either. You tink by now, I get um, ah? Tink by now I get someting. If I not one of da university fuckahs, and I no can see da fish like Papa, den wat da fuck? If I not *Robert* and I not *Kā'eo*, den who am I?" A termite landed just below Kā'eo's knee. He hesitated to kill it, choosing to watch it crawl instead. "No can be both."

They were quiet again. Kā'eo watched the termite twitch forward, its wings stutter-stop, and then circle his head before returning to the numbers that swarmed the streetlamp. He took one last sip from his can and reached for the cooler lid. Pops let his hand fall intently against the plastic. "Been one long night, let's go inside, rest a little while, we can finish this tomorrow," Pops said.

"Tomorrow?"

“I’ll wake up early, make some eggs, deviled ham and potatoes. Your mother can go grab some pastry. Get the ham rolls you like.”

“Nah Pop, no can come home yet. Still get plenny room my friend’s place. Not ready fo stay hea, no deserve fo stay hea.”

“Been two years, Kā’eo.”

“Might be longer if I no can figgah um out.”

“What’s one night for your mother? Maybe she’ll wake up, see you in your old room, it might make a difference, y’know?”

“Maybe anada night.”

“Maybe tonight.”

Kā’eo stared up at the streetlamp, so many termites around the lens now that he was sure if he waited long enough they would eclipse any flicker of light. “Wat if I no like make one choice, y’know? I know wat stay right, I know wat stay wrong, but wat stay in-between all dat, is dis dat place?”

“I dunno.”

Kā’eo nodded. “Who da fuck get da answer fo dat?”

“There isn’t one.”

“Den wat’s da point, ah?”

“I can tell you all the bullshit in the world, it wouldn’t matter. Comes down to you, and until you see that, well—.”

“Wat?”

“There’s always a chance for forgiveness.”

“Yah? Who gon forgive, you? Ma? Papa? Even den, wat stay da point in me stickin around, why? How I gon help? How I gon make tings better?” Kā’eo looked to the end of the street, the lot that overlooked the river. “Pūpūkahi i holomua, you know wat dat means?” Pops shook his head. “One ‘ōlelo no‘eau, one Hawaiian proverb. Everybody on da wa‘a workin as one team, as one unit. One family. Took me one long time fo understand wat dat means and now I realize why: cuz fo operate like one team, all da parts gotta have one function, one purpose, wat stay my purpose, Pop? Wat I good fo?”

“You know the answer to that.”

Kā'eo pointed up towards the streetlamp, toward the festering shadow around it. "You know why I hate termites, Pop? Why da fuckahs bug da shit outta me?"

Pops shook his head.

"Cuz da only ting dey good fo is nutten. Dey consume. Dey destroy. Da homes you build, dey eat away at da supports until all you get left is da empty parts. You keep talkin family, Pop, look at wat I done fo dis family."

Pops looked at his son, "Only a few years, Kā'eo."

"Mo den years, mo den time. Can never get back all I wen miss. Can never get back those years Mark wen need me. Wen Elani wen need me. Look at Ma, she sittin in dat rockin chair tinkin about Papa, but she get me on her mind too. I stick around, wat den? Wat gon happen to her, she gon end up empty too?"

His father leaned in close, "Family forgives. Family moves forward."

"I am wat I was. Da mistakes, da flaws, da good, da bad. Tomorrow, I be wat I was today. No matter how much I try fo change, I never gon escape da fuckin termite dat I am. You know who said dat?"

Pops looked down at his hands. "No."

"No matter, Haole words dat, university bullshit." Kā'eo smiled and looked at his father, the light above them shining down across Pops' shoulders and illuminating the cracks spreading across his cheeks. "Y'know wat it is Pop, you tink family gon save me. I get my head in da noose, and you tinkin dat wen da block falls and I hang, dat my feet gon find da home you wen build fo us, ah? But fo me, da supports already wen rot one long time ago. I did da damage, I wen riddle da fuckah up, and now wat?"

"Now you fix it."

"One natural order, how tings work. Termites, dey not around all da time, ah? Always one season. You fix wat you can, you build da house up again, but until you tent dat fuckah, dey always gon be waitin. Ready fo fuck tings up one mo time."

"It's not the same."

"But it is, y'know? Look at Mark, pretty soon he gon wanna leave, he gon wanna abandon dis house cuz of me. Elani too, who knows, he look up to me now, couple years, he gon see me fo wat I am. Wat happens wen everyting gone Pop, wen everyting rot away? Wat gon be left?"

Pops put a hand on Kā'eo's arm and held it there. "What you've always had."

Kā'eo looked at his father's hand. He could see shadows from the termites above moving across his skin, circling the flesh. "Dea you go again, Pop, sayin it like it stay one magic word. 'Ohana, and the whole world gon be different. Everyting gon look brighter, everyting gon have one purpose again. I love you Pop, I love Ma too. Mark one good kid, he one hard worker. Elani smart, I hope he no end up like me. But Papa's dead, 'ohana not gon bring him back."

Pops opened his mouth to say something, but stopped himself and let go of Kā'eo. He stood up and put his hands in his pockets and then walked out to the curb and stood in the flicker of the streetlamp. Kā'eo leaned forward in his chair and tried to count the termites, but after a moment he knew there were too many and gave up.

"The funeral's next week," his father said. "You gonna be there?"

"Maybe."

His father nodded. "Mark's tryna write something, Elani too, maybe if you feel up to it, you could say a couple words."

"Yah."

His father turned around to face him. "Kā'eo?"

"Huh?"

"Do you know what it means?"

"Da name?"

"Yeah."

"Righteous, full of knowledge."

"It was the name he would've given his son, if he had had one."

Kā'eo smiled. "So dramatic, Pop."

"Maybe," his father said without taking his eyes off of Kā'eo. "It's just one of those things you worry about when you get my age. Too many folks with too little time, forgetting to say what they really think. I'd hate for you not to have known."

"Das wat'chu really was tinkin?"

"I was thinking it's time for bed." Kā'eo nodded. "You coming in?" Pops asked.

"Tink I gon stay out hea fo awhile."

His father patted him on the back and started up the walkway to the porch. When he reached the screen door, he opened it and then looked back at Kā'eo. "I'll see you in the morning, alright? Your mother will be glad to see you. Your brothers, too."

Kā'eo said nothing. He just stared off, watching shadow against shadow, and eventually he heard the screen door close and his father's footsteps disappear. The streetlight above him flickered a few times before becoming a dull glow, a muted orange hue like the reflection of a lighted buoy on the ocean's surface. Kā'eo fished in the cooler for another beer, and found success in one of the corners. He popped the top and it fizzled softly until he brought it to his lips.

After a while, he leaned back in his chair, and let himself drift off. He never really dreamed anymore, but tonight he fell asleep and dreamt of termites. He could see them landing on his legs and face, crawling up his arms, and migrating to him as if he were a piece of driftwood washed up on the shore.

Kā'eo dreamt that they went into his ears, his nose, and all the tiny places he could not see, and it was there, inside him, that they made their home; feeding on whatever they could find. Only after they had riddled his body with tunnels and holes, did they go, leaving Kā'eo to slowly crumble: first his hands and feet, then his arms and legs, until he had only the memory of a body and he could not remember his name.

When he woke, he found the streetlamp had stopped flickering and the termites had gone. He looked at his watch and, in a daze, guessed it was somewhere close to two o'clock. Mark's truck was home, and Kā'eo could see a light through the kitchen window. He stumbled out of his chair, and stood, his knees almost buckling when he tried to walk.

He made his way up the walkway and to the porch, where the light was still on and the front door was a sliver from shut. A sound came from the kitchen. Kā'eo imagined Mark making his lunch for the next morning, packing leftovers into baggies, wrapping a can of soda in newspaper and putting it in the fridge. Kā'eo wondered what Mark would say if he walked through the door, if he'd greet him, ask him to sit, tell him about Tihani, about work. Ask how things have been.

They'd probably end up waking the whole house. Elani would come out, start asking questions. What was going on, was he staying a while? His mother would come

out, act happy to see him, and offer to make him something to eat, fix up the couch. His father would just smile and tell him how he did the right thing. Family, he'd say, 'ohana.

A termite landed on the opposite side of the door, and Kā'eo watched it crawl. He touched a finger to it, and could just barely feel its legs through the screen before another sound came from inside, and the termite flew away, slipping between the crack of the front door and into the house. He rested his whole hand on the screen where it had been and noticed the veins like tunnels just below his flesh. "Ohana," he whispered, and then turned away, knowing what Mark would say if he walked through the door: *how'd you sleep, like one drink? Sorry, no 'awa tonight, maybe one beer? Ma get some sherry in da cabinet, like me pour you one glass?*

Kā'eo made his way down the driveway and stopped near Mark's Datsun. He dug in his pockets and pulled out the key-ring his father had given him. It felt heavy in his hand and he could see how rusty the ring was, left out in the water for far too long. Mark had left his window open. Kā'eo reached in and left the keys to the boat on the dash and then walked down to his truck and got in.

He leaned back in the driver's seat and felt the numbness of the alcohol that had already spread from his lips to his limbs. It was a strange, familiar warmth and it made him feel heavy and full. He reached for his keys, started the engine, and then looked in the rear-view mirror thinking that if he could see the termites again he'd be able to catch them, to count every one. But there were no termites this time, only that muted orange hue, and a final flicker of light before the streetlamp finally went black.