FOUR SEASONS
A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES AND POETRY

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MOMENTS IN ETERNITY

Faithfully trudging along its path without end
violent rays piercing the lifelessness of night
the vivid light approaches from the east
moving across to the black western sky
out of the darkness the woman awakes
whispering to her children time to rise
for the light is here at last

in the light things become clear
the mountain peeks through the clouds
the grass shiny with morning dew
cardinals take flight singing joyful melodies
as the collie playfully barks along
in tune with this harmonious song

the light is strong now
parching the land like wildfire
frantically burning everything it touches
there is nowhere to hide
as shadows vanish before it

the little redheaded girl
watches pink balloons float
into the blue sky
drifting toward the light

naughty boys laugh
their mothers call
shadows have returned

light fades
darkness arrives

night.
One time, when I was only five yeas old, I wen fall out from da cah window. My muddah tol’ me dat we wen go to da hospital, but I no remembah. My bruddah wen say das why I stay lolo. I nevah believe him, but. I stay in da top of my class, das why. My bruddah, he tease me all da time. Calls me “special ed” li’ dat. But I no let him boddah me. He stay lolo das why. Anytime he gives me some lip, I go crack his head cause I stay his oldah bruddah. I stay oldah den him, by two whole yeas. He stay eleven yeas old, so he still stay in elamentree schoo. I go tease him about dat all da time and he stay get so pissed off. But no can help. Stay funny when I piss him off. But I no can do dat too much cause my faddah going give me cracks.

Besides, I get plenny more oddah stuffs fo’ worry about. I jus stahted fo’ go schoo at Central Intahmediate. I had fo’ transfah hea cause we wen move from da oddah side of Kalihi. I was going Kalakaua Intahmediate befoa, but my muddah tinks dis is one bettah schoo fo’ me.

I heard dat dey like call um “middle schoo” instead of intahmediate but I tink it sounds pretty lame cause Central stay one tough schoo. Get plenny F.O.B.’s who tink dey all bad, and get plenny gangs, too. Not only da Crips and da Bloods like in da movies, but get plenny oddah kine. Mos’ people, dey stay all gang up by deir nationality. All da Vietnamese like fo’ hang togedah, and den dere’s da Japs and Chinks dat hang togedah cause nobody can really tell dem apaht. Us guys try fo’ stay away from da Samoans cause dey can get pretty nuts. One time I saw dis girl get all beat up just fo’ walking by their turf. All da Pinoys in da schoo tell me fo’ hang wit dem, but I no like cause dey always get in trouble. My muddah, she stay worry all da
time, like I going get beat up too. But I tell her I’m smaht and I no like go by dem, so I
not going get beat up. But everyday, I stay little bit sca’ed I going be nex’, cause I no
more one gang fo’ protect me.

I wasn’t kidding when I said I was da top of my class. I get pretty good grades
cause I stay do da homework and stuff fo’ class. Lots of people no like do da work, so
dey get junk grades. But I like da stuff I stay learning in class. I like science but ho, I
no tell nobody cause I no like get beat up. Sometimes I wish nevah have all da gangs
and fighting and stuff. Would be good to have lots more smaht people fo’ hang around
wit.

Last week in mat’ class we wen have one pop quiz. Plenny people got all nuts at
da teachah. I wen hear dem call her lots of names behind her back. Stuff like “bitch”
and “fuckin’ ho.” Stuff my faddah would lick me fo’ if he evah caught me saying.
Miss Souza wasn’t one push over, though. She could be supah mean if she wan’ed to,
and she nevah took no crap from nobody. Anyways, I was ready fo’ da quiz, an wen I
wen look around, people look like dey nevah even open da book since da firs’ day of
schoo. Miss Souza wen slap her hand on da desk. She get dis evil eye, kinda like da
kine da Rock has. You know, on WWE. Da raised eyebrow kine.

“Okay,” Miss Souza wen say. “Everyone put your books under your chairs. If I
catch anyone cheating, I’ll give them an F.” She wen sound pretty serious. Da guys in
da back, Jeff, Tommy, and one oddah racer Jap guy (I can not remember his name) was
laughing. I knew dey was going cheat. Miss Souza would catch dem cause she wen
catch dem plenny times arready. “Keoni,” she wen say, “I said books away.”

Keoni was dis really big Hawaiian kid with ehu hair and he wen wear da same
kine t-shirt and slippahs every day. Nobody like mess with him cause he had lots of
bruddahs and sistahs who all wen look out fo’ each oddah. He really wanted fo’ do
good in schoo cause his parents make him. But he no can help, he stay pretty dumb.
No mattah how much he try, he no can get um. I wen feel sorry fo’ him, but I nevah
like try go help him, an den get beat up cause I tink I more smaht den him, you know.

Had some oddah pretty smaht kids in my class besides me. But dey no like hang
out wit me. I no care cause I tink dey stay kinda weird anyway. One, dey try all talk
good kine English so dey can try make like dey stay way mo’ smaht den da rest of us.
And two, dey go fully run away at recess, an den aftah schoo again. I tink dey was
sca’ed fo’ get beat up.

Dere’s dis one girl I get in some of my classes, Amber. She stay supah smaht,
too. I nevah see her at recess and hardly evah aftah schoo. One time somebody wen say
dat she stay live across da street at da Queen Emma Towers. Everybody knows she stay
too smaht fo’ Central, but nobody wen figgah out how come she goes to dis school.
Sometimes I see her wit dis old lady after schoo at Longs. I wondah if das her gran’ma
o’ something.

I like going Longs after schoo cause das wen all da gangs like to cause trouble to
da rest of us wit no mo’ protection, and I no like get beat up. So I always go Longs and
go check out da candy and oddah stuffs. When I go look at da magazines, I always
have to keep one eye open cause one time dis guy who wen work dere tol’ me I no can
read if I no buy. I was kinda pissed off cause I used to do dat all da time. Kep’ me
busy ’til my muddah picks me up. She always comes fo’ pick me up at tree o’clock
outside Longs, cause like I said, I no like wait back at schoo, cause I wen hea stories
about da fights dat go on when da teachahs staht fo’ go home. Plus she like make shua I
take kea of all my stuffs. My muddah’s pretty cool about letting me handle my stuffs.
She always stay letting me know dat she’s dere fo’ me when I stay get in trouble. But I
try fo’ be a man an stuffs, but it stay good to know. Jus’ in case.
I wen see my cousin Jon Jon a couple weeks ago. He wen ask me how I like my new schoo. I tol’ him it was okay, but I nevah like get beat up. He wen tell me dat I should go make some good frens. He’s one smaht guy, my cousin. He stay in high schoo, so he stay know what’s going on fo’ real kine. I wen tink about what he wen tell me fo’ little while. Da only people dat I would try make frens wit was Amber and Keoni, only cause dey no get any frens, too. Keoni wen seem like one cool guy, but I nevah know if I could hang out wit Amber. Guys stay get teased all da time fo’ hanging out wit girls if dey no stay banging ’em. Dey call you gay and stuff. I nevah like dat happen so I wen decide fo’ just talk to Keoni fo’ now.

So las’ Friday I wen go talk to Keoni. He was kinda surprised and kinda happy at da same time. I guess aftah nobody wen talk to him fo’ a yea or someting, he was kinda happy dat somebody wen speak up.

“Eh, Keoni, wassup?” I wen ask him. He wen look around like I was talking to somebody else. Was funny, cause he was da only guy dere.

“Oh, eh, Chad, howzit,” he wen say kinda soft. Was funny fo’ hea dat from one big guy wit ehu hair. He was sitting on da stairs trying fo’ undahstand da mat’ homework from da night befoa. I could tell he was stuck and couldn’t figgah da problem out.

“So how you did on da stupid quiz. Was so uncool, she wen pop ‘em on us, ah.” I nevah like tell him I wen get one A, so I tried fo’ play dumb.

“Yea,” he wen tell me. “Dat class is so stupid. Word problems suck. Not like we going use ‘em in real life, yea?” Keoni kinda smiled. I tink he knew I was smaht, but was like he knew I nevah like nobody know. “Eh, you wen do da homework from las’ night?”
“Ho, yea, wen take me so long fo’ do um. Shit, I miss da wrestling cause my muddah wen make me finish um first.” Dat was true. Wen take me long time for do da word problems. Poor Keoni, he prob’ly nevah even finish.

“Oh, yea, me too, cuz. Dis ting is so stupid.” He looked down at his book and wen point to one of da problems. “Eh, how you wen do dis one?”

So I wen help Keoni wit his homework dat morning. He was pretty cool about it, cause he nevah jus asked me fo’ da ansah. He wen ask how fo’ do um, so I knew he like learn. I wen give him my phone numbah jus in case he get stuck ova night, cause I no like get us caught studying togedah. Even though he’s one big guy, I don’t tink he would be good at fighting ten guys wit weapons and stuff. So more bettah to jus keep da homework at home.

I wen decide fo’ try go talk to Amber, too, on Friday. I tink cause wen go so well wit Keoni in da morning, dat I tought maybe I could figgah out some way fo’ be Amber’s fren in secret. Plus my las’ class was science, and she stay in da same class, so was easy fo’ catch her aftah schoo. I wen make sure da hall was pretty empty befoa I wen go up to her, though.

“Eh, Amber,” I wen tell her, while she wen stuff her backpack wit schoo books from her lockah. “Ho, I’m so glad it’s Friday arready, yea?”

“Yeah,” she wen tell me soft kine. I tink she was kinda surprised I wanted fo’ talk to her. “I’m so tired of school. I don’t want to do anything school-related this weekend.” She was trying fo’ zip up her supah stuffed bag. Amber was one of dose people who talked pretty good, but she wasn’t really weird or anyting. And wen I looked at her, I couldn’t see how come she nevah have any frens. I mean, she was pretty, I guess. She had dat typical local girl look, cause she was hapa, kinda tanned
and she had long, brown hair. But she was kinda plain, cause she never wear any of da
dine makeup or dress all trendy, li’ dat, but she looked okay to me. I must have been
looking at her kinda long, cause den she wen say, “Did you want something, Chad?”

“Oh, I... I...” I couldn’t believe I didn’t know what fo’ say. I felt so stupid. Like
da words nevah like come into my brain an out of my mout. “I was wondering what
chu was doing aftah schoo.” Shit, I was making it sound like I was asking her out o’
someting. “I mean, I was going down to Longs fo’ buy one boa’d fo’ my science
project. An... an I figgah, since you live kinda close by, if you like come wit me. I
need somebody to show me da right size boa’d. An... an I figgah you would know,
cause you pretty smaht.”

She kinda smiled, and I wen realize dat no matter how I wen say um, it would
sound like I stay asking her out. So I nevah really care what I was saying aftah dat.
Cause what evah she was tinking was out of my hands. “Oh, okay, Chad. I can’t stay
too long, cause my grandma’s waiting for me at home.”

I was pretty stoked cause she was so cool to me. Aftah she wen get all her
stuffs, we wen walk ovah to Longs. Was cool. We wen talk most of da way. She tol’
me dat da lady I always seen her wit was her grandma, and dat when she was seven
yeas old, her dad wen kill her mom an he stay in jail right now. I was kinda shocked. I
didn’t know what fo’ say. I guess she was used to my reaction cause she wen tell me
dat it was okay fo’ me not to know what fo’ say. She wen jus ask me to treat her like
one normal person. But I couldn’t help tinking dat maybe das how come she no mo’
frens.

We wen talk about all kine oddah stuffs, and aftah I wen buy my boa’d, she wen
go home. I nevah like her go, but right aftah she left, my muddah came by fo’ pick me
up. An I was glad my bruddah, who was wit her, nevah see nuting cause oddahwise I wouldn’t be able fo’ shut his trap.

All weekend I wen tink of her. I wondahed how she could live wit’ out one muddah an faddah. I wen act pretty cool to my parents dat weekend. My faddah gets pretty nuts sometimes, but mostly when me an my bruddah ack up. Oddahwise, he stay pretty cool. He would nevah mess up my muddah. Sometimes when dey no tink we stay looking, me and my bruddah see dem get all kissy-kissy. Stay gross, but at lease we stay know dey love eachoddah. An aftah learning about Amber’s dad, I was tanking God fo’ a faddah like mine. My whole family was looking at me like I was weird o’ someting, cause I nevah like pick a fight wit my bruddah, an I wen help out around da house. Was funny, though, cause I wen feel pretty good about it.

Fo’ some reason, I couldn’t wait fo’ go schoo, Monday. I nevah have dis kine feeling befoa. Was like Chris'mas morning or someting. I tink my parents tought I was normal again cause I wen yell at my bruddah. He was taking so fricken long das why. He couldn’t undahstand why I wanted fo’ go schoo so early. He nevah know was cause Amber was in my first class. I was so mad at him dat I wen call him one “stupid ass,” and my faddah wen knock my head.

“Eh, boy, I tol’ you not fo’ talk li’ dat,” he wen say, raising his hand, ready fo’ slap me again if I talk back to him. But I knew bettah.

“Sorry, Dad,” I wen tell him, looking at his feet so he no tink dat I nevah mean um. “Ho, but Dad, he taking so long.” Aftah all, wasn’t my fault if he no can wake up on time. Da lolo can sleep tru one fire alarm if nobody stay drag him out of bed. Wen happen one time, too. Good ting was one false alarm. Took us five minutes fo’ drag him down tree flights of steahs.
I was getting kinda impatient, so I wen wait downsteahs by my muddah's cah. Sitting on da yellow block of cement behind da cah, I couldn't help but tink of Amber. How could she live knowing dat her faddah was one killah? I wondahed if she go visit him sometimes. Ho, if dat was my faddah, I wouldn't go even nea O-triple-C. I wondahed if she evah worried about him if he going come out or not. I wondahed if she hated him, or if she missed him. Cause could go eida way.

I looked up at our two-story building, da yellow paint was coming off, cracked all ovah da place. Da fence around da parking lot was cut in plenny places whea sometimes some of da gang membahs sneak in an tag our buildings. Dere's s'posed to be one guard watching, but usually he only stay watching TV in da guard booth at da front, so da guys get in and tag buildings and break into cahs. It's still housing, but it's mo' bettah den K.P.T. I wen watch da buses go up an down King Street. Get one nice park across da street, but my muddah no let me go dere. Get gangs and drug dealahs, she tol' me. But I nevah see dem. I only see da homeless people stay over dere an dey no boddah nobody.

I wen look at my watch an den back at da building. I wen wondah what da hell was taking dem so fricken long. I wen put my bag in my muddah's old green Plymouth. It was oldah den me. She had her locks punched so many times dat we no even fix um anymoa. It's so stupid cause she no even get nuting in da cah. I figgahed da guys who keep doing dis, must be on ice or someting cause dey stay really dumb. Finally, I wen see my muddah an bruddah walking down da steahs.

When I saw Amber dat morning, I couldn't help but smile supah big. "Eh, wassup, Amber." I was kinda nervous little bit, cause I nevah really know what fo' say.
All da stuff I wan’ed fo’ ask her, I nevah know how, cause was about her parents. So I just stuck to schoo stuff. “You stahted studying fo’ da math test next week or what?”

She wen laugh. “What? It’s so far away. I’m more worried about what I’m going to do for the Science Fair. What are you going to do? You’re entering, right?” I fo’got all about dat. Aftah I bought da boa’d, I wen stash em in my room an nevah even tink about it all weeken.


“I have a bunch of ideas, but haven’t figured out which one I want to do yet. They’re kind of big projects too.” She wen stop, tink little bit, and den she wen look right into my eyes. “Do you think…? Well, um, if Mr. Keenan says it’s okay…. Um, well, do you want to partner up on it?” I couldn’t believe how unbelievably cute she was when she asked me dat. I couldn’t help but stare at her an wondah how—no, when she got so fricken hot. An I could feel my face getting pretty hot, but in an oddah way. I nevah even care dat people was stahting fo’ walk tru da hall.

“Oh, so you like hook up?” I coulda shot myself in da head fo’ saying dat cause was like I was asking her out again. But den she did it fo’ me.

“Well, yeah, partner up for this project. Cause I know you’re smart and you’re a great friend,” she wen tell me, not knowing dat da last word she said wen cause my haht to stop. But unlucky fo’ me, I nevah die, an I had to live wit dat pain in my haht fo’ who knew how long. I wen fake one smile to her, an tol’ her dat I would do it if it was okay wit Mista Keenan. “Okay, then I’ll ask him before we have math class,” she tol’ me, an she wen turn and ran down da hall.

Befoa I could feel totally bummed out about da whole ting, Keoni came ovah from his lockah. “Eh, cuz. Tanks, ah, fo’ your help yestahday.” He wen seem pretty
stoked dat he wen finish his homework fo’ class today. But I wasn’t surprised. Aftah all, I was helping him fo’ ovah an hour on da phone last night, an my faddah gave me some lip about talking so damn long on da phone. Not like he used um anyway.

“Oh, yeah, shoots, cuz. No probs,” I told him, looking down da hallway aftah Amber.

He wen notice me checking her out. “Ho, what’s up wit you an Amber?” he wen ask, trying fo’ tease me about it.

I wen turn to look at him so fast dat I got kinda dizzy. “Oh, nuting, cuz,” I said supah fast. “We was just talking about da science project we gotta do. Das all.” I wen turn to look back at my lockah cause I nevah like lie to my new fren right in his face.

I saw outta da corner of my eye dat he wen look at me kinda funny, but I just nevah pay attention. “Eh,” he said, kinda quiet, “you know her parents stay psycho yea? I don’t know if you like mess wit her.”

I was so mad dat I could’ve cracked him right dere. I would’ve pounded him into da ground, and my fists were ready fo’ trow. But I nevah, cause I knew bettah. “Brah, you don’t even know,” I told him giving him da most dirty look I evah had, an I just wen walk away, cause I nevah even like look at him anymoa.

“Ho, cuz,” I heard him call aftah me. “Brah, I’m sorry.” But I nevah looked back. I was pissed; an I knew he nevah mean what he said. But I couldn’t help. Dis had started to become a shitty day, an I knew in five minutes, I’d have to face dem both in Miss Souza’s class. I wen walk by dese group of girls an dey was laughing. I wen look up an saw dem pointing at me. I felt like crap cause I knew what dey were saying.
When I wen walk into class, Amber was dere waiting fo’ me. She had dis really big smile on her face, an I knew I couldn’t even ack mad towards her. But I tried fo’ just be cool an wen walk straight to my seat wit out saying nuting.

“Hey, Chad,” she wen yell from across da room on her way ovah to me. She nevah go fo’ my ack an wen come over all bouncy like all da oddah girls. Was supah shame, so I nevah look up at first, until she wen call my name again. “Hey, Chad. Mr. Keenan said it was okay for us to work together on the project. Isn’t that great?” Her face was so cute dat I could have kissed her right there. But I nevah like people see what I was feeling. I nevah like her see, cause she said I was just one fren. I wen feel like two people wen grab my arms and was pulling me apaht. I wen feel like my head was going fo’ explode.

An den, she nevah know, but she wen put her hand on my arm. Was just fo’ a couple seconds but was so mean, dere was like dis volt of electricity dat went all da way from my arm, tru my whole body and den ended up in da front of my pants. Was one good ting I was sitting down, but I was getting worried cause people wen staht looking at us.

“Oh, yea, Amber, das cool,” I told her, trying really hahd not fo’ look into her eyes cause most of my concentration was keeping da ting in my pants down. I couldn’t imagine what da oddah kids was going do if dey knew what was going on, not to mention, Amber. I needed her to go away. At least fo’ right now. And was like God heard me cause Miss Souza wen walk in da class jus den.

All day I wen try fo’ avoid Amber. I nevah really like, but I nevah have control of my body when she stay by me. We wen learn couple yea’s ago in healt’ class dat dis was going happen, but nobody wen tell us dat was going fo’ be dis hahd to control. I knew dat I could take care of dese urges when I got home, but dat was tree ouwas away,
and I’d hafta see Amber again in science, da las class of da day. I tought about it, but I knew I couldn’t do it in da schoo bat’chrum. I was sca’ed enough fo’ go in dere by myself, and I knew I was going get da lickin’ of my life if I got caught pulling weeds. So I wen look fo’ Keoni cause I needed fo’ get my mind off of Amber.

I found him in da hall in between classes. He was looking kinda down, just staring into his lockah, so I told him, “Ho, bruddah, no mattah how hahd you look, one Extra Value Meal not going magically appeah in dere.” He looked up and wen smile.

“How, cuz, you not mad at me anymoa?”

“Nah, just having a shitty day. Das all. How ‘bout you?”

“Cannot wait fo’ go home. Kekoa, my oldah bruddah, is coming home today, so we going airport aftah schoo fo’ pick him up.” He was acking like everyting was okay, but I knew what I wen say to him dat morning was still kinda bugging him.

“Eh, brah, can talk to you, or what? Kinda confidential.”

“Huh?” He looked kinda confused.

“You cannot tell nobody, okay?” I wen look around fo’ make sure nobody was going hear me. People was arready stahting fo’ say stuff about me an Amber. Couple guys wen ask me if I was boning her, but I nevah tol’ dem anyting. I just wen walk away. Was hard cause I nevah like say no, but I couldn’t say yes eithah. I wen look at Keoni and he was looking straight at me, so I knew he was ready fo’ listen. “Brah, I got dis ting fo’ Amber—”

“Ha, you fuckin’ serious?” he wen tell me, small kine loud enough fo’ people to look at us, but den dey just wen look away again.

“Shh. Shut up!” I wen tell him. I fo’ real hoped dat he wasn’t going tell nobody.

“Oh, sorry, cuz. Was just kinda one shock fo’ hea you say dat, das all.”
“Yeah, anyway. I going nuts trying fo’ not tell her cause she only like be friends, li’ dat,” I stahted wondering why I was telling Keoni dis. Dere was no way dat he would have da kine advice dat I needed fo’ hea. But den it was good fo’ me to get dis out.

“Oh, she wen tell you dat? Das kinda harsh, ah?”

“No, no. I nevah tell her how I feel, but she wen call me one good fren so I know dat das all she like.” I couldn’t help but feel sorry fo’ myself. I jus wan’ed fo’ go home.

“Eh, maybe she feel da same way as you. She just no like tell you she like you li’ dat. Or ... maybe she’s da kine, ah?” he laughed. I wen try laugh wit him, but all dat came out was da fake kine. Ho, I woulda been so shame if she was da kine. Good ting only Keoni knew how I wen feel.

“Eh, you not going tell nobody, ah. I mean, I know you get all your bruddahs and sistahs backing you up, but I going kick your ass so hahd if you tell anybody. You got dat?” I nevah know why I was getting so worked up, but was almost funny.

“Yeah, yeah,” he tol’ me putting his arm on my shoulder. “Das not a problem. But just chill fo’ a little bit. It’s not like she get one boyfriend arready, and I nevah hea of anybody else spocking her out, so no worries, ah,”

“Eh, get off me, you fuckin’ fag.” I wen laugh, trying fo’ push his huge arm away. He wen laugh, too, and we wen walk to da science room feeling mo’ bettah.

I wen feel her eyes staring at da back of my head. I knew she was trying fo’ look inside, trying fo’ figgah out why I nevah talk to her aftah mat’ class and befoa science class. She was tinking dat I was mad at her and dat all dis was her fault. An I
knew I couldn’t make her feel li’ dat. Not even little bit. Dis was my mess, but I nevah
know how fo’ clean ‘em up.

I wen try really hahd fo’ pay attention to Mistah Keenan, but I just couldn’t. He
was telling us about some moon all da way by Jupiter, an oddah wise I woulda been
fully into it, but I couldn’t stop tinking about her. I had to see her. I just had to. So I
wen turn around an my haht wen break.

In da second dat I wen look at her, I wen feel all da sadness dat I saw in her face.
Her eyes wen catch mine fo’ one split second, an I could tell dey were small kine red,
like she was crying befoa. I wen turn back to da front of da class, but jus wen stare at
da book on my desk. I couldn’t help but tink dis was all my fault, an all dis stuff jus
wen pop inside my head. All dese reasons why she stay crying an all da reasons why
dis was all my fault played in my head ovah an ovah. I wen look at da blue G-Shock
watch my parents wen give me fo’ my birtday. Five moa minutes. I could hahdly take
it.

Aftah class I had fo’ run aftah her. I had fo’ apologize, make up an excuse, o’
something. I knew I shoulda told her da truth, cause das what I heard girls like to hea.
But I just couldn’t cause what if, fo’ real, she just wan’ed fo’ just be frens. She was
arready at her lockah, shoving all her books in her bag. “Eh, wassup Amber,” I told her,
tryin' fo’ ack kinda casual, which was hahd aftah running from class.

She nevah even look up, an I wen barely hear da “Hey” from her.

“What’s up?” I wen ask her, not caring anymore about wanting to kiss her,
wanting to hold her, wanting to —.

“Oh, Nothing,” she wen say pretty soft. I knew she stay lying, but what could I do?
“C’mon,” I told her, putting my hand on her shoulder. She wen stop moving for little while, jus kinda staring at da back of her lockah, like dere was someting deep down in dere. She could see someting and I couldn’t. I wan’ed so bad fo’ see um. I tried really hahd fo’ talk good, cause maybe den she would talk to me. “I’m sorry dat I wen ack kinda weird today. I hope you’re not mad at me,” I told her, looking in her eyes fo’ some sign of fo’giveness. But all I wen see was da tea’s building up, ready fo’ drip down da most beautiful face I evah seen.

“It… it’s not you, Chad,” she told me wit one real heavy sigh. “I… I heard these girls talking about me…” She sniffed and I wished I wen have one Kleenex wit me. “I know it’s stupid to listen to those ignorant bitches calling me a slut. But, it’s just this time of year and all. Well, I can get really . . . emotional.” Dis time of yea? I tought dat girls get deir stuffs once a month. I must’ve looked really confused cause den she wen try to explain. “It’s really lame, I know. I should know better than to let some stupid girls get the best of me. But you’re my friend. I don’t have many friends.” She wen look up at me. “I just miss my mom. I really don’t have anyone else to talk to.”

“Oh,” I said, taking one step back. I don’t know why I did dat. Maybe cause I knew what she wen hea from dose girls. Maybe cause dere was one rumor was arready flying around about da two of us. But she was right. We couldn’t let dat boddah us. I wan’ed so bad fo’ get close to her. I wan’ed fo’ hold her an tell her everyting going be okay. But I nevah know what fo’ say.

“I’ll understand if you don’t want to be by me right now,” she told me, as da first tea’ wen roll down her cheek. I couldn’t take my eyes away from her. I wan’ed so bad to hold her. Not as one boyfren, but jus as one fren. Jus like she wan’ed. I nevah care dat everybody dere was looking at us. I nevah care dat da stories about us was
going fly around da schoo fastah den anyting. I nevah care dat she jus wan’ed fo’ be frens. I wen grab her bag and slung um ovah my shouldah. She wen look at me like she nevah undahstand. But I nevah say nuting. I jus wen grab her an wen hold her close to me. I nevah feel da stares at da back of my head. I nevah hea da whispahs. I nevah feel da tea’s soaking tru my shirt. I wen only feel her breathing deep in my arms. I wen only smell her smooth hair dat was resting on my cheek. I wen only hear my own voice telling her dat it’s all going be okay, cause I was nevah going leave her.
New Kid

Eh, wea you go schoo?
Wea dat, “Sacred Hahts?”
How come you no go Mai-Mai like da res’ of us?
How ol’ you?
Seven? We all stay eight already.
How come you stay ova hea, you faddah Japanee?
Das why everybody else stay hea, we all stay Japanee.
Who else going go Japanee schoo?
You no look Japanee. How can yo’ faddah be japanee?
You lying to me?
No gimme dat. You lying, ah.
You like like one haole.
What?! You not Filipino.
Not even! You no look Chinese.
You one liah. I no like you. You bettah watch yo’ back.
Somebody going beet you up das why.
Eh, no cry.
Only babies cry. You one baby?
No hang wit us, eef you one baby.
Baby! Baby! Ba—BEE!
Wat dat in yo’ han?
Eh, das candy, ah!
Why you stay hide urn from us?
We yo’ frenz an den.
Give um.
Kay den, you awright.
Eef you bring us candy, you can hang wit us.
Got dat, new girl?
Candy Run

Eh, we go YBA an get some candy.
Why you no can?
I not stupid. Course we not s'posed to go.
But who going catch us?
Da teachahs all stay in class, an Sensei Machida no stay ova hea.
He in his office bussing Na-tan.
We go, befoa somebody going rat on us.
Eh, no be chicken. Go sit wit da nerds you no like come.
Kay, we go den.
Eh, how much money you get?
Fai dollahs?! Eh, I going borrow, kay.
Shoots, we go.
Japanese School Boys

Japanese Schoo stay full of kolohe boys.
Dey no pay attention in class.
Well, some do, but dose are da nerds.
I no like go out wit one nerd cause dey stay weird.
Dey only like study all da time an no can play sports.
I like be able fo' play sports wit one boy wit'out making him look like one panty.
Eef dey no can play soccer den dey not good enuf.
I like get one cute boy.
One hapa boy wit muscles.
Oh yea, he gotta be dark too.
Not too dark cause my stupid haole-ness wen make me look moa white.
Bumbye we look like one zebra, you know: black an white.
E’erybody going laugh, an I going look moa haole.
Kevin is cute. I bought him one shirt fo’ his birt’day.
He nevah know, but I wen wear um one time first.
Was one nice hot pink T&C shirt das why.
Kay, I nevah really wen buy um.
I wen get um fo’ one present an I wen stay give um cause I no mo money.
I like him das why.
I wonder wat he tinks of me.
I know I get one haircut like one boy,
an I guess I stay small kine tomboy li’dat.
But he stay so nice. Cute kine nice.
I tink he get one girlfren.
Sheez, I cannot compete wit da kine foo foo girls.
Dey piss me off wit all da girlie-girlie crap.
An wassup wit dis cheerleading ting?
Das not one sport.
Soccer an football, dose are sports.
Da girlie girls stay all ditzy, too, wen da boys come by.
You wonda eef da boys like dat kine ting.
Maybe.
Maybe das why I no mo boyfren.
Ho, sad, my life.
Das okay. I get soccer practice fo’ go to.
Get plenny time fo’ tink of boys.
Hey, I heard you got in trouble.
What did you do?

Oh, not’ing.
I jus wen trow away somebody’s shoe.

What?
Why did you do that?
Who’s shoe?

You know Shannon?
Shannon Remsen?

Sort of.
I heard she a

Bitch?
Yeah, fo’ real kine.

Why?
What did she do to you?

Ho, she wen piss me off.
Damn haole tinks she’s all bad.
I hate going here.
All da damn haoles tink dey all dat.

Hey, you’re haole too.
You forgot?

Eh, don’t go dere.
I not one haole.
I’m HAPA.

I not even haole by choice.
My fricken haole-ass faddah wen leave my mom.
I not even haole.

I wen grow up Filipino, Chinese, Japanese.
Da only haole I get is my skin.
Don’t have a cow.
I was just saying....
Well, anyway, what did Shannon do?

She said I was a little piece of shit
an was all making fun
cause I wen grow up in Kalihi
an wen go public schoo.
She wen laugh at me
cause both my parents work
an I gotta do work fo’ pay to go schoo.
You know, I gotta work in da office an stuff
aftah schoo on Mondays.

Oh yeah?
I didn’t know that’s why.

Yeah, well, no make.
Anyways, at PE, I wen go steal her shoe from her lockah.
An I wen jus trow um in da trash.

How did they catch you?

Fricken Dawn wen squeal on me.
Fuckin’ bitch.
She s’posed to be my fren an den.

Nah, you can’t trust her.
She’s only your friend if you have something she wants.

Yea, I guess.
I had to clean da lockah room cause of her.
Good ting was only one day.
I would’ve been moa pissed if I had to go longah.
Anyways, you like go shoot hoops?

Yeah, let’s go.

Kay den.
SUMMER
A Time of Discovery

A young woman, eighteen years of age, made her way down Mount Tantalus’ Maunalaha trail. An aura of confidence surrounded her as she marched along the man-made trail. She brushed her golden hair out of her eyes and free from her sweat-laden forehead. A red bandana accented her ponytail, which held most of the golden strands up, but a few strays had somehow broken free from their shackle. Her eyes, beautifully hidden by icy blue contact lenses, focused on the farther end of the trail. Her confidence and concentration left her oblivious to the world around her. Twigs snapped and leaves rustled in the bushes behind her. Lisha Carson turned to see a blur of figures rushing toward her.

She screamed in fear as shrieks of laughter followed.

“What the hell?” Lisha cried out as her friends, Mona and Keali‘i, laughed around her. Mona, still holding her sides could hardly contain her laughter. Her once white Roxy t-shirt was now covered with streaks of dirt and remnants of leaves and grass from their stealth attack.

“We got you so bad!” Keali‘i shouted, jumping up and down, from one leg to another, in a triumphant sort of dance. His shirt, too, was covered in dirt and leaves, and small twigs decorated his wavy, dark brown hair.

Lisha jut out her lower lip and tried to give the meanest “stink eye” she could to the two clowns in front of her. She glared at Keali‘i and was careful not to look him in the eye, but when her eyes caught Mona’s, she couldn’t contain it any longer. She burst
out laughing at the sight of them, and at the fact that she indeed had been “gotten so bad” by her two best friends.

“All right, all right,” she said, trying to catch her breath. “You guys got me. I totally thought you were on the Valley trail on your way to the crossroads.”

“Yeah, well we only rested for a little while back there,” Mona explained. A kolohe look crept into her eyes. “Then Keali‘i decided to scare the crap out of you.”

“Shut up!” Keali‘i whined. “It was totally your idea. Plus, man, Lish, you walk so friggin’ fast it took us forever to catch up with you.”

“Well, since we’re all here, let’s get going,” Lisha said as she turned to walk up the trail. The other two followed playfully hitting each other.

The three of them had decided to go hiking together as a way to enjoy the nature of Hawai‘i before they had to leave for college. Known as “The Three Amigos” in high school, the trio would be separated for the first time as they headed towards different points on the continent. Lisha was excited to go, but sad to leave her best friends. They decided that they would hike together when they all came home. Mona called it their beginning of a tradition. Although, she was not much of a nature girl, Lisha agreed since it meant spending more time with her friends and she was sure they would need her help hiking in and out safely.

“Hold up, Lish!” Mona called to Lisha who was already two large trees ahead of them.

“What?” she yelled back.

“Come here, I forgot to tell you something.”

Lisha made her way across a slick patch of mud, adding another inch or so to her height as the mud stuck to the bottom of her hiking boots. “This better be
something for real,” she mumbled just loud enough for the others to hear as she turned back toward them.

“I almost forgot,” Mona said quietly, but she was very excited. “I was so caught up in freaking you out, that I forgot about this weird thing Keali‘i and I wanted to show you.” Lisha looked at Keali‘i and could have sworn she saw the light bulb go on above his head. She almost laughed when his eyes widened and his mouth, twisted in confusion, straightened into a big smile.

“Ho, yeah,” Keali‘i said, his eyes getting even wider, “There was this weird looking - I think was a flower or something. Yeah, Mona? We gotta go back. You gotta see it, Lish.” He turned back up the trail looking ready to reclaim his prize.

“No way,” Lisha said. Her face was stern when she spoke. “I don’t think there will be enough time to go back and make it out before the sun goes down.”

“What are you talking about?” Mona pleaded. “We’ve got plenty of time. At least three more hours. Plus we can take the Valley trail on the way back, since it’s shorter. It’ll take us an hour and a half at the most to get up there and get back to the car.”

“It’s five o’clock now,” Lisha said glancing at her watch, “and the sun’s going to set at about seven, so that gives us two hours to get out of here. I say we’re about an hour out right now. I don’t think we’re going to have enough time.” She cocked her head to one side, her hands rested on her hips, and she shifted her weight onto her left leg.

“Dude, we’ll make it,” Keali‘i challenged. “We just gotta walk fast. Not going to take more than 45 minutes. Promise.” He looked at Lisha who held fast in her position, but Keali‘i took advantage of her silence. “Com’on. Let’s go before we waste more time.”
Lisha snorted as the pair headed up the trail in front of her. Her lack of control over the other two upset her as she trudged behind them. *All for a stupid flower?* she thought to herself. *This better be a damned good flower...* She straightened out her pink tank top, evening the straps so they wouldn’t fall off of her well-sculpted shoulders. *Well, if they want to get stuck up the mountain, it’d be better if I’m with them,* she sighed.

“Eh, hurry up,” Keali‘i shouted back to her. “You’re the one worried about the time. Com’on already.”

Lisha picked up her pace. “All right, let’s see this damn thing.”

As they crossed the trickling stream at the base of the broken tree, where Lisha had left the two to rest earlier in the day, Keali‘i veered off the path into a small patch of bamboo. “Eh, over here!” he called out. “This is what I was talking about.”

Lisha and Mona emerged from the bamboo and sloshed twenty feet through knee high wild grass before reaching Keali‘i. “Whoah,” Lisha exhaled, barely getting the word out of her mouth. The two foot tall plant looked like a cross between a rose and a sunflower. Deep green, its stem was laced in thorns and its large leaves, too, were a dark green, almost black. The bud contained long, thin orange petals which shaped themselves into a rose-like formation. Lisha couldn’t believe her eyes. *This shouldn’t be here,* she thought. *It’s like an alien species from another world!* “Guys,” she said, unable to take her eyes away from their amazing discovery, her lips curling into a devilish smile, “we’re going to be famous.”

She looked up at the pair excitedly, and with an exuberant cry, the three of them screamed with joy as they hugged and danced together, completely unaware of the clouds racing from the mountains to completely cover the quickly setting sun.
The trio excitedly discussed who would get to name it and who would get to keep it. "I think Li‘i should name it since he found it," Mona suggested. Lisha nodded in agreement while Keali‘i stood proudly, his chest expanding at Mona’s suggestion. "What do you think we should do with it? It’s kinda huge and I don’t know how we’ll get it out of here. Li‘i, do you think you can carry it?"

He frowned at her suggestion. "Gosh, I don’t know," he said looking at their prize. "It is big, and don’t we have to keep it in dirt or something?"

Lisha found a smooth and somewhat flat rock nearby to sit on. As she did, Mona and Keali‘i followed suit. They stretched out their legs while they talked, trying desperately to figure out the logistics of bringing their discovery to the world that awaited them.

A brisk and startling wind rushed through the forest, rustling the restless leaves and creaking the tall shoots of bamboo. It sent a chill up Lisha’s spine bringing her back to reality. "Whoah," she said looking up at the sky. The dark clouds that had built up toward the peak of the mountain, made their way across the open sky smothering the soon to be setting sun. "We should get going," Lisha said, turning toward the others, a worried look creeping over her brow. "It’s going to get dark really soon."

"Yeah, but we still haven’t figured out what to do with the plant," Mona whined. "We can’t just leave it here."

"Why not?" Lisha asked. "We can come back in the morning with shovels and stuff."

"You’re forgetting something, aren’t you," Mona scolded. "Li‘i leaves the day after tomorrow. He’s gotta spend all of tomorrow with his fam."

Lisha turned to Keali‘i with a look of apology. "Sorry, Ke, I forgot."
“Nah, no worries,” he assured her. “It would be cool to see what this thing is worth before I leave, though.”

“So what are we going to do then?” Lisha asked the two. “You don’t want to leave it here, but you don’t think we can take it with us either. Do we have any other options?” Mona and Kealiʻi pondered their dilemma for a moment before Lisha chimed up again. “We’ve got to decide soon. With the overcast skies, we’ve got a lot less time to get out.”

“I say we sleep on it,” Mona said matter-of-factly. Lisha turned to her, letting out a happy sigh. She was glad to see that she was not the only one with a sane mind. Lisha was so sure she would have to persuade the two to agree with her. She knew if it were left up to them, they’d stay there all night just trying to figure things out. Mona’s suggestion was actually quite surprising to her.

“That’s a great idea, Mona,” Kealiʻi said excitedly. Lisha turned to him dumbfounded but encouraged. But before she could take the reins and steer them back down the trail, Kealiʻi snatched up his backpack he had set down earlier while they were stretching their legs. He seemed eager to get at something in there. Lisha wondered what he was up to when his eyes lit up. “Look here,” he said excitedly. “I’ve got a whole bag a trail mix and another full bottle of water. Try see how much food you guys got left. Maybe we have enough to stay the night.”

“Are you crazy?” Lisha asked with a bewildered look on her face. She immediately dismissed the idea that these two had become sounder in mind. In fact, only a lunatic would have suggested such a thing. There was no way they could they could possibly spend the night in this place. They didn’t have the right clothing, they had no camping supplies, and they probably didn’t have enough food and water. In addition to that, there were wild animals here. Lisha looked around her and she knew
that even though she hadn’t seen any strange creatures the whole day, that didn’t mean they weren’t there. She shuddered at the thought of bristly haired snout nudging her face while she slept. “There’s no way I’m going to sleep here.”

Mona looked through her backpack and triumphantly held up a snack-sized bag of Oreo cookies, a half eaten sack of potato chips and a full bottle of lemon-lime flavored Gatorade. “I’m good to go,” she smiled. She looked around for a few seconds before finally settling on a rock-free and somewhat level patch of grass. “I call that spot,” she declared over her shoulder, nearly dropping her Gatorade bottle. Keali‘i smiled as his eyes followed her.

Lisha couldn’t believe what the two were proposing. “Are you guys serious?” she asked. “We’re not even prepared to camp here. Do you have any idea how cold it gets? We could die of hypothermia or something.” She stopped for a moment, still trying to make sense of what they wanted to do. “Look,” she said, “I’ve got to get home tonight. My mom’s counting on me being home for dinner. There’s no way I can stay.”

“Go then,” Keali‘i said. “We can handle. Yeah, Mona?”

“Yeah,” she replied, tossing away any large stones that might disturb her newly furbished sleeping grounds. “We can handle.”

“What are you going to tell your folks?” Lisha asked. “They’re not going to be too happy with you guys staying in the woods overnight. Besides, what do you have to prove? We should just go and come back in the morning. You’ll be getting home at the same time anyway.”

“Hmm,” Keali‘i said. “Yeah, I guess you’re right. No sense in spending a fun, adventurous night with nature, when we could be at home sitting on the couch watching
reruns of *Friends* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*.” He turned to Mona and rolled his eyes.

Lisha gave him a sarcastic “Ha, ha.” She knew he was making fun of her since she rarely missed those reruns. She could almost recite the script word for word.

“Well, if you guys want to stay over, you can do it without me. I’m going home to my *TV shows,*” she said, sticking out her lower lip before turning back toward the trail. She could hear the two continuing their conversation without her.

“So what are we going to use for light?” Mona asked.

“I’ve got a Mag-Lite,” he replied, “See?”

“Cool, you can chase away any wild animals with that too, huh,” she laughed.

“Hey, do we need to build a fire or something?”

“We’re not going to catch any fish or anything. I really don’t think we need one unless we get cold. But I’ve got a long-sleeved t-shirt to keep me warm, you?”

“I brought a jacket in case it rained. I guess can use that.”

Lisha turned and looked at the two through the creaking bamboo trees. *Those two would be hopeless without me,* she thought. *I just couldn’t live with myself if something were to happen to them. And without me, a lot could go wrong.*... She looked at the sky, which had already begun its sunset sequence. The orange began to show against the gray clouds. She looked at her watch. “6 o’clock,” she said quietly to herself. “I don’t think I’ll make it out before dark anyway. God, what was I thinking, letting them run all over me like that?” She navigated her way back through the tiny bamboo forest toward their home for the night.

Their decision to lie to their parents didn’t sit well with Lisha. She thought back to the time her brother had lied once, only to find himself in a world of trouble. By the
time her parents had realized he had gone to a party in Nanakuli instead of to the movies with friends, he had been beaten up for being a “prep school townie” by two drunken teens. His so-called friends were too scared to back him up, and he spent a day in the hospital under observation. From that day, she promised herself that she would never lie to her parents. But here she found herself in a bad situation. There was no way she could have gotten out before dark, and Keali‘i had the only flashlight. She didn’t want her parents to worry, so she told them she was spending the night with Mona. Mona told her parents she was over at Lisha’s and Keali‘i told his parents he was over at another guy’s house. It appeared they had their bases covered.

They all looked upward when they knew the sun had set. The sky remained lit, but they knew it would only be for several more minutes. Night was closing in fast. Lisha looked cautiously around her making sure her backpack was zipped up tight and her unfolded goza, or straw mat, was bug-free. She had allowed Mona to ‘bunk in’ with her on the goza, but Keali‘i was on his own. He had already put on his long-sleeved t-shirt in an attempt to combat the cool mountain breezes, but he looked slightly miserable sitting in the grassy area Mona had claimed a half hour earlier. Lisha wondered how he would be able to handle the cold up in Colorado, which was where he was headed for school in a few days. Looking at his slightly discouraged face, she decided not to bring it up; or at least not just yet.

“What’s the matter, Ke?” she asked.

He shrugged and then crossed his arms, each hand moving up and down, warming up the opposite upper arm. “It’s a little colder than I thought it would be,” he complained, “and it’s not even fully dark yet.”

“Well,” she said, trying to sound optimistic, “the clouds have broken up. It’s supposed to be a pretty full moon tonight.”
“Yeah, I guess that would be pretty cool,” he said with a weak smile.

“Hey, don’t get all down on us now,” Lisha said playfully. “Remember, this is supposed to be an adventure.” Keali’i’s smile widened.

“Yeah, you’re right,” he said puffing out his chest. “This is supposed to be an adventure!”

“Damn right!” Mona cried out, thrusting her fist in the air. “So what are we going to do?” The three of them looked at each other and laughed. The sky’s light quickly faded from their faces.

“Well,” Lisha said, “we better get the flashlight out.” She prayed that the moon’s light would arrive just as quickly as the sunlight had disappeared.

The rustling of the forest leaves and the creaking of bamboo had kept the three adventurers on edge for most of the night. In the early evening, they kept themselves busy with ghost stories and songs, much like the camping they had done along the beach in their younger years. Occasionally one of them would check up on the plant they had temporarily named “Special K.” They eagerly anticipated some sort of metamorphosis once the moonlight hit it, but their excitement quickly faded as there was no change over the course of the evening.

Lying out on her goza with her head resting on her backpack, Lisha gazed up at the stars. Her mind had wandered through the day’s events and she was amazed at how she had been so easily swayed by the other two to stay overnight. Bothered by that thought, she quickly dismissed it and replaced it with the assurance that the decision she made to stay was solely her own, and that she did it for the sake of the other two. Resting a little easier, she allowed herself to be mesmerized by the creaking bamboo.

Maybe this being one with nature crap is not so bad after all, she thought to herself.
Her relaxed state had only lasted a few minutes before Keali‘i brought her back to reality.

“I’m hungry,” he whined. They had finished the last of the food when they decided to eat at 8 o’clock. Lisha glanced at her watch. It was now nearing eleven. She, too, began to feel a little knot forming in her stomach. A handful of trail mix and a peanut butter flavored Tiger Milk bar was miniscule compared to the roast pork her mother prepared for dinner at home. The knot began to get tighter as she thought more about what she should have been eating that evening. She sat up and looked at Mona who, through the moonlight, looked as if she could go for some food, too. “Do you have any food left?” Keali‘i asked to no one in particular.

“Nope,” Mona said sadly. “You finished mine off at dinner. All I have is half of my Gatorade, but I’m saving it for tomorrow morning.”

Lisha shook her head at the two. “I told you we weren’t prepared,” she said in a scolding tone. “But no, you all had to get up with this let’s go on an adventure crap. See? Now we’re stuck out here in the cold with no food and no shelter. Guess we better be happy it’s not raining, but we’re in Manoa. Anything could happen here.” She felt bad for yelling at the two, but her hunger had put her in that unpleasant mood. Unless she got some food in her, there was no way she could tolerate the other two.

“Don’t lose your head, Lish,” Mona pleaded. “Maybe if we go to bed, we can sleep through it without thinking about it.”

“I can’t go to sleep on an empty stomach,” Keali‘i said in way that looked like the beginning of a temper tantrum. The girls looked at each other trying to establish a mental communication between themselves in an attempt to not upset him further. Then Lisha got an idea.

“Hey, animals and birds and stuff gotta eat right?” she asked.
“Yeah,” Keali‘i said slowly. “How does that help us? What are you saying? I should eat like a frickin’ bird?”

“No,” she said, realizing that she should have explained it better to him. “There’s gotta be some food around here then, right?”

Keali‘i’s familiar smile returned to his face. “Yeah, you’re right,” he said nodding, “What would I do without you, Lish.”

Yeah, she thought, a proud smile dancing on her lips, what would you do without me?

He ran over to where she sat and gave her a huge hug, nearly tackling her to the ground. He stood up again and began dancing and singing. “We’re gonna get some foo-ood. We’re gonna get some foo-ood.” The two girls laughed with each other at his foolishness.

The idea to search for food was a lot easier that the actual search itself. The three decided to go together and to head back towards the trail. Lisha had pointed out that if they had decided to search in any other direction, they would surely get lost. She was proud once more to see that her expertise was put to good use, but she wished there could have been a way to improve their lighting situation. As they huddled around one flashlight, trying desperately to navigate their way through the bamboo forest, the night’s air began to fill with “shine it over here,” “quit hogging it,” and a lot of “I can’t see where I’m going!” After about the twentieth complaint, Keali‘i stopped suddenly causing the girls to lose their footing as the rammed into the back of him.

“Ow,” Mona moaned, rubbing her elbow. “What’d you do that for?”

“Yeah, what’s the big idea?” Lisha chimed.
“Look,” he said turning towards them, “if you two don’t cut it out, I have no problems turning this car around and leaving you both at home.” The girls stifled their laughter.

“Yeah, our styling car with the busted headlight,” Mona said under her breath before she and Lisha bust out with laughter.

Keali‘i chuckled. “But I mean it, okay,” he said. “It’s hard enough to walk through here without you guys complaining so much. I’m doing the best I can, okay?”

“Yeah, sorry,” the girls mumbled apologetically. They continued walking and soon enough, the girls were at it again, but before he could quiet them down, they heard a loud scurrying sound to the left of them near the trail. The trio froze, unable to speak or move. A minute went by, but it could easily have passed for ten.

“What the hell was that?” Lisha whispered.

“Shh!” Mona scolded. “It might still be here.” Her eyes darted about looking for any movement around their immediate area. Keali‘i began to raise the beam of the flashlight in an attempt to search the area. “No!” Mona barked in a loud whisper. “Don’t do that. It might attack us.”

“Don’t be silly,” Keali‘i urged. “It’s not a big dinosaur. It’s probably just a little mouse or something. It’s probably more scared of us than we should be of it.” His light shone upon the wooden area around them and the Mona cowered behind him. “Don’t worry, Mona,” he laughed. “I’ll protect you. I am the knight of the bamboo forest.” He raised his left hand in a fist and began to wield his flashlight like a sword. A shimmering light began to dance among the forest’s canopy.

Despite Mona’s protests, he continued his mock sword play, totally oblivious to the uneven ground beneath him. Lisha watched him in what seemed like slow motion. The beam of the flashlight shot up toward the trees and Keali‘i seemed to disappear into
the darkness beneath it. "Oh, shit!" Keali'i yelled as he fell. A series of thuds and the crunching of branches and loose gravel followed his cry. Mona screamed.

Lisha turned toward the final resting place of the Maglite. It lay a few feet from her, but as she stumbled towards it, she took caution with every step while the damp cool darkness toyed with her outstretched arms. Her right hand grasped tightly around the neck of the flashlight, their last sense of security, and she quickly surveyed the area around her. She had lost her bearings in the black of the forest and tried to locate her missing friend as Mona's screaming turned into panicked cries. "Keali'i, she yelled. "Where are you? Keali'i!" Lisha moved quickly toward Mona. The last thing she needed was for something to happen to Mona while she tried to find out what happened to Keali'i.

"Mona, shh," she said, trying to be calm about it. She scanned the ground around them for any sign of Keali'i. Meanwhile Mona had latched herself onto Lisha, her nails digging into Lisha's bare arm.

"W-where did he go?" Mona whimpered. Lisha's light revealed a broken tree branch with an unsettling darkness behind it. Mona gasped. "Do you think..." she began, but before she could say any more, Lisha pushed forward to investigate.

"Li'i?" Lisha called out as the light revealed a twenty-foot drop behind the fallen tree branch. "Hey, Li'i?" A moan floated up from beneath them. Lisha excitedly shone the light down upon its origin.

"Whoa, whoa," Keali'i said waving one hand and shielding his eyes with the other. "Not in the eyes. You wanna blind me?" He let out what seemed to be an attempted chuckle, but his body language and facial expressions told the girls that his accident was really nothing to laugh at.
“Oops, sorry,” Lisha apologized. “You hurt?” She looked at him from head to toe. He seemed all right, but he was holding his foot in a funny position.

“I think I’ll be okay,” he replied. “Is there a way to get me out of here?” He eyed up the sharp drop between the girls and himself. Lisha knew he was wondering how the hell he got down there. She shone the flashlight around the area, but couldn’t find him an easy way back up.

“If I can get some kind of a rope, do you think you could climb up?” she asked. He gingerly stood up, leaning heavily on a nearby boulder. He carefully applied pressure to his left foot before he cried out in pain and collapsed to the ground. He wrapped his hands around his ankle in what looked like an attempt to alleviate the pain. Lisha was concerned. If he couldn’t walk, she knew they’d be in big trouble. Even if they made it until morning, they would still need help to get him out of there. She turned to Mona. “I think we need to get help,” she said quietly so Keali‘i wouldn’t hear.

“I don’t know,” Mona said looking down through the darkness. “He looks pretty bad. But who’s going to come up here at this hour?”

Lisha nodded. She understood Mona’s concern, but they could get in a lot of trouble if they called for help. They all had lied to their parents about where they were. She knew Mona’s and Keali‘i’s parents would be pretty pissed, and although she, too, would soon be on her way to college, her parents were still very strict with her and expected her to obey their every wish. This was the main reason she chose to attend Boston University. She had to get away from them. Lisha shook her head trying not to get too worked up over her overprotective parents. She looked at Mona. The poor girl was scared out of her mind. She looked at Keali‘i, and she knew that they had to get
him out of there somehow. She sighed and realized that she had no other choice but to call for help.

Mona and Keali‘i sat in the darkness as Lisha walked back to their camp, guided by a lone beam of dim light. Now away from the others, she began to sob softly. It was her job to keep them safe. They needed her to protect them. That had been her duty. But this time she couldn’t. She could not save them. She could not save herself. Not without help. What would they think of her now? She was no better than the two sitting in the dark. She reached the campsite and found her cell phone in her bag. She took a tissue out and wiped her nose. How did it come to this? she asked herself. Then she remembered the mysterious plant that was the seed of the mess they were in. Through the course of the evening the trio had forgotten about their fame-bringing discovery and their adventure had blossomed into a whole new world of trouble. Lisha wondered if the whole experience was even worth it. Perhaps they still had a chance, a chance to turn their course of events with a grand ending. They would reveal their great discovery and still be famous.

Lisha rushed over to the alien species, but as she shown the dim beam of light across the clearing, she quickly sucked in her breath. She scanned the clearing again, but it was the same image as before. There was nothing there. The plant was gone. She mistrusted her eyes and rushed to the spot the plant should have been. She dropped to her knees when she saw it.

The once beautiful and strangely enchanting perfectly bloomed two-foot plant had wilted to the ground. The petals had fallen to the ground first and a multitude of beetles and other bugs were feasting on its death. Its thick green stem was now
shriveled and the thorns looked no more menacing than the large hole-riddled leaves that lay, barely attached to the stem, on the bug infested earth.

Not knowing what she would say to the others, Lisha stood, defeated, and walked back to the others, her cell phone clutched tightly in her hands. Her stunned silence echoed the quiet of the forest that enveloped them. She navigated her way through along the once friendly trail to find Mona sitting against a large boulder, her eyes closed in exhaustion. Lisha aimed the light down toward Keali‘i, careful not to shine directly into his eyes again. He, too, sat against a boulder, his foot propped up on a smaller stone.

“Did you make the call?” Mona asked softly. Lisha opened the flip phone and began to dial. She knew that the three of them would never be the same. They were all going off to college over the next few weeks, and would be without each other. Their “last hurrah” was supposed to make their friendship stronger, but Lisha was no longer sure what exactly their status was. Perhaps instead of being a step together towards the future, this was their first step apart. Lisha realized she would have to learn to survive on her own. She realized that Mona and Keali‘i weren’t dependent on her. She realized that she needed them.

A tired voice answered her call. Lisha began to speak, but the voice she heard coming out of her mouth did not sound like her own. The voice sounded unsure of herself, unsure of her friendships, unsure of her future. She looked down at her feet realizing she had her own life to live. It was time for her to grow up.
AUTUMN

Turning of the Leaves

12:21 p.m. He just stared at me with those dark, lifeless eyes. I sat there as an internal battle began between fear and courage. I didn’t know what to do. I was brought up to be kind to the less fortunate, but this man could have been the devil himself. Then again, he could have been God testing me in one of his mysterious ways. Nevertheless I sat there alone on the bench, my lunch in hand, while he sat across from me, fifty yards away, in the shade of a tree.

I looked around wondering why I had chosen such a secluded area of the park. Granted I wanted to get away from the mall for a while, it was not smart for a young girl my age – still a teenager for God’s sake – to spend her lunch break alone at Ala Moana Beach Park. But here I was, where fate had decided I would be.

I tried not to look at him, but his eyes bore a wave of guilt into my mind. I tried to focus on my six-inch low-fat turkey on wheat from Subway, but I could still feel his stare. I could see him now in my mind, licking the drops of saliva along his parched and cracked tanned lips. I closed my eyes but he was still there. His hair, like the mane of an old lion, was greasy, matted, unkempt, and likely full of lice and God knew what else. His grime-crusted clothes stuck to his body like a second skin. His hands and feet were black from rummaging through what people called garbage, but what he knew as treasure. I furiously tried to shake the image from my head. A Catholic should know better than to judge a person by appearance. I opened my eyes to the sandwich still
sitting in my lap. The battle had changed to a tamer conflict between my morals and my hunger. I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt and with that came half of my sandwich. I took a plastic knife out of my bag and sliced the sub in half. I ate my half and wrapped the rest and neatly placed it back in the Subway bag. I glanced up to see if he was still there. An intense flash seemed to ignite in his stare, but it was only for a moment. And it was at this moment that courage and morality were winning the battle. I stood up to approach him and smiled as I realized I was doing a good deed, and God would be proud. But I could not look at him. I smiled, but not at him. I could not let my eyes meet those that seemed of immense anger, hatred almost. My smile went through him as I walked forty feet away. Thirty feet. Twenty. His eyes met mine and I froze as his soul went into me.

A searing pain shot through my ears as he yelled obscenity after obscenity. His hands waved around confirming my belief that he was a mad man. In part horror and in part embarrassment, I dropped the gift and turned away quickly. My eyes searched for sanctuary as my mind tried to erase the image forever burned in my head. I walked quickly away. My legs would not let me run. I did not know if he was coming after me, but his soul did. His haunting image, his eyes, and his words – they followed me from this day. Tormenting me. Tormenting my soul. I hated him for it. I hated him for scarring me with his pain. I would spend my life trying to forget him.

4:05 p.m. I glanced up from the timetable and scanned King Street for my bus.
It was late. I checked the wrinkled pamphlet in my hands again and scanned the
column for the Punchbowl stop. I had to squint, but it was still there. 4:02 p.m. This irked me. If the bus people would go through so much trouble making an exact timetable, it would only make sense for the buses to be on time. Looking down the street again, I sighed knowing that the later the bus was the more crowded it would be. And I hate crowds.

Being amongst a lot of people bothered me, which is why my job placement counselor at UH decided I would be best suited to work in a cubicle in an office in downtown Honolulu. She must have been out of her mind to suggest such a thing or maybe it was a joke. I've never been around so many people in my life. Perhaps it was her way of trying to get me to open up to the idea of being around people. Whatever it was, it didn't work. I hate crowds.

I stood in the shade of the palm tree, away from the rest of the bus patrons. As I waited I noticed the usual mix of people. Confused Japanese tourists stood there not realizing they had just missed three busses headed toward Waikiki. Asian immigrants who had emerged from the depths of Chinatown carried their bags of weird smelling produce and huddled under the lone roof on the corner. Businessmen and women dressed in their lifeless suits usually gathered on the lawn beneath the shade of the larger trees to escape the Hawaiian heat. And of course there were the demons.

The demons hung around the trashcans looking for their treasure. Lord knows I would not find myself near them. Their foul smell repelled me. I found myself quickly moving away as one drew near to me.
“Hey,” he said roughly. I turned toward him and in an instant my heart began to pound in my chest as he smiled, his rotten teeth exposed. “I know you.”

I ran to the nearest bus and boarded, nearly stumbling on the steps. Flashing my pass to the driver, I peered out the window to see him standing there just looking at me. I sank into a chair and closed my eyes. I tried to assure myself that this was just a coincidence. Nothing more.

The bus roared down the street as I sat there not knowing my destination.

4:07 p.m. I hadn’t seen the demon for many weeks now. I wondered if he moved on, or perhaps he was dead. I didn’t know, and I’m sure no one really cared. But there were still many more demons to keep an eye out for. I had seen the greasy haired, dirty clothed demons lurking around as I approached the bus stop after work. I knew they were waiting for me. And if I weren’t careful, they would attack like feral cats. I hated these filthy demons.

I glanced at the large clock on the old church across the street. The bus was late. Again. I loathed riding the bus with so many people. My mind drifted to thoughts of Kyle. Oh, how I missed him. Kyle was the man that kept me sane in this world. He was the only man who cared for me, and he treated me like a princess. Being in his arms made all the demons disappear. His job kept him busy and I hardly got to see him, but I knew I would see him tonight around 8:30. He would finish his work at the Sheraton Hotel and come home to me. I smiled as I imagined us together. I looked at the promise ring on my finger and knew that one day he would be mine and only mine.
I looked up to see the Number 4 bus approaching. I sighed as I watched a bunch of Chinese and Korean women crowd themselves beneath the little sign on the sidewalk. Each one of them, acting as if they had deserved the right to be first on the bus, were ignorant of the fact that people coming off the bus would need room to disembark, and were ignorant of the elderly people waiting patiently behind their chatter.

As an elderly woman climbed slowly aboard in front of me, I prayed there would be an open seat. My feet were just killing me. The bus driver checked my pass and nodded me through and I scanned the aisle. I smiled as I saw one open seat left. It was towards the back and next to a normal looking woman.

The bus maneuvered its way through the usual mess of rush hour cars along King Street. I kept my gaze out the window and kept my hands folded upon the backpack on my lap. I obeyed the unspoken rule of not talking or making eye contact with fellow riders, and over the years, I had mastered the art of looking genuinely interested at whatever was outside the window.

As the bus turned up Ward Avenue, the woman next to me stood up to get off. I spotted a group of people waiting at the next stop, and knew one of them would be taking her place. I glanced around the slightly crummy looking homes and buildings in the area. I prayed that one of them would not sit next to me. I didn’t dare to look up at the passengers coming on. One might mistake my eye contact to mean an invitation for a seat and conversation. I kept my attention at the scar on my right hand and rubbed it
as if it would magically disappear, like I wished all these people would. But then I felt
the presence of a man next to me.

He had nice shoes and decent pants. I exhaled in relief and relaxed in my seat.
He had a nice smell, too. I wished to look up at his face, but didn’t know how to in a
not so obvious manner. Plus, I knew better than to break the bus rule. He on the other
hand, did not.

“Hot day, isn’t it,” the man said. I wasn’t sure if this was directed to me or
someone else. Conflicted between my obligation to follow the rule and my complete
curiosity of the man, I elected to keep my eyes toward the scar on my right hand and
continued my silence. “So do you go to UH?” he asked as I felt the weight of his eyes
bearing down on me.

I knew now that he was talking to me. He probably thought I was a student
based on the fact that I had a backpack and was on a bus headed for the University. I
supposed I’d have to give him the time of day. It couldn’t be that bad. After all, he had
a pleasant voice.

I looked up to study him before answering his question. His decent pants were
accompanied by a clean, white long-sleeved shirt, buttoned up to the top where a dark
tie speckled with hints of color spilled out from the collar. His chin showed a hint of
stubble where it had probably been shaved clean earlier in the morning. His strong jaw
relaxed as my gaze moved upward, watching his lips curve to a smile. My glance
moved pass the bridge of his nose and could not get past his eyes. They were an
amazing blue. It was a color I had never seen before. My eyes locked with his and I
wondered if this was the "ice blue" I had read about so many times in my romance novels. I was stunned by his good looks, and temporarily took back any misconception I previously had about male bus passengers. I smiled.

"Do you go to school?" he asked again.

"Oh," I stammered. My mouth had gone dry from the long silent ride and I licked my lips trying to get the saliva going again. "No, I mean I used to, but I don't anymore." I saw his eyes descending upon me, much like I had done just moments earlier. Instinctively I covered my promise ring, and for a second wondered just what I was doing.

"Huh?" he asked as his eyes moved up again and rested into mine. I thought to myself that he was the exact opposite of a demon. This man was an angel, like Kyle. Kyle had told me many times that not all men were demons. There were angels like him in this world. Oh, he would be so happy to know that I had met an angel. I looked at this man sitting next to me again. Oh, what an angel, I thought to myself.

"Do you go to UH?" I asked the man.

"I used to, but I graduated a few years ago," he explained. "I work at Queen's now."

"Do you live out this way?" I asked. I couldn't believe what a conversation I was having with this man. It was as if I were talking with him for years. The excitement built up in the well of my stomach, and with a flutter of butterfly wings, I felt as if I were young again. Innocent again. For some reason, I wanted to know everything about this man. Where he lived, what kind of food he liked, what television
programs he liked to watch, whether or not he had a girl—. I quickly looked down at his folded hands to find his fingers bare. Smiling I looked up, awaiting his answer.

“Yeah, I live by the University. It’s not glamorous, but it’s cheap and close to everything in town.” There was something in his voice that hinted he did not grow up in the islands. His English was a little too good. How exciting. He could tell me about his travels around the world, or his adventures curing sick children in Africa or in South East Asia. He would sit with me in his cozy little condo telling his stories hour after hour and I would listen with great excitement as he promised to take me there one day. Take me away from the hell I had been living. His gentle voice, which was neither too high pitched nor too low pitched, soothed me. His words moved in perfect rhythm. It was perfect. He was perfect. “Here’s my stop.”

The words did not make sense for a moment and it was if I was shaken out of a dream. “Huh?” I asked.

“Don’t worry,” he smiled placing his hand upon my thigh. “I will see you again.” He stood up, his tall body silhouetted by the sun coming though the opposite window. I did not want him to leave. I wanted to hear more. I wanted to say more. I wanted to feel more.

I watched him walk down the steps of the bus and through the open doors. I watched as he walked confidently along the sidewalk narrowly missing a possibly fatal collision with a middle-aged woman running to catch a ride on this particular bus. I watched as the bus roared past him and I could have sworn he looked up, his eyes locking his soul into mine. But for a brief moment I felt fear as a familiar intensity
brushed across his eyes and I swore I saw a flash of anger, of hatred, in them. But then it was gone. I shrugged it off and pictured him again next to me. I closed my eyes and tried to keep him there. I couldn’t wait to tell Kyle everything about this man.

5:29 p.m. Kyle left me three weeks ago. He was not the angel I thought he was. He was a demon hidden beneath the angel skin. I had told him about another angel I met on the bus that day, and he could hide no longer. His demon was revealed. It scared me at first. He began to scream like one, yelling harsh, horrible words to me. He began to look like one, his eyes dark and filled with hatred and anger. He began to smell like one and he repelled me. I screamed for that demon to get out, and he did. He never came back.

I could not trust my eyes anymore. That man, the one on the bus, must have been a demon too. Luring me, tempting me. Just as Kyle did. Tried to get me in his clutches. Just as Kyle did. Tried to kill me. Like Kyle would have. I wanted to scream out, asking God why he would do such a thing to me. What have I done to deserve the demons?

I had found the demons at work, too. I knew they were there, lurking in the shadows. I had heard them talking before. But the day after Kyle left, they began to scream at me. I looked around from my desk but could not see them. They were there, though. I stood up and asked the woman who worked next to me if she heard them, or if they only talked to me. She looked at me her and eyes flashed. I knew they had gotten to her.
“What voices?” she asked, looking so smug in her gray pants suit, her blonde hair tied with a red scarf. I stumbled back as the demons began to whisper.

“Red scarf,” I heard one say in its rough voice. “Kill you. Red scarf,” it whispered again. I looked with horror at the woman. I knew she was with them.

“What’s wrong?” she asked smiling. I knew she tried to deceive me. I walked backwards away from her. If I turned, she would attack. Her red scarf was only one weapon. Many others lay at the ready on her desk. Scissors, razors, and pens, all holstered ready to be used against me. “Are you okay?” she asked again.

“Kill you,” the demon whispered.

“No!” I screamed. “Get away!” I stumbled and fell on the floor. I turned and she stood over me, reaching for me. I grabbed my shoes and flung them at her. The heel of the second one caught her between the eyes, stunning her. I used the opportunity to get away. The demons were screaming now, fluttering in the trail of shadows behind me. Their heads popped up from fabricated walls that had separated me from them for so many years. I ran out of the office out of the building pushing away any demon that might try to stop me. I looked back to see the shadows. In them, I knew the demons were following me. I saw all the people I had pushed aside gathering around an old woman. She lay on the ground. I had pushed her too. I turned around and kept going until I reached a familiar place. I searched my pocket and with a sigh of relief, I found my pass and boarded the Number 4 bus.
8:46 p.m. I found sanctuary at the familiar stop. I couldn’t stay at home any longer. I hid there for a few days, but the demons found me. I knew they would. I don’t know why I tried to out run them. They’d just find me again. I tried to ignore them, but when I closed my eyes I saw his face. I saw the flash of anger, the flash of hatred, on the face of that man, that demon, on the bus. I shut them tighter, so hard that stars formed in the blackness, but there he was. The demon that had deceived me. The demon that I trusted to protect me from all other demons. Kyle. The stench of him burned my nostrils. The place reeked of his sourness. I took what money I could find and left my home. Hoping to leave the demons there with every memory of him.

9:15 a.m. I rested under a tree. Last night was the first night of sleep in weeks. I greedily slurped up whatever remained of the magic potion in the bottle I found. I had come across it while getting dinner.

There it lay among a variety of interesting things. A green bottle, the cap still on. I was thirsty so I had a sip. The warm liquid filled my body and it tingled my senses, which had been dormant for all these days. I looked at the green bottle in wonder. Foam rose to the surface of the liquid and I knew what this was, but it had never tasted so good before. I licked my lips of the remnants of my first sip and took another. Oh, I had never felt so good, so relaxed, so alive. I wanted to drink it all, but my search had only revealed one bottle. I had to savor it so this feeling would never end. The demons did not visit me that night. The magic saved me.
My head, now clear of the demons, began to think of such wonderful things. I thought of my childhood with Mother before she died. She and I would spend our days together just the two of us. That’s all, just the two of us. I didn’t have a dad, nor any brothers or sisters. There was just my mother and I. Oh, and God. I felt tears rolling down my cheeks as I thought of her and what she would think of me now. But she left me here. And then, God left me here to serve my days in hell amongst the demons. I took another sip and it filled me, replacing the emptiness. Its warmth battled the cold of night and took me into a better place. The sweet smell of the magic liquid repelled the stench of the demons and they subsided.

12:21 p.m. I watched her come to the park before. She would sit there all pretty like and eat her lunch. Today she wore a blue dress with little yellow flowers all over it. She daintily crossed her legs at her knees and smoothed a napkin to protect her precious dress. I slurped from a half-empty bottle of clear potion I had found yesterday. It was not as strong as the first bottle I had found. I still heard the demons whispering. I watched from the shade of the tree and saw her glance at me. She folded her hands in her lap and seemed to be contemplating something.

“Perhaps,” I heard a whisper, “she’s listening to us.” I shook my head and grabbed the bottle to take another sip. But I stopped myself, remembering that I have to save it for tonight. I quickly put the bottle into a bag with four other half-empty bottles. I looked again at the girl. She was sweet and very innocent. She was brave to come
into the park alone. She seemed to enjoy the scenery as she looked at the ocean, her hands still folded in her lap.

She reached into her bag and pulled out a sandwich. I could feel the pains in my cheeks as I imagined the taste of the soft bread and salty meat upon my tongue. She looked up at me again. Was she mocking me? Did she come here to tease me with her precious meal, dressed in such fancy attire? Ooh, I did not think her so sweet anymore. She looked away guiltily. Yes, she should feel such a thing, her being so blessed, able to enjoy a meal without the demons breathing down her neck. Her auburn hair, swept up into a ponytail, glittered in the sun that escaped the filtering of the leaves. Her eyes were a blue that I had seen before, not too long ago, but I don’t remember where.

She looked toward the ocean again, as if hearing a voice. Was she, too, hearing the voices among us? Her pink lips curved into a smile as she pulled something from her bag. The sun caught it for a moment and the steel blade gleamed in the light. I held my breath and I could hear the demons talking wildly, their voices out of rhythm, moving faster and faster. They swirled around me.

“Kill you,” they murmured. “Hurt you,” they chanted. I focused on the girl, trying to clear them from my head. Surely this innocent thing cannot hurt me. I stared into her eyes, pleading with her silently. Help me.

She smiled and cut the bread in two. I looked in horror. Is this a display of her power? Is she showing me what she will do to me?

“Yes,” the demons whispered. “She will hurt you.”
She ate one half of her sandwich and wrapped the other half neatly. This is a ploy, I thought to myself. She is with them. She has been listening to them, and now she is going to try to do their bidding. She is going to try to kill me.

The girl stood before me and her eyes looked past mine. A smile curled on her lips as she walked towards me. Closer. Closer. She was nearly upon me. Her knife carefully stowed for easy access and she would slice me in two. The demons shouted louder as she got nearer. Still she looked through me. At last I caught her eyes with mine and I felt all the anger and hatred of her kind toward me. I knew they wanted to be rid of me, but I was not yet ready to be rid of.

“No!” I screamed and she nearly fell back from the power of my voice. “You fuckin’ bitch! Get away from me!” I yelled and grabbed at an object to throw at her to keep her away from me, but I could not reach my things from where I sat. So I threw the leaves that had fallen from the tree above me. I threw every single one of them at her. My mind was filled with a blind rage that compelled me to curse that girl, curse that devil of a being who wished to torment me so. I closed my eyes to be rid of her and when they opened, she was gone.

Before me lay half of a sandwich so neatly wrapped, nearly hidden beneath a pile of leaves. It had been so carefully prepared to deceive me. Perhaps she had poisoned it. I wondered. I grabbed it from beneath the leaves and brushed off the dirt, oh, so gently. I would save this for later. If indeed she had poisoned it, I might use it to forever rid me of the demons. But not today.
Today, I had thwarted their attempts. Today, I had survived their attack.

Perhaps they will leave me now. But I shook my head. No, I said to myself, they will be back. But I am strong. I will not become one of them. I will not become a demon.
BITTERNESS OF THE COLD

In the back yard I swing alone tonight;
The lights are out and everyone's asleep.
I walk around thinking it's just not right;
It was the one promise you did not keep.

And through the twilight stars I see your face.
Did you hear the thoughts crying in my head?
To be with you in that heavenly place
Would only mean that I, too, would be dead.

And like the words from a verse lost to time,
Your smile brings me a gentle memory.
Life has become a poem without rhyme,
But then perhaps that's how it's s'posed to be.

And now tonight, as dawn is drawing near,
This world and life alone is what I fear.
His long-sleeved polyester shirt looked as new as the day he bought it. Ivory in color, brown and orange swirls moved about in their oval patterns. With a swish of the tail, it looked as if ancient fishes had imbedded themselves in the fabric. Gray hair that had once been a darker brown loosely covered his tanned head. Years of yard work, years of fishing, years of living in Hawai‘i had done that to him. His outward appearance mirrored his soul, which was full of memories and scar tissue.

Robert made his way through what seemed like countless lines and security checkpoints toward the aircraft. It had been years since he rode a plane and things were dramatically different since then. New rules and new places; a lot more planes and a lot more people.

"Times have changed," he thought to himself with a sad sigh. His thoughts moved to the hijacking and terror attacks that happened on the mainland just over a year ago. He thought of the people around him as he pictured what they would look like if it had been their plane. Who would scream? Who would cry? Who would stand up to those evil men? He sighed again realizing what his family would think had it been him. He thought of his sons and daughters, his brother, his beloved wife, and his mother. Hidden behind his half tinted glasses, a tear welled in the corner of his right eye, his good eye, and strolled down his cheek as his gaze fell up on a little hapa girl with light
brown hair and big, deep brown eyes. She couldn’t have been more than five years old, no older than his youngest grandchild.

The seats were uncomfortable and a little snugger than he was used to. It was a good thing that the young woman on his left was on the slim side. She was kind enough to share an armrest with him. Robert wondered for a moment if it was because he looked old.

“You’re so kind to an old man,” he said with a smile to the young woman who was obviously of Japanese ancestry.

“Oh, no,” she said laughing nervously, “you’re not that old.” Despite her politeness, her mannerisms indicated that he, in fact, had become one of the elderly.

He gazed out the window, his eyes just staring, not focusing. He wondered why he took this flight alone. There were many who could have come with him. His eldest son still lived on the island, as well as three of his nieces and two of his nephews. But there was something peaceful about flying alone. Not having to go where someone else wanted to go, not having to do what someone else wanted to do. This was the first time he could make his own decisions.

The plane rocked and rumbled and their chairs shook. Robert’s grip tightened just enough for the blood to rush out of his knuckles. The force of the plane’s acceleration pushed Robert back in his seat and he closed his eyes hoping it would all be over soon. The plane moved faster and faster and he felt the ground disappear beneath him. The loud ratting of the plane slowly subsided and he felt himself floating as he loosened his grip and opened his eyes.
The afternoon sky painted the clouds pink and orange and splashed various shades of blue across the skyline. The mountains of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa loomed in the distance. He couldn’t see any snow on the peaks today, but he knew there would be some soon.

His gaze moved across to the ocean line – the beaches, the hotels, and the vast industrialization his homeland had to endure. He looked towards the mountains again to see if he could see his two-story house. It was the one with the red roof, white fence and well-maintained yard. He squinted hard through the top of his brass-rimmed lenses, but he couldn’t tell which one was his. There were too many of them.

Robert leaned back in his chair and thought of Aileen. His last plane ride had been with her. He remembered her long auburn hair and how it shimmered in the bright Hawaiian sun. He remembered how she laughed, running on the beach, her long, slender legs teasing him like the tentacles of a tako disappearing into deeper waters. She was the beauty that required patience to catch. She was always a step ahead, and he had always seemed to have the wrong bait. When he finally caught her, he knew the wait was worth it. He couldn’t imagine his life without her in it. He frowned as he realized how much he missed her over the past six years. She would have wanted to come, he thought to himself.

Aileen was the daughter of a newspaperman in Kona. Robert was the son of a city worker on Oahu and moved to the Big Island to try to make it on his own when he turned 18. He managed to land a job at a local mom and pop store on the southern
outskirts of Kona. At first, Mrs. Watanabe didn’t want to give him the bag boy position. Robert wasn’t sure if she could see past her idea of him being a young kid who had no respect for his parents since he had left home at such a young age. And he knew she doubted that he would uphold the tradition of taking care of them when they got older. But after he assured her he loved and respected his parents, and promised to work early Sunday mornings, she put him on the payroll.

He had gotten an earful from his parents before he left them on O’ahu. Threats of disownment and assurances of his failure tainted their conversations in the months leading to his departure. But Robert knew it was their fear, sadness, and love that caused them to say such things. He hardly ever took it too personally.

The house on Wainani Place was filled with silent movements on a breezy Saturday morning in July. A large Hawaiian man stood in the living room taping up an old recycled toilet paper box. Beads of sweat dripped down the sides of his sun-hardened face and down his neck until his thirsty, worn t-shirt greedily sucked them all in. He pulled out a thick black marker and wrote “Books” along the sides and top of the box.

The man, who told Robert to call him Jesse, brushed his forearm across his brow in an attempt to prevent his shirt from drinking more beads, but all he succeeded in doing was smashing the beads into a thick film of sweat that spread across his face and it wouldn’t be long before the beads formed once more.
“All right, last box, man,” Jesse said as he squatted down and then lifted the box with such ease that no one would guess it weighed nearly a hundred pounds. He left the room and Robert closed his eyes for a moment. He had said his goodbyes to his younger brother, Joey, that morning. That was hard, but he knew this would be harder. He knew the wait couldn’t last forever. He opened his eyes and turned to face his parents. His mother, fighting back tears, tried to smile, but her quivering lip prevented her from selling it. Her dark brown hair caught a bit of the sunlight peeking through the thin curtain covering the kitchen window. Eyes cast downward, her face filled with sorrow as her elder son stood to say goodbye.

“It’s not forever, Ma. I’ll come back and visit,” Robert said softly. Trying to be a man about it, he sucked in a deep breath, lifted his shoulders and looked up at his aged father. “Dad,” Robert said, extending his hand in a business-like manner.

The forty-two year-old stood with a solemn look on his face. He wore a tan and blue collared shirt that Robert had never seen before. Robert wondered if the had worn it for this occasion.

“You sure you don’t want us take you to the airport?” his father asked with the same stone-faced stare that seemed to have been a part of his whole demeanor.

“No Dad. I got a cab coming. Plus, it will be easier for us to just say our ‘byes over here. I don’t want too much hassle for you guys.”

“All right then.”
Robert's move to Kona wasn't as easy as he had thought it would be. The pace of the town was much slower than the hustle and bustle of the big city of Honolulu. Everyone in Kona seemed to know each other, and Robert was clueless as to where to begin in such a small town. He knew he couldn't quit, though. He had to prove to himself, and to his parents, that he could make it out here on his own. And, in fact, it was the slow pace of Kona that attracted him at first. The beauty of the woman he promised himself he would marry was what made him decide to stay.

A few weeks after he had gotten the job at the Watanabe's, Robert had gone out drinking with some of the guys from work at a place called Kiki's Bar & Grill. Since he was the newest member of the gang, Robert had to buy the rounds that night, nearly spending all of a two-week's paycheck. But he didn't mind. The company of others was what he had been missing over the past month, and he welcomed it any way he could get it. The night was spent laughing, eating, drinking and swapping stories. Robert wanted to learn more about Kona and the guys wanted to hear more about O'ahu. The stories went on into the early morning.

The bartender announced his last call, and most of the guys took it as their cue to head home for the night. Robert waved good night to the gang, and went up to the cashier to pay the bill. He nearly stumbled over an overturned chair when he spotted what he saw to be a beautiful angel sitting on a barstool behind the counter. He shook his head trying to clear the alcoholic glaze over his eyes. He once heard a story about a man who drank so much one night he went home with the ugliest girl in the place, all
the while thinking she was the most beautiful girl in the world. Robert definitely did not want to get stuck in that situation. He prayed his eyes were not fooling him.

“Looks like you’re the new guy,” she said smiling, looking at the tab in his hand.

“Yeah,” he said shrugging and smiling sheepishly. He forced himself to sober up. He didn’t want to be slobbering all over like some old drunk. He placed the tab and a wad of cash into her well-manicured hands.

“Well,” she said looking around briefly as if to hide something. “You’re pretty cute and the guys didn’t make a mess, so I’m going to give you a discount.” She smiled as she punched in the keys of the register. The hunk of metal roared open and she gracefully exchanged his money with hers. He swore her light brown eyes twinkled as she handed him his change. “Have a good night and drive safe. Hope to see you again?” Robert just stood there with his hand out. He was still stuck on the comment she made about him being cute. He dwelled on it a little longer before his brain rushed back into the present time. He felt foolish for being caught staring off into space like that. He thought desperately of something to say to her, but his mind drew a blank, and he was once again staring off into space. “Are you okay?” she asked with a soft chuckle.

“What?” he asked. His intoxicated brain struggled hard to keep up with the conversation. “Oh, yeah,” he added, trying to imagine what it would feel like to touch her soft auburn hair. “I, um, I live not too far, so I’ll be okay.” He didn’t want to go just yet. “Do you own this place?” Her hearty laughter filled the nearly empty room.
Robert looked down at his feet. The question didn’t sound that bad in his head. He began to wonder if he could trust his brain for the rest of the night.

“No,” she exhaled as she calmed herself down. “My uncle and aunty own this place. I just work here part-time.”

“Oh,” he said quietly. He knew he should go before he said or did something really stupid. “I have to work early tomorrow.”

“Will I see you again?” she asked. She seemed genuinely interested.

“Yeah, I’ll be around,” he said with a wave as he walked toward the door, careful not to stumble again. He hoped to God that this woman really was that beautiful.

Robert chuckled to himself as he remembered how inexperienced and naïve he had been in his younger years. He had told the story of how they met many times over and over, but it never ceased to amaze him how clearly he remembered it all. Aileen, as sweet as she was, assured him that he remembered every detail accurately, though sometimes he wasn’t so sure. He often wondered if she was just being gracious about the whole thing. He wondered if he really did make an ass out of himself that night. But what he was sure of was that he fell in love with the most beautiful woman on earth that night. His eyes had not deceived him after all.

The airline beverage service began and Robert lowered his tray table. The woman next to him stood up. He guessed she had to go to the bathroom. He looked at his neighbors across the aisle. There, between a young couple, sat the little hapan girl he
had seen earlier at the airport. She was looking in his direction so he waved. She
smiled and giggled. Robert felt a wave of sadness come over him as he watched her
play with her father and the plastic cup of juice. He frantically tried to brush away his
emotions. *No, not here*, he thought. *Now is not the time.*

He looked again at the younger couple and remembered how scared he and
Aileen had been when they brought their eldest son, Ronnie, over to Honolulu for the
first time. Ronnie was not yet a year old, but he had already established his
temperamental personality, and he had the set of lungs to go with it.

“Now, don’t worry, hon,” Robert reassured his wife as they arrived at the
airport. “Your aunt said that lavender bath we gave him should keep him calm for a
few hours.” He gave her a loving look in an attempt to erase her worried one.

“Yes, but I don’t want him to get an ear infection,” she said. “Gina’s daughter
got one from the air pressure. You’re parents wouldn’t be too pleased if we spent the
whole trip in the doctor’s office.”

“Don’t worry,” he repeated. He, in fact, was worried, too, but he knew it
wouldn’t help their son to have the both of them lose their heads. “Your aunt said to
have him drink his bottle on take-off and landing. Remember? Ronnie will be fine.”
Robert looked at his son sleeping quietly, wrapped in his favorite Winnie the Pooh
blanket. He knew his son’s angelic facade was only temporary. The little terror would
be up soon.
He looked up at his beautiful wife of two years. Their eyes met and they shared a smile. He didn’t blame her for forgetting anything that her aunt had said. They were seated in her kitchen just the night before as she went over everything that they had to do for the baby while they were away. He was surprised she hadn’t told them to write everything down, like she usually did. Looking back, he thought it would probably have been a good idea. They were bound to forget something, and she would be quick to get on their case about it. But Robert knew it was all out of love for her niece and grandnephew.

Ronnie wasn’t the only thing she worried about. She wouldn’t say it, but he knew she was nervous about meeting his parents. Two years ago, they had decided to elope and got married at the county courthouse, sharing the ceremony with only Aileen’s sister and brother-in-law. Both of their parents had been against their wishes to get married so young. But Robert and Aileen vied to prove them wrong. Aileen had since made amends with her mother and father, but Robert could not obtain his father’s forgiveness. Upset at his father for not being supportive of his decision, Robert gave up on trying to make peace with him. His mother, caught between the two of them, urged Robert to fly over so that she could meet his wife and son. For two years, his mother tried to break down the walls his father had put up so many years ago without luck. She hoped this time Ronnie could do the trick. He glanced down again at his precious son held tightly in his loving wife’s arms, and prayed that his family could be whole again. The PA system broke him away from his thoughts. It was time to go home.

* * * * * * *
Robert’s mother and younger brother welcomed their arrival to Honolulu. He had routinely sent them pictures since his marriage, so they immediately recognized Aileen and Ronnie as they walked off of the plane. A round of hugs and kisses were made and tears streamed down her face as Aileen hugged her mother-in-law. “It’s so good to meet you, Mrs. Kaneshiro,” she said. Robert’s mother laughed at her politeness.

“Please, call me Mom,” she said. Her eyes were also full of tears. “Now, let me see my grandson.” Aileen held out her sleeping son. He had slept through the whole flight. Their worries had faded to happiness when they landed, and as the plane taxied to the gate, they both let out a sigh of relief. “Oh, he’s so beautiful,” Robert’s mother said as she took him into her arms. Just then, Ronnie began to stretch. He opened his eyes and let out a whimper that immediately turned into a loud scream. Aileen, completely embarrassed, took back Ronnie from his startled grandmother.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” she apologized, over Ronnie’s loud cries. “He probably doesn’t know what’s going on,” she said with a nervous laugh. Robert’s mother laughed, too.

“Oh, no worry,” she assured. “This baby is just like his father was.” She looked at Robert and smiled. “They’re both just like his grandfather.”

Robert’s father was not home when they arrived at the house. His mother had explained that he was working overtime that weekend, so they might not see much of him. That suited Robert fine as he was dreading the awkwardness he would be enduring with his father there. He imagined feeling the power of his father’s stare that
always made Robert feel very guilty. The less he saw of him, the better, Robert thought to himself. He spent the day reconnecting with his mother and reconnecting with his younger self. He reminisced about the relationship he had with his father before he left. It never was good, but it was better that how it was now. But to his mother's disappointment, and somewhat to his own, Robert never saw his father that weekend.

A loud ding stirred him from his deep thoughts. The captain began announcing their arrival, and as the plane began it's approach, Robert again clenched the armrests tightly. He hated this part. It made him feel like he was in a speeding car desperately trying to stop before it got into a wreck. He closed his eyes and held his breath until the braking stopped. He peered out the window as they taxied to the terminal. The airport here was different, too. He had to wait until he got to the baggage claim area to see his brother. He removed his carry-on luggage from the overhead compartment and strolled down the narrow corridor. He tried to follow the signs to find the baggage claim area, but he decided that it would be easier to just move along with the herd of people that disembarked from his plane.

"Robert!" he heard someone call. Robert turned to see his younger brother dressed in a white t-shirt, shorts and slippers.

"Hey, Joey," he said as he hugged his brother tenderly. "How's Annie?" Joey's wife had been ill for a few weeks and the doctors had said it could be pneumonia.
“Oh, she’s much better,” he said happily. “In fact, she’s waiting for us in the car right now. We have to hurry before they make her move.” Joey grabbed Robert’s carry-on and ushered him to the door.

“You’re going like that?” Robert asked, looking again at Joey’s attire.

“Nah, of course not,” he laughed. “My clothes are in the car. I’ll change at the mortuary. Here we are.” Joey put the bag in the trunk of the blue Honda Accord as Robert gave Annie a kiss hello. They made small talk during the drive to Mililani, but Robert knew Joey’s mind, like his own was elsewhere.

Joey was closer to their father than Robert was. It seemed that every disappointment Robert created made Joey look better. Of course when they were younger, Joey didn’t mind, but as they went through their adult lives, the tension between Robert and his father had also taken a toll on Joey. Like their mother, he, too, got caught in the middle. But the relationship between Joey and Robert had always been good. Despite the distance between them, they always called or sent letters to each other, and Joey often took his family up to Kona.

When their mother died several years ago, they consoled each other, and Joey had watched edgily as Robert and his father were cordial with each other. Robert recalled how uncomfortable that was. He knew he owed it to his mother to at least acknowledge his father, and from the looks of it, his father had felt the same way. Joey obligingly had sat between them during the service and Robert was grateful. He was mourning the death of his mother and was not ready to deal with his father at the same time.
“I have something for you,” Joey said. Robert’s eyes refocused on the greenery outside the car window. “It’s in the back, so I’ll give it to you when we get there.”

“What is it?” Robert asked.

“You’ll see. It’s from Dad.” Robert looked up at his brother’s reflection in the rear view mirror. He wondered what it could be. The lawyers hadn’t processed the will yet, and he was in no way expecting anything from his father. As they entered the cemetery, Robert looked up at the statue on the top of the hill. He looked to the right of it and said a quiet hello to his mother. Joey parked and got Robert’s bag out of the trunk. He pulled out his suit and from the jacket pocket he took out an envelope and handed it to Robert. “I’m going to go change. I’ll meet you inside. Come on, Annie.” He gave Robert a reassuring look and headed toward the mortuary doors. Robert looked at the envelope. Written neatly on the front in his father’s handwriting were the words “For My Son.”

He rolled his bag to the chapel entrance. The room was empty with the exception of a closed casket below the huge cross, which hung on the wall. Robert sat in the last row of chairs, and looked up at the casket. He was angry and sad at the same time. His father was trying to get the last word in, like he always did. As he carefully opened the envelope, Robert wondered what his father would have to say after all these years. He unfolded the letter and smoothed out the page. He debated whether to read it or not. If he didn’t read it, his father would not succeed in getting that last word in, and Robert wouldn’t have to succumb to his stubbornness any longer. But if he didn’t, he
would forever wonder what his father wanted to tell him. He looked around and the
still, empty room. “Just you and me, Dad,” he said quietly.

“Dear Robert,

“The doctors tell me that it won’t be much longer. The past few days I was
thinking about you. Your mother always told me how good you’re doing, but without
her, I don’t know what you’re up to. It’s funny, when you know you’re going to die,
you start taking stock of your life. You wonder how good of a son you were, how good
of a husband you were, how good of a father you were, how good of a man you were. I
was a pretty decent son and husband. But I know I’m a lousy father. My temper often
got the best of me, especially with you. I never always agreed with your choices, but
you’re still my son, and I often forgot that.

“I know I should have told you this a long time ago. If I knew I wouldn’t have a
chance to talk to you again, I would’ve. I guess this is what I get. I get to go out as a
lousy father. But know this, I am proud of the man you have become. You are not a
lousy son. You made the attempt, I didn’t. So don’t feel bad. Please tell your children
and grandchildren that I love them. And know that I’ll be looking down on you from
time to time. Maybe we’ll have that talk one day.”

Robert mopped his face with his handkerchief. He looked up at the casket, tears
still rolling down his cheeks. A young Filipino man in a dark suit walked in from the
side entrance. He brought in a wreath of flowers with him. He checked the microphone
connections and wiped the casket with a white rag. He unlatched the left half and
propped open the lid. He looked at his watch and left.
After a few minutes, Robert stood and walked to the white casket. The strong scent of the flower arrangement caught him off guard and he nearly had to take a step back. Determined, he pushed past it and looked down at his father. He was a lot older than Robert remembered. The cancer that took his wife had now taken his father. It had aged him quite a bit, but his father looked so peaceful. Robert looked sorrowfully at him. With as much guilt that he had laid on Robert, his father had died with more guilt. The guilt of being a bad father. Robert put his hand on his father’s cold one.

“You’re not a bad father,” he said softly. “Be at peace, Dad. We will have that talk one day.” Robert smiled sadly as he realized that his family, though apart, was whole again.