



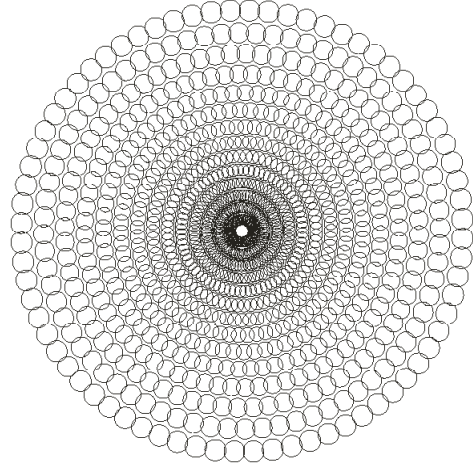
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Hawai'i
Review

Winter
2010

Hawaii Review

73



Winter 2010

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Aloha Readers,

The *Hawai'i Review* Editors hope the issue you hold in your hands will take you places. These places may seem familiar, strange, or maybe both all at once. HR's unique geographic location at the center of the Pacific has allowed for a variety of perspectives to be expressed within its pages for over 35 years. Place, as a theme seems inescapable, tethered to what we do, and rests at the center of this journal once again. The ways that place can define or not define ourselves, our perceptions, or our beliefs make it a tricky subject matter to define or categorize. But that's what literature is for, and we think the authors in these pages capture the outer and inner tendrils of these realities, whatever and wherever they may be. Look forward to dining in the desert, cataloguing leaves with Marlon Brando, short histories of perennial places, deadly one-night stands, the intricacies of settling down with the right one, a long-gone but not forgotten way of Hawaiian life, and much, much more. Happy reading.

Mālama,

The Editors of *Hawai'i Review*

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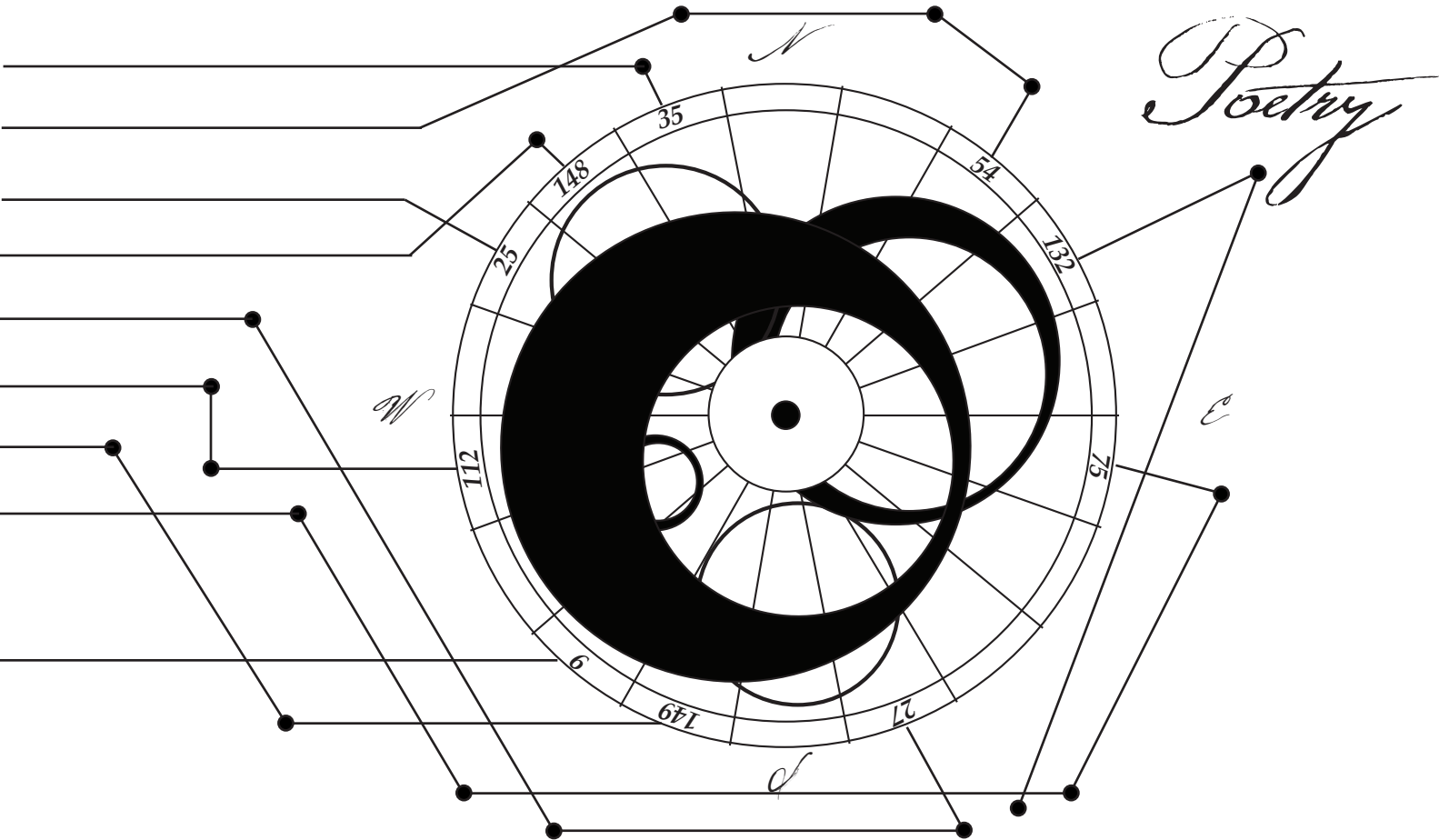
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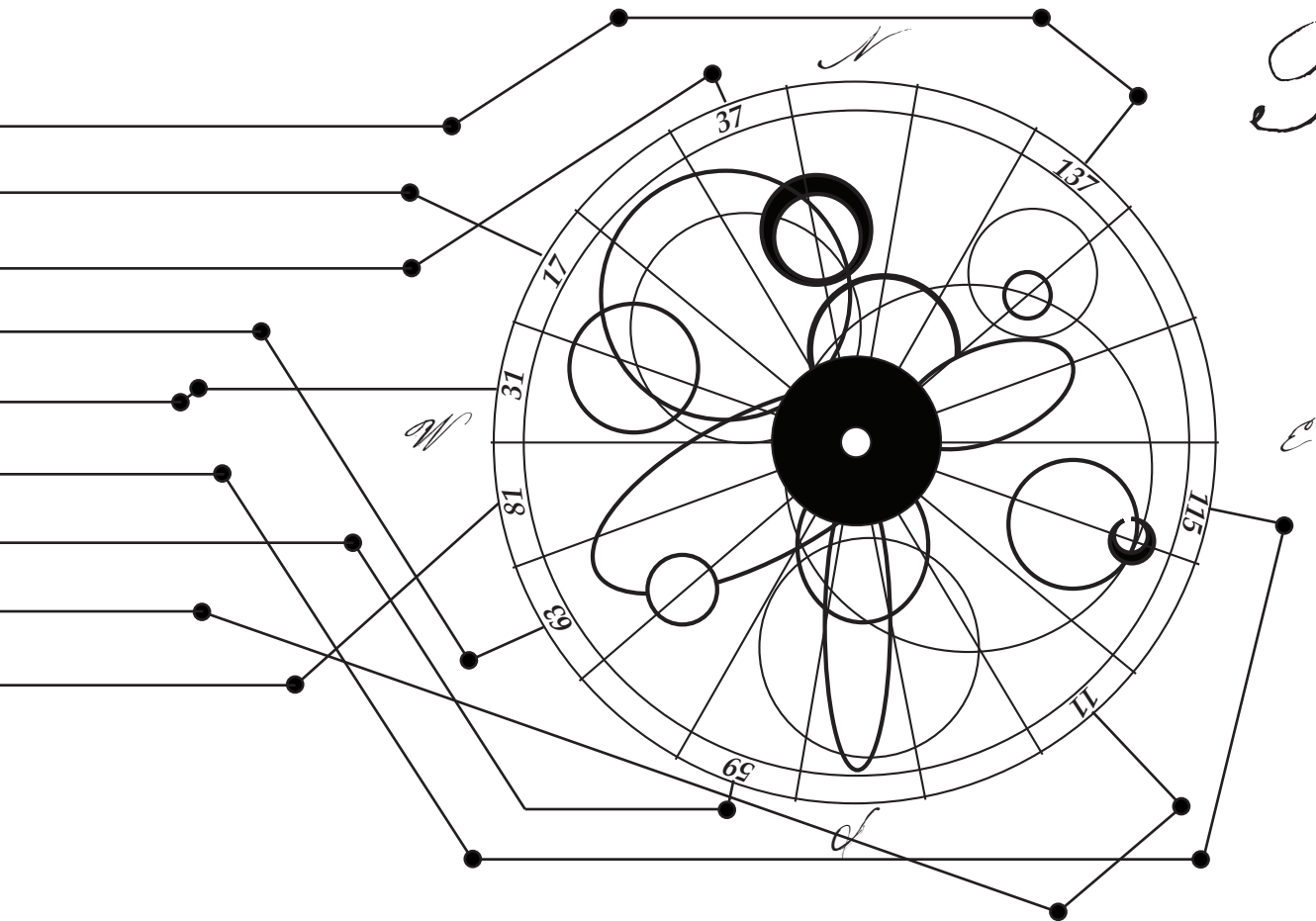
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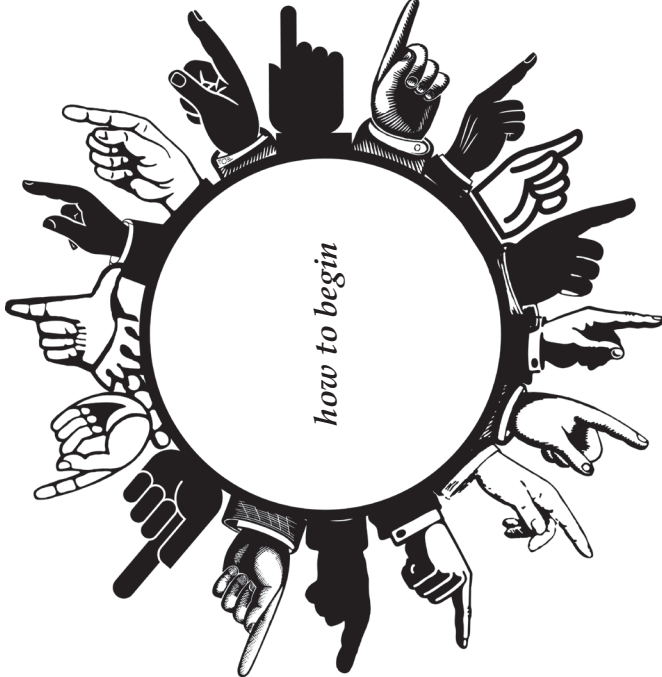
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Prose



Starting Again † David Wagoner

It depends on remembering
how to begin, on keeping
track of the right direction,
on being capable
of waking and going to sleep
more than once a day
or night and bringing food
and drink by hand to mouth,
while knowing almost nothing
about the weather except
it can't be depended on,
that the stars are less visible
than they once were and therefore
your eyes should turn to it
less often than to the ground
ahead of them, the unsettled,
unsettling, uncertain land
where being lost or found
will still be dependent on
familiar body signals
with universal meaning--
supine or erect, arms up
or held out rigidly sideways--
even when what's in the sky
is looking somewhere else
and going there by itself.

This is *it*, and I'm right here
 behind it, and you're there
 in front of it for a moment,
 your face hovering over
 what might as well have been
 laid out on a card table
 in a flea market, a shaky one
 in a long line of them
 covered with knick-knacks,
 with out-of-fashion ends
 and odds put on display
 for exclusive customers
 like you (meaning anyone
 pausing, at least pretending
 interest for mercy's sake),
 and I'm here to tell you
 what you see is what you get.
 It's not even mine anymore,
 though I made each piece you see
 out of old family trifles
 and the discards of strangers
 and stranger animals,
 out of hot and cold facts
 and dreams. A table like this
 holds unpredictable bargains,
 a tawdry necklace or two
 with homemade charms may be,
 not junk, but collectible
 jewelry someday,
 and if it isn't, sorry.

Soor

Me

By Christina Low

I no can talk Pidgin. No can articulate 'um right. I sound like the white guy from *North Shore* when I try. I feel like a fraud; I am an imposter.

"Don't say 'bumbye.' Don't say 'da kine.' Use your words. Use your brain. What do you mean to say?" my mom would ask, bending over me; her shadow blocking out the sun.

"Um," I'd look to the sky for answers. "I mean, bum—later, if I do my homework, we can get ish cream o wot?"

"No, you mean, 'could we please get ice cream if I do my homework?' And the answer is 'no.' Maybe this weekend, if you're good."

I was five then. I spent my mornings at Bay View Preschool and when I wasn't playing with dolls and houses, I was on the swing that had a clown's head atop both posts. I spent my afternoons with my mom, who'd pick me up for lunch at home. For the first six years of my life, Mom stayed home with me, and since she used to be a teacher, we'd spend our afternoons reading books and talking, doing homework, and making dinner. She never said, "don't speak Pidgin." She only asked me to use my words.

It was in school that Mrs. Andrade taught us about Pidgin.

"Where we get fo' talk liddat—regular—den?" asked Alika Soda, the dirty-blonde boy who smelled like cheese.

I thought I knew the answer, and raised my hand. She called on Barf-Girl, Shari Sakuda, instead.

I rolled my eyes.

"At home?" Shari offered.

"No." Mrs. Andrade shook her head. "Anyone else?" My hand shot up again. She called on Melissa Aukai, whose older sister was in the same class as mine.

"In church? Father Richard speaks Pidgin on Sundays."

"No," replied Mrs. Andrade, grimacing. "Yes," she said, finally pointing to me.

"We should always try not to speak Pidgin at all," I said, figuring it out from what Mom had told me.

"That's correct, children." Mrs. Andrade finally smiled, and began her lecture on how Pidgin had no application in our lives, and no value. It had no place in our education, no place in our future, and required no place in our minds.

That was third grade. When I reached high school, we used Pidgin in elevators filled with tourists.

"Fucking haoles. No more class. Dey tink dey so smaht, but dey not. Bachi on dem, I hope dey all go makei die dead," said my friend Kari.

My cheerleading friends and I were in an Outrigger hotel, on our way to under-age drinking with football-playing boys. We thought we were so cool. A freckled boy, about ten, looked up at his father who stared at the numbers lighting up, and clenched his fists at his sides. The boy looked at Kari.

"Watchyu looking at? I owe you money?"

He lowered his gaze, studying his feet.

"Fucking haoles no shame," she spat, making us giggle.

His red-haired mother looked at me and my cheeks

burned.

Kari said, “Eh, Auntie, wassamattah you? Get staring problems?”

When the doors opened, we stepped out, laughing all the way, switching to over-exaggerating our articulations like—like, valley girls.

We didn’t think our anger at these invaders was unjustified. We were local. They were clueless. We were in the know. They walked into houses with their shoes on. And our conversations about Pidgin were not about using it as a weapon to terrorize unsuspecting tourists (it was just something we did when the opportunity arose). They were about how stupid it made people sound, how beneath us it was, how only public school kids spoke it. We talked about how it reminded us of caveman times, how much better we were because we knew how to speak correctly, how we wished it were eradicated from our lives, and how it was on its way to becoming obsolete.

But when we went to Longs, or spoke to the lady at the DMV; when we asked for kama’aina discounts at haunted houses in Waikīkī, or went to the district park, we knew how to turn it on.

I thought this would carry me through when I moved to Los Angeles for college. If I could turn it on, I could turn it off, right? Wrong. For the first couple of months, these were always the first five questions people asked me:

1. Where is that accent from?
2. Oooh, are you Hawaiian?
3. Filipino, then. You look Filipino, right?
4. How did your Fijian father meet your New Zealander mother?
5. Does Hawaii have real roads, or is it like Fantasy Island?

After a few weeks, the answer to question four became so tedious, I would say yes to question three, that, yes, I was Filipino, which would streamline the ‘getting to know you’

portion of the conversation. The other person would move on and I'd clam up, feeling like a freak show, waiting for the novelty of my origins to render themselves moot.

I became ashamed of my accent, but I couldn't hear it. In retrospect, it was likely the small things: the "ho!" when I was excited, the way I said "cannot" instead of "can't," the "not!" of my disbelief that gave me away. It was the "yeah, yeah, yeah" that offended people because it sounded like I was being belittling—something that my culture had taught me was a device to encourage; to show I was listening.

I spoke differently from anyone else in the United States, it seemed. The Southerners, the Northerners, the Mid-Westerners, the East- and West-Coasters at my university were adept at picking out that I didn't belong with the first words that tumbled clumsily from my mouth.

I spent some of my time in Los Angeles attempting to erase my accent, picking up cues from facial expressions to hide the thing that made me stick out—until one day, turning it on was so artificial, I was embarrassed to speak Pidgin at all. I remember talking to an old friend on the phone, and realizing that my Pidgin sounded comical. Like a woman with A cups who upgrades to Ds, I was trying too hard to fill out my assets.

"Ho," he said, a smile in his voice. "What's up witchyu, sistah? You alright o wot? No need make, ah?" I understood how funny my Pidgin accent sounded, finally hearing myself speak; how deeply sad it had become. I stopped speaking it altogether then.

Later, when I moved back to Hawai'i, I accepted the fact that I was not a Pidgin speaker and it was fine with me. Until, that is, I started practicing real estate. Do you know how many deals are done on golf courses in this state? How many bank managers and loan officers, how many property owners and small business people transact their entire multi-million dollar portfolios using Pidgin? More than half. For real.

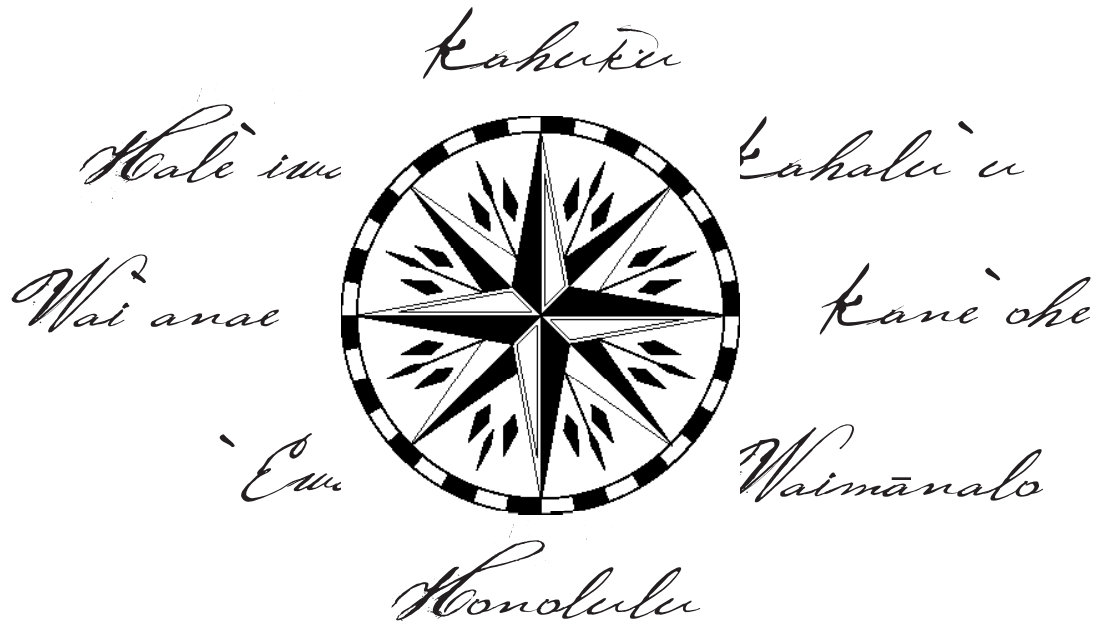
Which got me thinking about language-ism. Why was I not getting invited to karaoke night with the clique of commercial realtors who do ninety percent of the deals on the island? It wasn't because I was a woman. My escrow-officer friend who was a female would regale me with stories of bourbon and cigars, of buckets of ice and belted-out Prince songs. It was because I didn't speak Pidgin.

Now, when I met people, the first question was the same: "where is that accent from?" Followed by the statement, "I would have never guessed you were from Kāne'ohē." Even my dad, whose first language was Fijian, whose second language was Chinese, and whose third language was English, knew how to speak Pidgin with just enough flavor, people were sure he was a born-and-raised local.

All of a sudden, my identity as a local person began being challenged. "Where you from?" became, "You're not from here, are you?"

My parents and teachers, my friends and peers had always looked down on Pidgin; had all convinced me that speaking it was below me; had all been so sure that I would never need it, never want it, and never miss it.

But they were wrong. So poor me. I no can speak Pidgin. No can make 'um sound correk. And I went a long time not caring, not wanting it, and not missing it. But speaking Pidgin isn't about intellect or wealth—it's not about success or failure. It's about connecting with people. It's about camaraderie, and respect. Because becoming more local is something I aspire to, for the first time in my life. Because I live in paradise and I'm not going anywhere. Because it's not anyone else's choice anymore but my own. And I don't need the system to keep telling me lies about how bad it is for me—Pidgin is what my calabash aunties speak, it's what my friends who write beautifully speak, and it's what my kūpuna speak. I may not be fluent, but that's not going to stop me from trying anymore.



Light and Shadow

An Interview with Dr. Paul H. I. Coleman

In October of 2010, *Hawai'i Review* sat down with Dr. Paul H.I. Coleman of the Institute for Astronomy in Mānoa. Besides his many accomplishments in his field, Dr. Coleman also holds a great love and interest for Hawaiian astronomy. Hawai'i as a place in both space and time is obviously an ever-changing one. Resting at the geographical center of O'ahu island, there is a place where time seems to operate differently. It's a place of much importance for understanding where we've been and where we want to go. Deep in the Wahiawā plains, the secrets of the Kūkaniloko birthing stones are whispered in the winds. They are waiting to be discovered.

HR: I guess it'd be best to start by explaining what Kūkaniloko is about or what people think happened there.

Dr. Coleman: The obvious, or at least the first glance of what Kūkaniloko is about has to do with

the birthing stones. Its location is pretty much central to the island. So that would make it easy, or easier for pregnant women in their third trimester to actually walk to Kūkaniloko to give birth. And to me it's an example of how tough Hawaiian women were. Because my wife's been in the third trimester, and it's not a pleasant time. To think that they would have to walk from wherever they were to this centralized location in order for the birth of their child to be validated in some way, it's amazing. So it's a place that is really full of a lot of spiritual power. Plus the fact that it's out on the plain there, far from any of the mountains, further makes it special. I can imagine what it was like, for example to be there at night. There weren't any streetlights and there weren't any automobiles, so I think about the view, and how fantastic it must have been to view the universe back in those days. So, that's the first of the purposes of that place I think. But then, if you look carefully at one rock in particular, now the thing about Kūkaniloko is that it's not just a collection of several rocks, it's actually all one ground rock and the spaces between those rocks are just where they've eroded away. So if you dig down deep enough you'll find that it's all connected.

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HR: Kind of like a banyan tree.

Dr. Coleman: Yeah, it's like a banyan tree. But there is one rock there that's very special. It's shaped like a diamond, in fact I often think of it as if it's shaped like O'ahu itself because it kind of has that same outline to it. And that rock is different because it's actually been shaped. It's been carved. And you can imagine it took a lot of work to carve it because you're basically working with stone tools. We're lucky in Hawai'i. We have Mauna Kea where it gives us these fantastic, very dense stone samples. So Hawaiians actually used those dense stones to make adzes and axe

heads. It must have been a difficult thing. But that rock has been chiseled. It's been shaped. There are these bumps along the top of the rock that have definitely been formed by human hands kind of grinding away at it. Also on the top of the rock, the flat plane surface of the rock, there are two petroglyphs: Two etched-in, concentric patterns of circles, sort of like circles within circles with a single dot at the center. Now, this kind of petroglyph we've seen in other places. You know, usually the central dot is dug out and there's a piko (center) or something.

HR: Would that kind of pattern be similar to glyphs found at, say, Chaco Canyon in New Mexico?

Dr. Coleman: There are examples like that, Chaco Canyon. There are other examples from other Native people. But I mean, Hawaiians. We also have these circles appearing else where in the islands. So you can actually find these petroglyphs. Typically, if you have circular patterns where there's a central hole, then the central hole represents someone's belly button. In this case, that central dot is kind of interesting because it just has to do with being in that place. Kawena Johnson is the source of most of this material that I've ever learned about Kūkaniloko. She's really a treasure.

HR: Is she the woman who kind of inherited the information about the site from someone else?

Dr. Coleman: She inherited the data, yes.

HR: He was a retired military officer who studied the site?

Dr. Coleman: [He was] a military officer who was interested in geography or geology. So he had done all this real work [on the site] and basically gave it to her. Then she took that data a bit further. But the story goes, and I don't know, this may be anecdotal, but she was there at the site one night near one of the two solstices, probably the summer solstice. The sun was setting and as it set she noticed that the carved rocks and valleys of indentations on that particular rock made a pattern across the surface where the petroglyph is. The shadows from those rocks crossed the petroglyph in a weird way. She thought, "I wonder if this is important?" She started thinking maybe these petroglyphs, maybe these carvings were made so that the sun—as it set in these special times of the year, during the solstices and the equinoxes—projected shadows across this rock. It would have told one of the older practitioners during the time of the People of Old that this was that time of year, this season was upon them. And so in fact, I went out, and took a picture of the rock on the day before the summer solstice. Sure enough, the shadow of those deliberately carved out, etched rocks sort of cups the piko of the petroglyph. It's very cool stuff. To me this was very similar to the sun dagger calendars on the continental United States, where the native people there used not shadows, but the reflection of the sunlight on the rock and so there'd be a sun dagger that would cross the center of the etched patterns on their rocks.

HR: And those patterns were cast upon vertical planes also, right? As opposed to the horizontal planes here?

Dr. Coleman: Yeah. And it's fitting that we would do it with shadows. In Hawaiian tradition,

shadow is more important than light. The shadow is where all the mana is. In fact we considered it a pretty cool time when it was Lahaina Noon, when your shadow kind of retreated into your body and you had all your mana. And of course that's why you were never allowed to step on the king's shadow. You'd be defiling his mana. Or letting his shadow fall on you. I guess you'd be put to death instantly.

HR: The relationship between shadow and light, and how that perspective is reflected in the way they recorded celestial events like this, is definitely an interesting insight into the way Hawaiians perceived their world. What time period are we talking about here? Are there theories about how old the Kūkaniloko is?

Dr. Coleman: I'm sure there are but I'm not really up on them. I would guess that...you know there's a bunch of iron wood trees there that were planted, not by us, but by the People of Old. So the site has got to be at least older than that. There are rocks that have been placed there now. First there were a group of thirty-something rocks placed there to represent the royalty or ali'i who would stand there during the births to make sure no one snuck in there with a baby or snuck out with one. So at sometime they replaced those guys with these rocks. And those are not part of the larger ground rock. So yeah, it's been there for quite a while. We might even be able to trace it back through some of the 'oli, or chants, where it's mentioned where a certain ali'i was born. You could date it generationally first, doing it that way. Currently, I know that O.H.A. (Office of Hawaiian Affairs) is working on a project there and they're trying to get as much information as they can about the site.

HR: Tom Lenchanko, one of the members of the Wahiawā Civil Club and still one of the caretakers for the site said something I thought was interesting about Kūkaniloko a few years ago in an interview. He connected the learning environment of this site to a kind of school or university. I think he said it was actually kind of like Hawai‘i’s first university, in a way.

Dr. Coleman: Yeah, well you could imagine that if you wanted to teach or learn about stars or astronomy, that would be a great place to do it from. You can see the horizons from pretty much every direction.

HR: There are also other rocks that look like they were reflecting pools.

Dr. Coleman: Yeah, you can see the basins where they may have filled them with water. We’re all trying to piece this together. One of the things I’d love to do is just go out there and stay for a couple nights, camp out. Get more of a feel for the place, rather than just driving in, looking around, and driving out, right? Clearly it was a place where you stayed and you spent some time there. So yeah, it could have well been like a kind of school. But in reality you didn’t need to go there to see the stars. Teaching about the stars could have happened anywhere back then. The skies were so clear. There wasn’t any ground light to interfere. There was also no David Lettermen to distract you, so at night it was a natural thing. And I think us Hawaiians were fantastic astronomers.

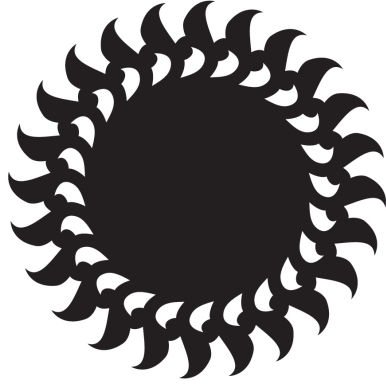
HR: It's amazing to think that we don't even know how old that site is, and in order for our ancestors to get here, they would have had to have all this knowledge in the first place.

Dr. Coleman: I guess the "accepted" numbers are that we were really here "in force" around 300 A.D. There are some bits of evidence that we were here around 300 B.C. The problem of course, is that the 'aina, the land, changed, right? There's volcanism so you may have had early settlements all over the place, which could have been completely wiped out by a volcano. So we live in a place where the land is always changing. But I think it's pretty reasonable to assume that our culture and our understanding of astronomy are thousands of years old. Cook and those earlier explorers of the Pacific were amazed that everywhere they went, there were basically the same people, a little bit different, but basically all spoke the same language. It implied to them that we must have populated all these islands. I think he called it the biggest nation on Earth, because it covered about a third of the globe.

Visit our website at www.hawaiireview.org to view Dr. Coleman's own pictures of the stones.



Rear View Mirrors



Mo

Pa

My Ancestors

Listening To Heads And Studying The Effects † Greg Evason

my mood fluctuates
I go from feeling
like I'm agreeing
with one
or even with both
of the talking heads
then one will say something
that jars
and so from matching with each other
and with me
they go into confrontation mode
and though it is exciting
it means I have to
go through this rigamarole
of questioning myself
am I being relevant
or am I living
in the rear view mirror
of my ancestors?
i.e. am I an artist
or a mere crafts person?
and then one of the heads'll
say something
that makes both of them laugh
and me
and I feel I'm back on track
and the answer is
of course I'm relevant
and an artist
so all is well
all I need now is an audience
or maybe not



towards Missouri



cats licking dew off of roses

Won't ❖ John McKernan

Eureka Springs Arkansas A paper mache or whitewashed wood statue Jesus of the Ozarks - one hundred feet tall - stares north towards Missouri We're going to drive that road tomorrow Pollute pollute with oil in the VW exhaust A city on an incline Curved and carved into the side of several hills Granite slab walkways in sand Cats licking dew off of roses in alleys A pear tree full of perfume and wasps

I wake up first Yellow-red sunlight above your tiny snore resembles the variable in some equation explaining atmospheric pressure I have been bitten by a spider or a mosquito while sleeping The three dots of an obtuse triangle Welts I touch each imagining them in the shape of a heart This is the first time in my life i have not bounced quick from bed the moment of waking

As we leave we stare into the huge purple black mirrors inside and outside the front of the hotel The photographs remind me of a Sixth Grade class trip to The Dinosaur Room in at the Museum in Lincoln

Hollywood ❖ John McKernan

Last Friday we snuck into the West Dodge Drive-In Theater through a hole in the wall It hurt to crawl through that wall Herbicide burns on our hands Barb wire rips through jeans and shirts on hips and shoulders It wasn't Narnia

Tonight four of us are crammed into the leaking muffler trunk drum of Maguire's Chevy Corvair Eyes full of oiled engine exhaust Lungs oozing rattles and monoxide Jeans slippery in antifreeze and grape vodka We were screaming "Lietenant Calley Let us out" Every pot hole a grenade Every left curve a land mine Maguire turns up the radio to drown out our screams Elvis Blue Suede Shoes

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We are enraged that he went a mile out of the way for a pack of cigarettes and start screaming as soon as the trunk opens

A fat bald guy in a blue Buick Le Sabre screams at us "Shut up or I'll break your skulls"

Somone with words is running towards me I freeze wondering where i can throw this half pint of grape vodka It's the manager A tall blonde woman swinging a 5 Iron in her right hand My friends have vanished except for Maguire in the car smoking a Pall Mall

Still frozen I stare up at the black screen big as Omaha Low drum and high violin sounds dripping from speakers greased with static I stare at this woman The word MANAGER monogrammed in red on her white shirt Large breasts She resembes Kim Novak

(...) *Hollywood* † *John McKernan*

But Kim Novak never pulled a pair of handcuffs from a pair of white golf shorts

Nor did Kim Novak snap the tiny cuffson me Cutting both wrists Blood Salt Sweat

Kim Novak appers on the screen She is wearing a white dress and looking out a window

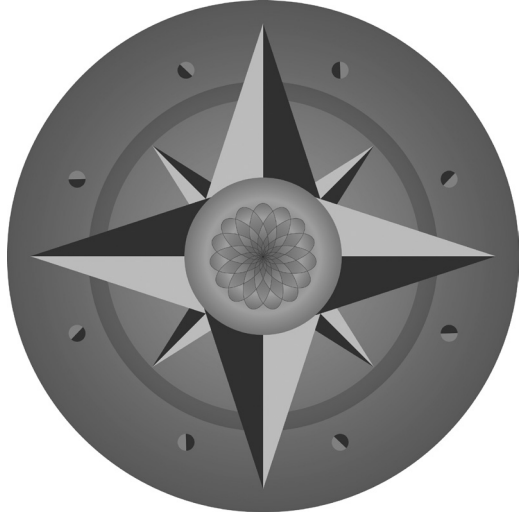
The manager drags me to the concrete projection booth and when she turns to dial the Omaha
Police I begin running Five minute sprint Two hour jog through shadow

She tried but she never caught me The 5 iron whizzed past my right ear

Whenever I jog at night past a mysterious voice it's always Kim Novak I hear

Kim Novak

Dining in the desert



MA

FA

"Are you talking about me?"

The Starlite Café

By Arthur Windfield Knight

Let's stop here," Janet said. "I'm hungry."

Tom parked in front of The Starlite Café. It was painted a twilight blue and had three wooden steps leading up to a door with a cowbell over it. It clanked when they went inside.

"It doesn't look like much," Tom said.

"It probably isn't much, but I'm hungry. I don't think anyone was ever poisoned by a hamburger in America. Especially in Nevada."

They'd passed huge signs on the way to Beatty that said THE WEST WASN'T WON ON SALADS. The hills were the color of rusted iron, and the sun was as bright as a shattered mirror.

It took them a minute for their eyes to adjust to the dim light inside the café.

Tom thought he could smell the rancid odor of fried fish, but it wasn't Friday and no one ate fish in cattle country. In parts of Nevada, the salad bar cost more than a steak.

There were two women sitting at the counter. They

were both wearing shorts and halter tops and both of them were bleached blondes. They were probably in their thirties.

One of them said, "There's nothing to do around here but wear out your life," then she lit a cigarette, even though there was a no smoking sign next to a door that led to the kitchen. They both looked incredibly bored, but so did the cook who apparently doubled as a waiter. His eyes were the color of peeled hard-boiled eggs that had gone bad. He gestured toward one of five vinyl-topped tables and said, "Seat yourself," then brought them menus that were held together with tape.

The table they sat at wobbled, but the others didn't look any sturdier.

"I hate tables that wobble," Janet said. "Can't you do something to fix it?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Maybe you can stick a matchbook under it or something."

"Maybe we should just leave," Tom said.

He hoped this wasn't the beginning of one of her tirades. After fifteen years, he could almost always tell when one was coming. The more tired she got, the more little things annoyed her. Tom wondered what she'd be like in another fifteen years.

"How's the food here?" Janet asked when the cook came back to their table.

"The best for miles around," he said. He was wearing a dirty white shirt with frayed cuffs. He reminded Tom of the waiters he'd seen in Paris. Almost all of them had frayed cuffs and dirty fingernails. Janet would have hated them.

"We'll each have a hamburger," Tom said.

"With or without cheese?"

"Without cheese," Janet said. Someone had told her cheese stuck to your hips so she never ordered it.

One of the blondes opened a lap top computer, staring at it, while the other stared at Tom and said, "The streets of

the world are paved with discarded husbands.”

He wondered if she were talking about him and wished she’d quit staring. She stuck the index finger of her right hand into her belly button, then sucked the tip of the finger while she continued to stare at Tom. There was something obscene about it.

“Why’s the blonde staring at you?” Janet said.

“Forget about the blonde. She’s not important.”

“I didn’t ask how important she is. I asked why she’s staring.”

“How should I know?”

“You always act like you know everything,” Janet said.

The blonde sucked her finger again, as if she were fellating it, but looked at Janet this time.

“Are you talkin’ about me?” she said, after she’d removed the finger from her mouth.

It reminded Tom of a scene in a bad movie.

Outside the fly-specked window, the sun was cold as a pearl now.

“I asked you a question,” the blonde said.

Tom couldn’t remember the last time he’d heard

someone use the word *blowzy*, but she was *blowzy-looking*.

“I think you brought me to a goddamn whorehouse,” Janet said. “Let’s get out of this place.”

“I wasn’t the one who wanted to stop here.”

Janet got up, heading toward the door as the cook came out of the kitchen carrying two plates. “Hey, aren’t you going to wait for your hamburgers?” he asked.

“You eat them,” Janet said.



There is no other way

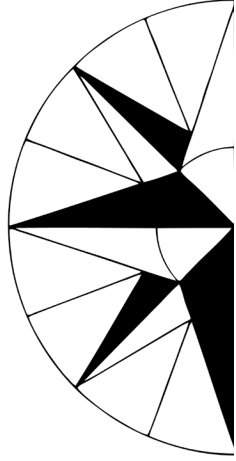


to say this.

The Raid † Kathleen Boyle

After Carolyn Forché

What you have heard is true, he said. I was at my house. My wife carried a tray of coffee through her dreams. My nephews also slept, it was the middle of the night. There were papers, a sweater, no weapons beside me on the sofa. The moon had already set. The television was off. No noise in english or in spanish. Broken bottles outside on the curb and in the gutter. Even the corner store closed behind its grating. For dinner we'd had chicken, rice, tortillas. The doorbell did not work. There was no maid to clean as we slept. Then a pounding at the door, *policia* they yelled. I was asked how I got into this country. They spoke to me in broken spanish. My wife was taken away. There was some talk of where to have us wait. From far away the sound of traffic. One officer told my nephew to shut up, and closed his handcuffs tighter. My other nephew said to me with his eyes: say nothing. Outside there were others from my country, some with small sacks, all handcuffed. From inside the building, the cries of children left behind spilled out into the street. There is no other way to say this. They took the parents and left behind their children. *We are tired of fooling around*, they said. *You have no rights. You can all go fuck yourselves.* They swept the children back into the building. They held their power in the air like wine. Poetry? Some of their eyes caught their parents being led away. Some of their eyes were pressed to the ground.



"Come by tomorrow and find out."

Quit and Switch

By John DeBon

Liz picked the slice of lime from the lip of her glass and dropped it into the icy pink liquid, then stirred until the thin green wedge sank below the crushed ice. She glanced at the mirror that ran the length of the wall behind the bar and smiled, but only slightly. She needed to appear concerned for Jessica's benefit. Still, the well-dressed reflection that stared back with large blue eyes, high cheekbones and highlighted blond hair only confirmed what she already knew—she looked better now than she had at any other time in her life. She had always been easy on the eyes.

"They always take care of themselves," Liz said to Jessica, while stealing a glimpse of the two men at the table behind them. Like most of the men in the midtown watering hole, they were dressed in custom-made suits, tailored shirts and silk power ties. Liz had noticed them when she and Jessica, a shapely brunette seven years her

junior, had entered the tavern. The two men had turned and stared, their smug expressions announcing that the entertainment for the night had arrived. Jessica had ignored their appraising looks and appreciative smiles, but Liz had made a mental note, as she always did.

Located a couple of blocks south of Columbus Circle, the tavern drew a lot of executives, not top-tier players, but a good number of six and even seven-figure patrons. Though several men had seemed interested, there was something about the two at the table, an aura of self-importance beyond that of the others. When their eyes finally came to her, Liz could not help smiling.

Lawyers.

She could see the two attorneys were about to decide whether to make a move or call it a night. The one with the hungry eyes adjusted his jacket and ran his fingers through his thinning hair. His gaze moved between Liz's long, lean lines and Jessica's athletic curves, finally settling on Jessica as he placed his empty glass on the table.

Liz assumed an understanding expression and turned her attention back to her friend. "They always say they're on your side, but when it comes time for promotions or layoffs they figure the men have families to take care of, and the women...well, we have men to take care of us, or should." She raised her Sea Breeze and took a long swallow.

"Jim told me everything was fine, that I had nothing to worry about, and I believed him," Jessica said, tossing back her long black hair.

"You can't trust men, Jess."

"Right now I don't trust anyone. Damn it, he didn't lay off a single man in our—"

"Excuse me, but it seems wrong for two attractive ladies to be sitting by themselves, looking so serious," the attorney with the hungry eyes said, resting his hands on the backs of their barstools. His right hand quickly slid from the back of Jessica's stool to her shoulder. "I'm Will, and that

good-looking guy at the table is Len." Len flashed a gap-toothed smile and waved as Will continued. "Why don't you join us, let us buy you some drinks? Relax, have a good time?"

"Uh, excuse me," Jessica said, shrugging Will's hand off her shoulder. "I don't know what planet you're from, but here on Earth you don't interrupt people having a *private* conversation with some lame-assed come-on."

"It's all right, Jess. Will is just being friendly," Liz said, giving Will a warm knowing smile. "I'm Liz and my friend is Jessica."

"My pleasure," Will said. The left corner of his mouth curled up in a predatory grin. "Sorry if I interrupted anything important."

Jessica scoffed. "Actually, Will, you did, as I already pointed out. So if you don't mind—"

"Jess is right, tonight's not a good time," Liz said, still smiling. "Tomorrow night would be better. Maybe we'll see you here."

"A girl after my own heart," Will said. His eyes ran up and down the length of her body.

Liz knew that he had already undressed her in his mind and was well into imagining all the things he wanted to do with her. The realization didn't bother her. In fact, it was just what she wanted him to do. "You and Len seem like fun guys, and if we didn't have plans we'd join you."

Will moved his right hand from the back of Jessica's stool to the bar, and all of his attention to Liz. "Why wait until tomorrow?"

"Because, lover, it's not going to happen tonight."

He placed his hand on her knee. Though still smiling, his expression no longer held any humor. "I don't think we can make it tomorrow."

"That's too bad. I guess we'll have to have fun without you."

Will held her stare for several seconds. Liz did not

blink. He removed his hand from her knee and laughed. "You're good. What do you do—contracts, mergers?"

Liz leaned forward until her lips almost brushed his ear and whispered, "Come by tomorrow and find out." Then she turned back to the bar and picked up her drink.

"Count on it," Will said, then turned to Jessica. "See you both tomorrow night." He gave her a wink and left. "Will?"

He stopped and looked back. "Changed your mind?"

"No, hon, it's still tomorrow," Liz said. "I'm just curious, what do you do?"

His brow furrowed as he said, "Arbitrage. Foreign Exchange."

"Interesting. What about Len?"

Will laughed. "You're one weird broad. Lenny's in regulatory compliance."

"Thanks," Liz said with a smile as she turned away. Will shook his head. "Don't forget, tomorrow night." Jessica rolled her eyes. "Oh yeah, right." She watched Will return to his table where Len waited with a drink in his right hand, his left hand stuffed deep in his suit pocket, and an expression better suited for a puppy anticipating a belly rub. She looked at Liz. "What the hell was that about? Why did you even say hello to that asshole, never mind telling him we'll see him and his creepy friend tomorrow?"

"Just lining up prospects."

Jessica's brown eyes grew wide and her lips transformed into a mischievous smile. "Oh-my-god, you're hooking on the side."

"The economy would need to get a lot worse before I considered that option," Liz said, motioning to the bartender for another Sea Breeze.

"Well, I'm almost there. Not to sound too needy, but what about the opening you mentioned?"

"You don't sound needy. I know how it is when there's no paycheck coming in."

“No paycheck, but the bills keep coming.”
“And the rejections don’t help.”

Jessica sighed and nodded. “Tell me about it. I’ve sent out so many resumes, networked all my contacts, posted on all the job sites. It’s just so... I don’t know, unfair. When I finally get an interview, it seems like I’m always sitting across from some guy who’s more interested in my cleavage than what I’m saying. It’s like the world is full of Jims.”

“You’re not the first woman to be lied to by her boss and you won’t be the last. McClellan & Locke has always been one big boys club. I used to work there, remember? How long were you with the company, seven, eight years? How often did they pass you over for men—no, not men, *boys* with less than half your experience? And when it was time for cutbacks, did they let any of the boys go? No, they let you go because there is an army of intelligent, reliable, experienced women out there who they can bring on as needed and at half the cost of hiring a man.”

“I worked my ass off for those bastards,” Jessica said. “Jim would never have made Senior V.P. if it wasn’t for my work.” She shook her head. “Of course, my work always had his name on it when it came to the final draft. God, I’m so stupid.”

“Hey, I’ve been there. Before I made Director, our office never ranked better than twenty-third. A year after my promotion we were in the top ten. My last two years we were in the top five. So who got the credit? Sid Weinberg, the walking corpse, that’s who. And when Sid retired, they replaced him with Jim. Four years out of college and he gets promoted, and I get laid-off. I earned that promotion. Not just for the work I did, but, God help me, for those long lunches and late nights with Sid.” Liz took the new Sea Breeze the bartender had placed in front of her, shoved the lime down into the glass, and drained half the contents.

“Get out, you and Sid?”

“How did you think I made Director,” Liz said with

a half-hearted laugh. "We both know what hard work gets you."

Jessica nodded. "More hard work."

"Two years ago, when they handed me my notice, I took a personal inventory. Know what I discovered?" Liz asked, and then continued without waiting for an answer. "I was forty-three, unemployed and alone. None of the big firms wanted me because of the economy, my salary history, and my age. I had a co-op with more mortgage than value, a Mercedes that cost as much to garage as it did to lease, and more debts than assets. And the worst part was being alone. Having no one to turn to." Liz stabbed her cocktail straw at the lime wedge that had floated back to the surface. "I was engaged once. He made it all the way to the week before our wedding before realizing he wasn't ready for commitment. How original is that? And then he had the balls to ask for the ring back."

Jessica shook her head. "What is it with men? They act like the minute they commit to a relationship the woman of their dreams is going to come along."

"And she always does, because the woman of their dreams is any woman other than the one they're with. What men want is to live with their mothers and screw their high school sweethearts. Or maybe it's live with their high school sweethearts and screw their mothers."

Jessica laughed. "I think they'll screw anyone as long as they don't have to marry her."

"Figuratively and literally. What about you?"

Jessica sipped her wine before answering. "I was married...for a little while."

"Another woman?"

"Alcohol." Jessica looked at the glass of wine in her hand, and then at the bottles lining the dark paneled wall along the bottom of the mirror. "At first it seemed harmless enough, just good times, but after a while it was all the time. It was...I don't know, it was his life. I pleaded with him

to get help, brought home pamphlets for programs. One morning he left for work and didn't come back. In a way it was a relief. I wanted to leave, but part of me, the stupid part, wanted to help him. I was young. God knows how long I would have stayed."

"Sounds like he did you a favor,"

"I guess," Jessica said with a shrug. She finished her wine and put the glass down.

"I hate men. Don't get me wrong, they're great for sex. I just wish they would disappear when it's done."

"Now *you* sound like you want to date your high school sweetheart and live with your mother," Jessica said. They both laughed. "Enough self-pity, tell me more about this job."

"Sure, but not here," Liz said, sliding off her bar stool. "We can talk at my place."

"Okay," Jessica said as they left the tavern. "Is the position in your Department?"

"It's not with my firm."

"What firm is it with?"

"I can't tell you, yet."

"Can you tell me about the position?"

"Not exactly."

"Is this one of those situations where someone is being let go and doesn't know it yet?"

"Something like that," Liz said as they approached the corner.

"Still, there's no harm in you giving me some general information about the position."

"No harm, I just don't have anything to give you."

"Come on, Liz, at least tell me the sector. Are we talking finance, media, technology?"

"What do you want it to be?"

"There is a job, right?"

"There's a job, we just need to find it for you," Liz said and turned at the next intersection. "It's only another

block. Did I ever tell you how I found my new position?"

Jessica stopped in mid-stride. "What do you mean, 'we have to find it'? I thought you knew about an opening?"

"When you called, I said I might have something for you," Liz said while digging in her purse for her cigarettes, "I didn't say a job."

Jessica stared at Liz for several seconds, her cheeks growing red. "What, some multi-level marketing opportunity where I sell facial creams and detergent to my family and friends?" She turned to leave. "I'm really disappointed in you, Liz. I need every minute I have to search for a *real* job."

"Hey, I haven't heard from you in over a year, but you were smart and a hard worker, and I remembered how it was when I was let go, so I thought I'd help you out. Sorry I wasted your time." Liz lit her cigarette and exhaled. "One last thing, I make twenty-thousand a month, net. Get a bonus tied to my performance with a guarantee of thirty percent of base. Stock options, profit sharing, a new leased Lexus, and six weeks paid a year. How much have you made since you were laid-off?"

Jessica stopped and sighed. After a few seconds, she said, "Sorry, there've been so many scams. People are so opportunistic when they know you're down, even friends." She turned and followed Liz up the block to a seven-story townhouse. Sweeping white marble steps led to a second floor landing where white columns and stone urns overflowing with ivy flanked a large mahogany door. "This is your co-op?"

"Sold that a year ago, this is my new condo. KLP reimburses me for half my mortgage payments at the end of each year if I meet projections. Nice little perk, don't you think?" Liz typed a code on a keypad beside the door and they entered a small lobby.

Jessica took in the tiled floor, sculpted crown molding and polished brass fixtures. "Now you have my attention."

Liz pressed the elevator button. “After I was laid off, I did the same things you’re doing. I called everyone I knew, joined half-a-dozen professional organizations, sent my resume to every headhunter in the Northeast, checked all the online sites daily, and every night I went to the usual bars hoping to run into someone who might provide a lead. But every night ended with me drinking to forget how frustrating the day had been.”

Jessica nodded, still taking in the surroundings.

“Sounds like my last four months, except I’ve steered clear of the bars. You know...trying to stick to a budget.”

The elevator door slid open and they entered the car.

“Luckily, I didn’t. Around the third month I was having a drink when the bartender informed me that the guy at the end of the bar—”

“Wanted-to-buy-you-a-drink. If I had a dime for every time I’ve heard that.”

“I know, but when I looked down the bar at the balding, potbellied little jerk leering at me from behind his oversized glasses, I had an epiphany,” Liz said, pressing the button for the fifth floor. “I realized that all the anger and frustration I felt about being let go was counterproductive. I had to look at my experience at McClellen as a lesson on what to do and what not to do. I began thinking about what obstacles had gotten in my way and how I could avoid them. And the obstacle that loomed largest was men.”

“Good luck with that, they’re pretty much everywhere.”

“True, but as I listened to the little guy brag about his work—”

“You let him buy you a drink?”

Liz shrugged. “I let him buy me a few. Turned out he was an SVP at Artisan Limited, and the more I listened, the more he drank and talked, until I started to feel like I worked at Artisan. That’s when I realized if I was going to succeed, I had to make men work for me, not against me.”

The elevator doors opened onto a private vestibule.

"And how do you do that?"

Liz pulled out a set of keys and unlocked the door to the apartment. "By not playing on their court or by their rules."

"Oh-my-God," Jessica said as she entered.

The apartment was a duplex, the living room cavernous with a cathedral ceiling rising twenty feet. Floor-to-ceiling windows along the far wall provided a view of a private courtyard behind the townhouse, and in the distance between two larger buildings a decent slice of the Hudson River and the lights on the New Jersey side.

"I forget how nice it is," Liz said, closing the door behind them. "I never have time to have people over. Want a glass of wine?"

"That'd be great," Jessica said, pulling herself away from the view to follow Liz into the kitchen.

Liz stopped in front of a recessed wine cabinet and reached inside for a Merlot. She removed the cork and filled two glasses. "Here you are."

"Thanks. How 'bout a tour?"

"In a little while. First I want to finish what I was saying." Liz indicated a small table with two chairs tucked in a corner of the kitchen.

Jessica sat. "So how do you not play on their court? I mean, they own all the courts, right?"

"Think about tonight with Will and Len."

"I'd rather forget them."

"That's what I'm talking about. Every time you've been in a bar and had to fend off some jerk, you thought of him as a nuisance, not an asset. The very men we try to please during the day turn into the nuisances we try to avoid at night. Think about it. All those guys flashing hundred dollar bills and gold Amex cards so we'll notice them are some other women's Jims and Sids. In the office these guys are all about keeping their power-secrets from us, but out of

the office we're in charge as long as we don't try to latch on to them. Remember, they want what they don't have."

"So how does this help me get a job?"

Liz crossed the kitchen to the counter, returning with the bottle. She refilled her glass and Jessica's as she said, "Most of these guys can sleep with half the single woman in their offices, but what they really want is someone not so available who will be around when they need them. Someone who will make them feel better about themselves without staking a claim. If you're willing to compromise some of your ethics, these guys are goldmines of inside information...after you get a couple of drinks in them."

"I'm no prude, but that sound's a little too close to prostitution for me."

"Really? What's a job to the average woman? A place to sell her time, right? But what about all the primping you have to do, and the jokes you have to laugh at? Ever feel like you have to laugh at a coworker's joke if that coworker is a woman? And all the flirting that we smile and go along with, just to show we're part of the team. And if your direct report starts joking and flirting with someone else, someone younger, are you telling me you're not going to laugh harder when he tells a joke, smile longer when he flirts, feign more gratitude when he says your new dress makes you look slimmer? And after all that, when you go home, do you have the strength or desire to invest in a real relationship?" Liz picked up her glass. "All for a paycheck. If that's not prostituting yourself, I don't know what is."

Jessica stared at her glass for a moment, and then asked, "So what did you do to get the information, and how did you use it to get your position?"

"I still made the calls, followed every potential lead, but at night I did the rounds of the upscale business bars. If the guy offering was well dressed, I'd let him buy me a drink. If he was articulate and had an interesting job, I'd let him buy me a second. And if he was married, I'd listen as

long as he wanted to talk.”

“Why married?”

“The married ones usually talk more, and they soak up the attention like a sponge.” Liz took a cigarette from her bag and lit it. “Smoke bother you?”

Jessica shook her head. “How many did you... interview?”

Liz smiled. “Interview, I like that. Quite a few. I made a list of the qualities I was looking for in my next employer and position, and I wasn’t going to compromise. Like anything else, with practice you get good at sizing them up. It took me two months to find the right guy, George Giacomo. He was a big man, Italian. A little more hair than I like, but he could be sweet.”

“Married?”

“Of course, with a daughter in college and a son in high school. We met in Samantha’s off Fifth. He was sure of himself, at times arrogant. By the time I met him, I’d become an expert at feeling them out, finding what it was they needed. He was upper-middle in KLP, but he was feeling neglected, a little taken for granted at work and at home. I listened. He’d talk about his job, his coworkers, his boss, his clients, every aspect of what he did and who he interacted with. I was supportive, encouraging, never pushy.”

“So how long did this go on?”

Liz snuffed out her cigarette. “Almost three months. It started slow. We’d meet once or twice a week at places where no one knew either of us. Then it was three or four times a week. In the beginning he pulled back a couple of times, but when I didn’t complain or act possessive, we settled into a routine. Of course, he talked about his wife and kids, hopes and frustrations. I’d listen, eventually bringing the conversation back to his job. A lot of nights I spent time helping him with a big presentation he was working on, proofing it and making suggestions. And when he slept, I’d go through the files on his laptop, just to familiarize myself

with KLP's workings."

"So you made him feel wanted, and in return he gave you the inside track on a job."

"In a way. Come on," Liz said. She stood and placed her glass on the counter. "We can talk while I give you that tour I promised."

Jessica followed her out of the kitchen and down a hall. They stopped to look into the dining room, den, and downstairs bath.

"George didn't directly arrange for my position at KLP," Liz said as they walked back up the hall. "In fact, I have his job."

"Was he promoted?"

"No," Liz said. She started up a circular staircase.

"The second floor has two bedroom suites. Each has its own bath and dressing room. The master also has a sitting area and a balcony with a great view."

Jessica followed Liz up the stairs. "So if he wasn't promoted, how did you get his job? Did he take a position with another firm?"

"If that were the case, what I have to say wouldn't be very helpful to you," Liz said, opening the door to the master bedroom. Beyond the king-sized bed, glass sliding doors opened onto a small balcony.

Jessica entered the room and walked straight to the doors. "This is so great."

Liz laughed. "Let's go outside."

A mild breeze carried the sound of traffic from the surrounding streets. Jessica looked down at the court yard. "Do you spend much time down there?"

"Some. An older woman, Mrs. Grimes, has three terriers she lets out in the morning and late at night. I like to go down and watch them play, and give them treats. It's relaxing."

"Sounds nice," Jessica said, looking at the Hudson in the distance. "I'd like a place like this." Turning to Liz, she

asked, "So, how did you end up with George's position?"
"Poor thing died."

"Oh my God, really?"

Liz nodded. "Really."

"How?"

"At first he was missing. I understand the police didn't know what to make of it until his wallet was found a week later on a bench in Riverside Park. It had his blood on it. They searched for his body but never found it. Anyway, with everything he told me about his job and the company, I wrangled an interview with his division's HR Department before they had time to start looking for a replacement. After going through the usual prelims, I eventually met with his boss and was hired."

Jessica's jaw dropped. "Get out! Did he know you were George's...girlfriend?"

Liz shook her head. "Nobody knew. What cinched it for me was the plan George was working on to streamline KLP's proposal and contract process. He was planning to present it at the next management meeting. He hadn't told anyone. It was going to be his ticket to the next level." She pushed off from the railing and headed into the bedroom.

"Let me get this straight, the secret for success you're sharing is for me to search the bars until I find someone with a job I like, have an affair until I know all about his work, and then wait for him to die?"

"I don't think you'll need to search," Liz said as they entered the hall. "Len seems to be a good prospect."

Jessica stopped in front of a closed door. "Len, from tonight, are you serious?"

"Why not," Liz said, her hand on the doorknob, "he works in regulatory compliance, and so did you at McClellan. Sure, he's an attorney and you're a CPA, but you both come from the financial sector. And, he's married."

"How do you know that?"

"He was wearing a wedding ring. Didn't you

notice how he kept his left hand in his jacket pocket? He's definitely the type who would keep an affair a secret. The only problem is Will, he'll know. Something will have to be done about him."

"You sound like you're talking about killing him."

"Well, duh. What did you think I've been talking about?" Liz pulled the door open. The only furniture in the second bedroom was a large chest freezer against the far wall. Its motor emitted a low purr.

Jessica watched Liz walk into the room. "What?" she asked with a chuckle. "You want me to believe you killed George?"

Liz stopped beside the freezer. "He kept all the notes for his idea on his laptop. The night he told me he was going to make his presentation at the next meeting, I stabbed him in the shower." When Jessica didn't reply, she added, "Well, it wasn't as if he was going to die on his own, at least not right then."

"And I'm supposed to believe he's in that freezer?"

"Not all of him, just most of his upper torso and right arm. I've been feeding him to Mrs. Grimes' terriers a little at a time."

"Yeah, right," Jessica said, shaking her head. "Because after you killed him, you cut him up into small pieces."

"That would be insane, think of the mess. I keep him frozen and cut off a little of him at a time with that thing I bought at the hardware store. What did the man call it...a Sawzall, I think. Then I defrost the meat in the microwave and cut it up for the dogs." As an after thought, Liz said, "The bones go in the disposal."

Jessica laughed. "I know you're putting me on,

because you didn't live here when you were out of work."
"Of course I didn't, I lived at my old co-op. After I stabbed him, I left George in the tub and covered him with ice, then ordered the freezer the next day. I mean, what else could I do with him? I thought I was going to have to keep

him in the freezer forever until I moved here and saw Mrs. Grimes' dogs." Liz watched as Jessica stood in the doorway, arms folded across her chest, an amused smile on her face. "If you don't believe me, look for yourself."

"I'll look," Jessica said as she crossed the room and grabbed the freezer's handle. "Not because I believe you." She pulled the freezer lid open. "But to call your bluff—Oh shit!" Jessica stumbled back from the freezer. "It's...It's—"

"It's George," Liz said with a nod.

Liz and Jessica stared into the freezer without saying a word. Then Jessica asked, "Why, you made him sound like a nice guy?"

"He was nice, until I helped him finish his proposal. Then I wasn't that interesting to him. And I doubt his wife would think he was so nice if she knew he was cheating. They're all the same, Jess. They all lie. Didn't Jim get married last year, six months before he laid you off?"

They continued to look in the freezer in silence, until Jessica asked, "Twenty-thousand a month net, right?"

Liz nodded. "Plus profit sharing and bonus."

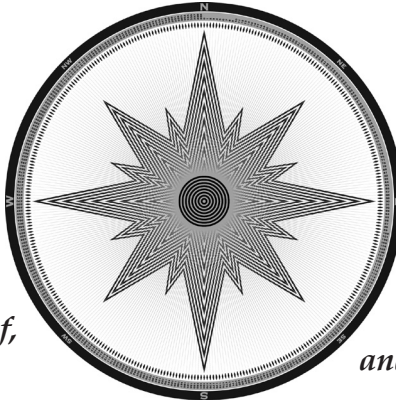
"And you think Len is a good prospect?"

"Definitely worth exploring," Liz said. "Want to go downstairs, have some wine, talk a little more?"

"Yeah," Jessica said, closing the freezer. "Yeah, I think I would."



I have a tree book at home.



we can get a leaf,

and look it up later.

when i met marlon brando
i was only a bit star struck
and immediately began asking questions.
do u read much poetry?
yes, but the minute i start reading it i get bored.

we went to a large outdoor area
of private land
i started digging with a shovel on a grassy hill
the dirt fell away easily

54

i continued to dig
the dirt flowing away below me
finding nothing

marlon went downhill
toward the river
and began looking around
we knew it was not our land

i wasn't sure what he was doing
he yelled at me
what kind of tree is that
i looked upriver where he was looking

there were several large trees
that i had appreciated
one clearly a 300 year old white oak
with only a few autumn leaves left
i said
the thick squat one with the large green leaves
on the upper right corner?
marlon brando shook his head yes.
i don't know i said, i think a type of eucalyptus or poplar
i have a tree book at home
we can get a leaf, look it up later.
he was satisfied with this answer and agreed and
bent back down looking at natural material by the river.

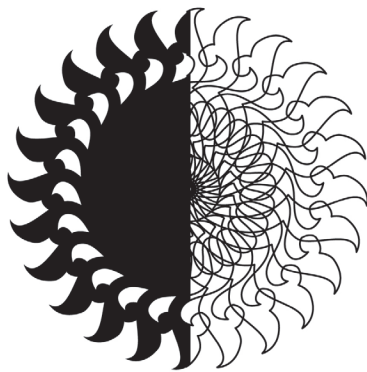
finding nothing
i gave up and moved to the top of the hill
where i found a white wall
and began digging into it.
wet drywall began to break away easily
then a wood door
which i opened
finding a small bedroom.
stapled to walls and a small corkboard

were letters and the scribblings of a teenage boy
along with a few clippings and photographs.
i began taking them down
anxious to preserve them.
it seemed to have been the abandoned room
of a boy 80 years ago.
i found a stack of old letters
one i thought from my sister lynn to him
but the light was bad
and when i reread the return address
it was only from lynn not the right last name.
then i found a compact disc
cut into a crescent moon.
so i knew the faded and yellowed material
could not be 80 years old.
and wondered if the small cabin was still being used.
i worried the owners might return
and find me trespassing
i wondered if i should take anything
so didn't take all i was interested in
just a selection of the writing, cut-outs and photographs
and i returned to brando by the river.
he had no concern about my robbery saying that u could not be an artist
if all u cared for was convention and laws.

i took down cut-outs and photographs from my grandfather's workshop
after his death.
my uncles hated him
were hiring people to tear it all down and throw it in an industrial dumpster
told me i could take whatever i wanted
but be fast about it.
the 60-year-old newspaper clippings tore easily as i released them from staples.
i took small leather books where he recorded reload data, weights of bullets,
amounts of powder, velocity formulas.

marlon was 50 pounds lighter than his heaviest.
was still a very overweight man.
i was at my thinnest.
i returned to him, balding, hair mostly grey,
where he was searching with his hands
beside the mucky riverbank.

her



him

Pass Why Staked

By Monica Keawe Kaluakini Lee

He was thinking about how the waves were generated by storms out at sea, how the color of the ocean was affected by the color of the sky, and how winds impacted the conditions of the water enough to make the surf too choppy to ride. And then she posed the question that all guys dread.

“Wot you t’inking?”

He frowned. He knew she couldn’t understand his thoughts. She had no science background, no interest in nature, absolutely no comprehension of what he was thinking about so he answered, “notting.” And without missing a beat, he questioned her. “Why? Wot you t’inking?”

Her eyes glazed over. It was the throwback question that all girls dread. Right before she tried to start a conversation with him, her thoughts had been on how the waves were generated

{DASS WHY HAHD}

by storms out at sea, how the color of the ocean was affected by the color of the sky, and how winds impacted the conditions of the water enough to make the surf too choppy to ride.

She grimaced because she knew he couldn't understand her thoughts. He had no science background, no interest in nature, absolutely no comprehension at all of what she was thinking. So she mimicked his answer. "Notting."

They sat there for a while, side by side, contemplating their relationship.

⊗ 'We get anyting in common o' wot?' She wondered as she looked to her left. He sat there, picking his teeth with his thumb-nail and staring off into the sunset. 'He kinda stupid, and gross too. Look him, digging his dirty-yellow teet' in public, going fo' broke wit' da plaque. What do I see in him, anyways?' She stopped herself because she knew very well what she liked about him: sweet face, good looking body, healthy hair, big fat ding-ding, nice car. But that was about it. They ate, they fooled around, they sat, and they did nothing else. That was their entire relationship.

He turned his head slightly and peeked at her through the side of his eye but she avoided side-eye contact with him, and smiled her way back out toward the ocean.

'We get anyting in common o' wot?' He wondered as he rotated his head to his right. She sat there, grinning at the pigeons on the beach. She kinda stupid, and weird too. Look her, smiling at da fricken birds. Fricken weird. What da heck do I see in her anyways? He stopped because he knew very well what he liked about her: sweet body, good looking face, healthy hair, big fat chi-chi s, nice punani. But that was about it. Every day was the same thing. They ate, they oofed, they sat, and they did nothing else. That was their entire relationship.

He sighed, mind filled with thoughts about nature, science, poetry.

She sighed, mind filled with thoughts of nature, science, poetry.

It was quiet. And then, he broke the silence. "So, wot you like do next?"

She wanted to suggest something different, like fishing, or dancing or strolling hand in hand down the beach, but she shrugged and said, "eat?" instead. She saw the corner of his mouth turn down, so she sent a question his way. "Why wot you like do aftah dat?"

He wanted to suggest something different like fishing, or dancing or strolling along the beach hand in hand, but he knew it was hopeless. The words poured out like sand from a dry beer can. "Pu-in-side?"

"Kay den." She got up, and wondered if he was the one for her.

"Shoots." He got up, and wondered if she was the one for him.

And as they both walked toward his car hand gripping hand, they thought in unison, 'we get absolutely notting in common. Dass why hahd.'





Aloha Flight 243

By Peter N. Forman

Mimi Tompkins occupied the second best seat in the Boeing 737, the copilot's position of the plane's cockpit. She guided the jet's climb this afternoon with light pressures to a large control wheel. As with many members of her profession, First Officer Tompkins often hand-flew the jet to cruise altitude, thereby immersing herself in the demands and sensations of controlled flight. This trip from Hilo to Honolulu included a climb to 24,000 feet—some 10,000 feet higher than altitudes reached on shorter hops—allowing sweeping views of the island chain below. Through the windshield, Maui's massive volcanic mountain Haleakala rose from the haze as the jet ascended into dry, rarified air on this trade wind day.

Nine years earlier, Tompkins signed on with Aloha as the company's first female pilot. A petite young woman, Mimi caused concerns at the airline that such a delicate creature might not possess the leg strength to hold the substantial rudder pressure required after an engine failure.

Tompkins hit the gym with a vengeance and satisfied her critics when the test came. In those early years, she wore her hair down below her shoulders. The 36-year-old now sported a shorter hair style more appropriate for the metamorphosis she anticipated ahead. The date was April 28, 1988, and between the recent demise of Mid Pacific Airlines, a healthy economy, and Aloha's successful push for reliability, business was booming and the airline hired at an unprecedented pace. Pilots of her seniority would soon check out as captains. No doubt Mimi felt extra pressure as the first female pilot to upgrade at the airline, and she wanted to provide an exemplary performance. She studied her manuals but also took the added step of memorizing emergency checklists which would be read during her upcoming simulator checkrides.

From the cockpit's left seat, Captain Robert Schornstheimer supervised the flight. A tall man with an aviator's mustache and profoundly deep voice, Schornstheimer provided a stark physical contrast to his copilot. The 42-year-old former Air Force pilot spent many of his service years as a flight instructor in T-38 jets. He had a reputation for being cool under pressure. Hired by Aloha eleven years earlier, Bob checked out as captain in 1987. He loved to sail and had also taken a recent interest in computers. Aloha's pilots regarded Schornstheimer as a meticulous fellow who worked to master whatever he did, including flying. His logbook detailed some 8,000 hours aloft, but such numbers hardly did justice to his experience. During a typical workday, inter-island pilots often performed three times as many takeoffs and landings as their mainland counterparts, and it was during these critical phases of flight when most of the learning took place. An air traffic controller on a familiarization flight occupied the cockpit jumpseat just behind the two pilots.

Today's aircraft was N73711, one of three jets with which Aloha inaugurated 737 service back in 1969. As the

trio aged, Aloha replaced them with newer aircraft. Then came Mid Pacific and its threat to Aloha's existence. Joseph O'Gorman brought the original 737s back to Aloha and instead leased newer planes to other airlines in order to cut costs and compete with the upstart. The jets racked up significant flight time during their 19 years, but as with pilot proficiency, it wasn't so much the hours that counted as the number of takeoffs and landings. Each time a pressurized aircraft climbed to altitude and returned, the airframe's shape distorted slightly during this pressurization cycle. The more cycles, the more fatigue the aircraft experienced. Three of Aloha's jets now exceeded 82,000 cycles—more flights than any other jets in the world—and N73711 was one of them. Add in the corrosive effects of a salt environment and the potential for failure increased further.

Aloha's mechanics regularly inspected each jet and performed repairs when structural flaws revealed themselves. The airline's techniques didn't catch all potential problems, though. Most of the industry joined Aloha in accepting Boeing's claim that the aircraft could sustain a break in its skin without catastrophic results, and for this reason airlines were more relaxed about the issue of old airplanes than they might otherwise have been. Boeing bonded the fuselage skin onto a skeleton of metal supports. In theory, if a hole developed in the skin while the fuselage was pressurized, the hole would not spread beyond certain boundaries where the skin attached to stronger metals. By 1972, though, Boeing discovered flaws in this cold bonding technique. It switched to another method of joining metals pieces together, but N73711, built in 1969, predated this technique. Flights to Maui and Kauai never climbed high enough for the jet to reach its maximum pressure differential. Only flights above 18,000 feet stressed the structure to its maximum, trips such as this return trip from the Big Island.

Back in the cabin, three flight attendants worked

quickly to accommodate the needs of 89 passengers. The seat belt sign remained illuminated during the climb, giving them a chance to start their service without competition for the aisle. The flight attendant in charge today was Clarabelle “C.B.” Lansing. C.B. grew up near Hanalei, on Kauai, the youngest of eleven children. Just out of high school she joined Aloha and worked every plane the company ever flew, from DC-3s to 737s. Now the second-most senior attendant at the company, she took a few new hires from each class and showed them the finer points of the job. Young flight attendants knew that C.B. didn’t tolerate congregating in the galley for gab sessions. She was old school and even gave pilots some good-natured scolding for eating macadamia nut cookies intended for first-class passengers. C.B. loved plumeria blossoms and usually wore one in her hair. Flight attendant Jane Sato-Tomita assisted C.B. in the forward cabin, and the youngest attendant, 35-year-old Michelle Honda worked the aft end of the plane today. Michelle followed the company rules which C.B. insisted upon and would not proceed forward of the tenth seat row. She had no clue how important this discipline would be on today’s flight.

The jet was just leveling off 24,000 feet above the channel between the Big Island and Maui when tiny cracks in the aircraft’s fuselage skin came together and ruptured the cabin ceiling. The force of pressurized air blasting through this hole led to a chain reaction of other cracks and a massive section of fuselage structure tore out of the aircraft with a ripping noise like the near-instantaneous movement of some giant zipper. When the mighty WHOOSH of air came, C.B. Lansing was standing in the nearby aisle and was swept off her feet and out the aircraft. The force pulled the cockpit door from its hinges, knocking Jane Sato-Tomita unconscious. Pressure in the cargo compartment buckled the floor beneath the break, leaving seats at odd angles. Passengers grabbed Michelle Honda and prevented her

from being swept away. Jagged pieces of metal flew at passengers and lacerated many. The howling wind was unbelievable and insulation materials from the aircraft's walls contaminated the air heading back to the passengers. Oxygen masks flew back in the torrent and even if a passenger could reach one they were unusable because of an oxygen line break. Eighteen feet of fuselage had torn away and it wasn't just ceiling—walls were gone as well—up to 70 percent of the surrounding structure in the forward cabin. And here were these passengers seated in the 400 mile-per-hour wind, many times stronger than any hurricane, with virtually no structure surrounding them. Bare electrical wires once strung through the ceiling now whipped through the air and shocked and burned when they hit. The jet lowered its nose and began a dive. For passengers in the rear of the aircraft it looked grim. For all they could tell the cockpit had torn away from the jet.

Only a combined effort kept the human toll from increasing. Gary Nekota sat in the forward cabin and lost consciousness during the depressurization. When he came to, his seatbelt had fallen down around his knees, but his business competitor sat in the adjacent seat and held Nekota to keep him in the aircraft. Passengers tended to the wounds of those seated next to them. Michelle Honda now crawled through the aisle against the hurricane blast, urging passengers to put on life vests and lower their heads between their legs. She helped those in the most distress, even in areas of the plane where a bad jolt of turbulence or flying debris could have knocked her overboard. Some passengers encouraged their seatmates, but perhaps the most welcomed words came minutes later, "Looks like we're heading for the Maui Airport."

In the cockpit when the blast tore the plane open, a tremendous suction pulled at Mimi's body from the direction of the cockpit door and lifted away paperwork, dust, checklists, and everything else that wasn't secure.

She saved her contact lenses by momentarily blinking her eyes. Captain Schornstheimer felt the air in his lungs being expelled instantly. The aircraft pulled to the left. Reacting to the thunderous sound, Schornstheimer glanced over his right shoulder and instead of a cockpit door saw bleeding passengers swaying from side to side with a background of jagged metal and blue sky. He donned his oxygen mask, then quickly placed both hands on the wheel before him to signal Mimi that he was taking control. She released the control wheel, then donned her mask. Schornstheimer raised speedbrakes on the wings, retarded the throttles and began a rapid descent to an altitude with sufficient air for passengers to breathe. A deafening slipstream precluded verbal communications. The aircraft was unstable, rocking from side to side, but it responded to control inputs. A generator warning light and zero fuel flow indicated that the left engine had quit, explaining the yawing to the left just after decompression. Schornstheimer made a hand gesture toward Maui's airport to convey his intended landing location to the copilot. Mimi Tompkins took over the radio. Honolulu Center would not respond so she tried Maui Approach Control. No luck. Finally she reached Maui Tower on the Number 2 radio. She recalled each frequency from memory.

"Maui Tower—Aloha 243. We're inbound for landing—we're just to the west of Makena...to the east of Makena ...descending out of thirteen and we have rapid depress.. we are unpressurized, declaring an emergency."

To Mimi's frustration, it took several exchanges to convince the tower controller that she was indeed Aloha 243 and not another Aloha flight number.

Finally, "Aloha 243, say your position." "We're just to the east of Makena point ...descending out of eleven thousand...requesting clearance into Maui for landing... request the (emergency) equipment."

Shortly thereafter, Captain Schornstheimer leveled

the plane at about 10,000 feet and slowed to 210 knots (242 mph). He retracted the speed brakes and motioned for Mimi to extend flaps to the first notch. Wing flaps create drag to slow a plane, but they also increase the wing's lift and make reasonably slow landing speeds possible. Flaps 5 degrees, Schornstheimer motioned, and Mimi responded. The air roar subsided enough for the two to hear words yelled across the cockpit.

"You okay?" Mimi asked the jump seat rider. He responded positively. Tompkins communicated with Maui controllers while the captain angled the jet towards Maui's southern coastline and an ocean of sugar cane filling Maui's central valley. He yelled to Mimi, "I think they can hear you, but they can't hear me. Tell him (the Maui controller) we'll need assistance to evacuate."

"Right."

"We really can't communicate with the flight attendants, but we'll need ambulances, and we'll need an airstair from Aloha." Here was the captain at the controls of a jet which might break apart at any moment, working to get the right people on the ground in position for the landing. Plenty of professional pilots get amped up in the simulator during emergency procedures practice and don't think far enough ahead to take care of such details. Schornstheimer was doing a textbook job of it even as he and Mimi figured out how to land a plane with unknown flight characteristics. Of particular concern to him right now were the heavy flight controls and their lack of responsiveness. The plane felt like the hydraulic assistance had failed and he was using muscle to move small control tabs on the flight controls in order to steer the plane. "Feels like manual reversion," he called out.

"Can we maintain altitude okay?"

The jet had more surprises in store.

Abeam Wailea, Schornstheimer called "Let's try flying with the gear down here."

"All right, you've got it." Mimi moved the wheel-shaped knob to the down position. The main landing gear on the wings indicated down, but the nose landing gear did not. She twice performed the manual gear extension procedure by memory, but still no light. "Be advised we have no nose gear, we'll be landing without the nose gear," she transmitted to Maui.

"If you need any other assistance, advise."

"We'll need all the equipment you've got!"

Bob Schornstheimer called for flaps down to the 15-degree position, but when the first officer complied, the aircraft responded unfavorably.

"Is it easier to control with the flaps up?" she asked.

"Yeah, put them back to five."

Now the crew needed to figure a higher approach speed with this reduced wing flap setting. Mimi calculated the number, but as the jet decelerated below 170 knots it became difficult to control and Schornstheimer held the 170 knots.

Since the depressurization at 24,000 feet, the jet's engines had been at idle, and engine thrust was now needed for a stabilized, shallow approach to the runway. The captain advanced the throttles but only the right engine responded. With an engine failure now confirmed, new problems complicated the landing, and what about the right engine? Would it continue running under stress?

Two minutes from landing and Captain Schornstheimer concentrated on the approach. Up ahead beyond the tall stack of the island's sugar mill he caught sight of Runway 2, his destination. Maui's central valley is a natural wind tunnel producing strong, gusty conditions. Add in frequent control movements needed to keep the plane straight as the pilot changed power settings to correct for these gusts, and the captain had a real challenge, especially with sloppy controls and asymmetrical thrust from only one operating engine. Clouds along the approach

course required a turn off the runway centerline to maintain visual contact, followed by more maneuvering to line up again. Schornstheimer kept the banks shallow, but on the last correction he felt the plane's fuselage flex and this really concerned him.

Due to the extra drag from the gaping hole, the jet required almost full power from the right engine just to maintain a normal descent rate. A level off or climb would be impossible, eliminating any second attempt following a failed landing.

"Aloha 243, just for your information the gear appears down, the gear appears down." The controller had binoculars on the craft and although this information sounded encouraging, there was no guarantee the nose gear was locked in position.

With a grossly weakened fuselage, a hard landing which slammed the nose wheel down might break the aircraft and produced disastrous consequences. Passengers say that Schornstheimer touched down so gently you couldn't tell the plane was on the ground. The nose wheel held. He used brakes and reverse thrust from the one good engine to get the machine stopped, and Tompkins extended wing flaps to the full-down position once the plane was firmly on the runway. Finally stopped, the good engine shut down and memory items of the emergency checklist completed, the two stepped back to help their passengers. Total time from explosive depressurization to touchdown: 13 minutes.

An unreal scene greeted the two. So much of the cabin structure was missing. In the forward cabin a few passengers slumped unconscious, others suffered broken bones, cuts, and eardrum damage. After the deafening roar of the flight, the relative silence felt so strange. Nobody panicked. Mimi helped a few ambulatory passengers depart through the forward exit. One arrived with briefcases in hand, ready to descend the emergency slide and end this journey. Others

retrieved bags from what was left of the overhead bins. In the aft cabin the crew received help from Amy Jones-Brown, a 24-year-old Aloha flight attendant returning on this jet with her husband from their Big Island honeymoon. An airstair on the rear exit expedited passenger departures while crew members directed emergency crews to the most severely injured. Within thirty minutes all passengers were off the plane. Maui Memorial hospital admitted 13 of the passengers, two in critical shape. All would recover. A Coast Guard helicopter searched the ocean along Flight 243's route for C.B. Lansing but found nothing.

Many off-duty Aloha employees first learned of the events when a friend or coworker called and said, "Turn on CNN!" There on national television was one of their jets with this awful bite out of the fuselage and commentary about the disappearance of a flight attendant. The aircraft failure had cost one of their own and rattled confidence for many who flew. Hung Wo Ching and President Maury Myers soon spoke with reporters. Ching especially had difficulty finding his words; he was visibly shaken by the event. Aloha grounded three 737s of similar vintage and recognized that major challenges lay ahead.

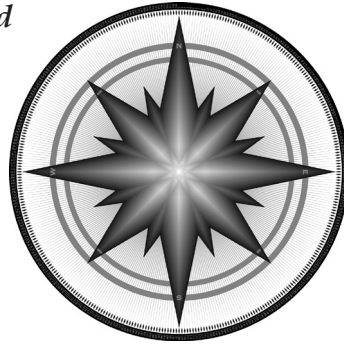
First, though, was a need for healing. On the morning of May 2, 1988, the airline held a service for C.B. Lansing at Honolulu Airport to enable the attendance of working employees. Patty Smart read a verse from Psalms—she and C.B. had shared the same years at Aloha. The two also shared friends at both inter-island airlines, and when flight attendant friends from Hawaiian Airlines called Patty and asked what they could do, she said, "Come in uniform." They showed up and decades of airline rivalry disappeared as they hugged and all held hands. Later, a private aircraft released its cargo overhead the spot where C.B. was lost, and for a brief time thousands of fragrant plumerias covered the ocean.

The next days further revealed the unlikely nature

of this flight's safe return. Investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board discovered five broken and two cracked floor beams, leaving minimal strength to hold the fuselage together. Bob Schornstheimer and Mimi Tompkins remarked that other professionally trained pilots could have brought the plane back just as well as they had. Yet, there was reason to wonder since so many of the tasks this crew performed were beyond the scope of training. "I couldn't think of a more capable pilot than Bob Schornstheimer to have in the left seat during such an emergency," says fellow Aloha Captain Bob Morrison. And how fortuitous that Mimi Tompkins just happened to be primed for captain upgrade with checklists memorized, and performing so well. In aircraft accidents, a chain of human failures typically leads to the event, any one of which, if corrected, could have prevented the accident. In the case of Aloha Flight 243, the crew encountered an accident ready to happen, and only a chain of properly performed steps led to a safe conclusion.



twisted



twisted

weeds

#5

From cactus thorns dolls hang through their necks, dangle limply—faceless toys with brittle hair, bitten fibers, tunics slipped off shoulder blades. Vultures pluck their weather-torn pieces of cloth.

Aster lies on the top landing of stairs. Her back rests on a cement slab. Ligaments tremble under ropes binding her torso and legs. The moist air smells of yeast. Vultures flock to steps stained a dark wine: the red of the sacrificed. She hears heavy shuffling. Her mouth is sewn shut.

#8

Aster funnels down a shaft, a skin of yellow flowers with fallow veins, pleated folds of dress, rags of papier-mâché and broken eggs. The shaft is thin glass, rimmed in salt and salty liquid, a strange concoction of beer, squeezed lime, and hot sauce. The glass flickers against blue peeled from the moon. Her toes singe. Toenails pluck away to wilted petals. The flowers become pale stars, low-wattage bulbs that flicker around chubby black flies.

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In a brackish cavern she surfaces among bloated whitefish, eyeless and pulpos. Their bones trail their glands, appear as tiny herringbone stitches. She floats beside discolored roaches, dolls of corn husks, mangled feathers. Still bound in ropes, she watches splintered currents scalp the flesh from a cracked pomegranate and other discards.

Toilet paper unspools, a silk-screen for the soft and fleshy to reproduce itself on the backs of shadow. Ashen hairs tangle her in a grove of skulls. The pile of heads forms a mountain, hollow on the inside. In a crawl space of several skulls she finds two clasped hands. The hands desiccate to coral heads, whitewashed polyps scrubbing her unbound skin to sand.

#9

She falls through a sieve of ashes and fish bones, surfaces among rags balled in fists of pastels.

Caught between scarves in tatters, dangling hemlines, traditional pieces woven from looms, only the strange woman's breast bone glimmers in a corner of light. The woman moans over and over: "There is a beast, a beast that took what was mine." Her chambers are warm and moist but her breath is cold.

Aster asks her to untie her bindings. She looks upon Aster with sadness. "You, too, they have sacrificed to the beast." She cuts her ropes with bare teeth. "I suppose you know who I am." Her pose is forlorn.

Without the slightest idea, Aster shakes her head.

"Malinche, the so-called-fucked-one-who-slept-with-Cortés." She offers Aster an orange peel, dangles it on a fingernail.

Aster falls on the backs of twisted weeds. Twisted, twisted weeds.

#17

Incense singes blades of grass. Aster lies on dirt surrounded by dolls in dark cloaks. One doll girl leans over for a heartbeat. Her scalp is stitched.

Another doll tilts a small cup of water to Aster's mouth. Aster coughs up some liquid, brown and odorless.

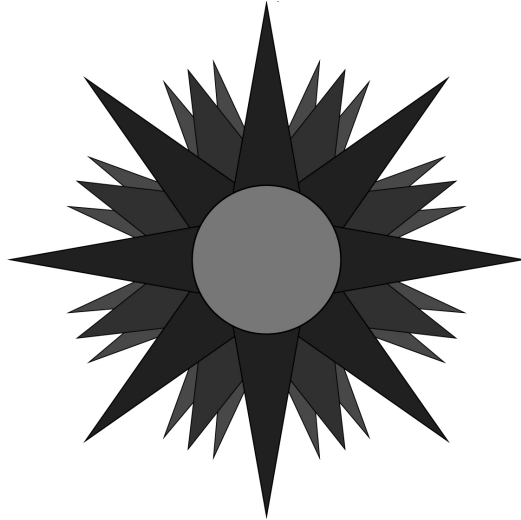
The doll lays her fingerless hand on Aster's forehead. Her eyes are ink blots.

78

Aster has a gash on her forehead. One girl unrolls a spool of white thread. The other unpacks a large needle. Aster wants to sit up but a ring of knobby hands push her to the ground. The girl with the needle threads the eye and ties a fierce knot.

A black moth lands on Aster's mouth.

Aster is unsure if this is the end.



I wuz one of five boyfriends she had. Two wuz jus sugar daddies.

Papa Claus

By Lee A. Tonouchi

I no even like kids. You see me with any kids of my own?" Das what I tell my babes and my sistah. But dey no give up. Dey keep trying for hand me . . . da suit. And you know which suit I talking, right? Not da kine penguin tuxedo kine all those himakamaka guys wea to those fancy fundraisers like how you see 'em in da *Mid-Week*. We talking da kine red velvet suit wit furry white trim and da hat wit da big cotton ball pom pom at da end.

"Maybe you'll learn for like children," my babes tells wit dat glimmer of hope in her eyes. But I see through Kawehi and her tricks. I know she trowing da hints. She always telling she like tie da knot, but I know das means she only like tie me down.

All da guys from work, dey all warn me. I da only one who still get my freedom. I know dey all live vicariously through me. Tings dey wish dey still could do. I CAN do.

Da guys at work, even before dey got marry, I could see da girlfriends wuz changing dem. Gradual behavior modifications. Das why only easy change 'em when da time come get married. Das why you gotta stop da nonsense before it happens. One time somebody wuz complaining about how him and da girlfriend went Longs and he wuz thirsty so he bought one bottle Coca Cola. So he wen drink 'em while da girlfriend wuz shopping at da mall den when he wuz pau he wuz going trow way da empty bottle. But da girlfriend said he should hold on to 'em, cuz can recycle. So he had for carry around da empty bottle wit him da whole day. Das da kine brah. Das how men slowly lose their power.

Me, pau drink soda, I jus toss da bottle. My babes, she said someting one time. I jus told her, if everybody kept their bottles, den bumbye you taking away jobs from da homeless people. Den she scolded me. I dunno for why. I only tinkin about oddah people.

Da boyz, when dey heard what I said, dey wuz amaze I wen talk back. I toll 'em Brah, if you no talk back, den you only get lip action.

To dem, I their hero. I am. . . da last man standing.

Dey all tell me what I already know. Dey tell no get married. No get kids. Soon as you get married. Half of everyting you get is hers you know. Dat part I no mind. Cuz not like I get much. So my future wife, she can have half of doo doo squat.

My co-worker Andren, soon as he got married and had kids, bam, wuz like he found religion. When his wife Kandy got pregnant he wuz healed. He wuz healed I tell you, healed. Halleleujah, praise da Lord. Amen.

Some would say dat da old Andren wuz one sick man cuz of all his organ problems. His body parts wuz all kapakahi hammajang. Most of da time his brain wuz in his pants, his mout

wuz in da toilet, and his liver wuz on life support he drank so much.

His wife said he had for give up drinking cuz bumbye he set one bad example for his kid. He had for give up swearing cuz das bad example for his kid. He had for give up hooking up wit random women he met in bars, cuz das bad example for his kid and plus it too das how it is when you get married, ah. I tink dat might be one of da main rules in fack.

I always tease Andren cuz most computer technicians swear kinda planny. You be amaze how hard it is for diagnose da various computer problems. Most da time it's either motherboard or power supply. But if we change 'em all out and still she no go. Most us tell goddammit or godfunnit. Andren when he cannot get someting for work he tell, God . . . bless America.

"What, I wen re-solder everyting, how come? God Bless America."

He crack up us.

Before if someting no go right he tell f*ck, frick, or sh*t. Sometimes he even used to join 'em, like F*ckin, frickin' little sh*t part no fit. Das how most normal techs talk. But den he started changing his ways. Instead of F*ck, take two guys fo' do dis job. Or Sh*t, I wen fry da motherboard. Or I wen fry da motherboard, sh*t. He switched to Jesus Christ, how fast dey tink I can fix 'em? And Jesus Christ, what dey expeck, auto-mation? But den his wife started getting on his case about dat too. She said he wuz using da Lord's name in vain.

For make her happy he wen change 'em one more time again to someting dat sounds even more stupider, but made her happy. Now when he like swear he tell, *Jesus Christ Superstar!* He says he referencing da Broadway musical so Kandy lets it slide.

So sometime when no mo' nahting bettah for do we make trouble to Andren. When expressing shock we tell *Fiddler on the Roof*, if I know. And oh *Little Shop of Horrors*, I nevah expeck

dat. And what da . . . *Phantom of the Opera* wuz da boss tinkin'? Poor Andren. But das what he get for being such one panty.



I no even know why we gotta have one Santa anyway. I cannot figgah out how come dey trying for revive da tradition aftah all these years. I guess it's cuz all da cousins getting married and having kids of their own so get planny small people in our family again.

When we wuz small time, me, my braddahs and my sistah, my cousins, we all knew who wuz dressed in da Santa Claus clothes. Wuz weird cuz my ol'man wuzn't da most spirited of people. Every Christmas mom would set up da cardboard fireplace, da plastic tree, and da stockings from Woolworth. She'd make my faddah put up da Christmas lights knowing dat he wuz going complain all da way. He always ended up putting 'em up like two days before Christmas. And taking 'em down same time as everybody else, right aftah Easter.

We'd have Christmas Eve dinner when everybody in our family would come ova. I not sure how my faddah got dat job. I tink my Uncle Reynold would've made one bettah Santa. He had da stomach and da beard. One time he said he even got mistake for Santa at da mall. One little girl kept pointing at him and say "Mama, mama, Santa, Santa!" So I asked him one time why he nevah like be Santa and let us kids sit on his lap. He said someting about he like, but da judge would frown upon it. At da time I nevah know what he meant.

And I believed him when he said dat his electronic ting he wore around his ankle wuz for measure how far he went jogging. He said if he ran too far den his monitor would sound off one

alarm, telling him wuz best if he stopped and went no further.

We'd feel silly, but each year we'd always play along wit Papa Claus. We'd all take turns trying for trick him into blowing his cover.

"Eh Santa Claus, das fo' really you dis year?"

"Of course it's me. Who else going be?"

"You kinda look like somebody in our family."

"No, I Santa Claus from da South Pole."

"I thought you live North Pole."

"Oh yeah, das what I meant. I live North Pole."

"Where's da North Pole?"

"Da kine, da North Pole, das in Alaska, li'dat. Can see Russia from my house, you know."

"Eh Santa, hakum you talk Pidgin?"

"Oh. Oh, Santa travels all across da world, so Santa knows many languages. In fack, Santa knows allllll languages. Santa Claus is what is known as omni-lingual."

"Try talk Hawaiian."

"Uh. . . Mekalekahaimekahainiho."

"Das not Hawaiian, Santa! Das Pee Wee Herman."

"Oh. Smart you kids. I meant Mele Kalikimaka. Das what I meant for say. I know so many languages sometimes mix up I come."

And das how Papa Claus would make us all laugh.



I can tell Kawehi like get married. All my friends, all her friends, we at dat age when everybody getting married. Everybody having kids. Kawehi says sometimes she feel like she being left out.

But I tink we get differing views cuz her parents is different from my parents. Hers sleep togeddah. Mines slept in separate beds planny. Hers talk planny. Mines went long periods of time without saying anyting to each oddah.

Wuz weird when I went Kawehi's house for dinner. Her parents wuz asking me all kine questions. Da way I wuz raised, I wuz more used to everybody jus eat fast, wash your plate, den go watch TV. Typically whoevah finished first got for choose what channel on da TV we all going watch. I grew up viewing eating dinner not as one social experience, but more as one race.

Kawehi says I seemed little bit nervous. She said she could tell cuz I wuz actually chewing my food instead of scarfing 'em down. I toll her I wuz only eating slow cuz dey wuz slowing me down with all their questions dat apparently I wuzn't answering correck.

"So what are your guys' plans for da future?"

"Oh, tomorrow we going Ala Moana for go shopping. Our friend's baby luau coming up."

"What about beyond dat?"

"Uh, beyond dat. I dunno go work, come home. Next weekend get UFC so my friends coming ova and Kawehi and her friends going get facials and get their nails done."

And I guess dat still wuzn't one satisfactory answer, cuz still yet dey kept pressing for our plans beyond dat, until finally I wen tell, "Well, in March 25, 2059 we plan for do da Great Aloha Swim. Cuz no longer going be da run, cuz half da island going be under water."

Later on Kawehi said I made one bad impression and she questioned how come I nevah answer their question about whether or not we wuz going be getting married and having kids.

I wondered if maybe me and her wuzn't at da same dinner or what cuz I nevah remembah dem asking me dat. She said dey did ask, just not direckly. And das when all came clear how come dey wuz asking me for make all Nostradamus. No wonder she said her and her parents always had da kine long conversations. I could have some long conversations if I wuz talking all roundabout like dat too.

For someone who grew up in one non-direck communicating household, I dunno why Kawehi get all huhu when I no get straight to da point. Sometimes when she watching TV I go, "Wotchoo watching? *What Not to Wear?* Again? Why, you dunno what for wear? Why, good dis show? I seen dis show before, yeah? Nic Arrojo, he only know one hair cut style I tink, cuz das da same haircut he give everybody, ah? Stacey London, das one skunk sitting on her head? Eh dis guy Clinton Kelly, he look like da guy David Sedaris da one you made me see at Hawai'i Theatre. I thought da guy David Sedaris wuz going sing. Dat wuz one big let down. Basically we jus paid for hear him read his book. And I tink we got for see his face little bit, da two times he wen look up from da podium. Tickets wuz \$50, so das like \$25 a look. At least when we saw Augie T da month before at da Hawai'i Theatre, he wen use his whole body telling his jokes, not jus move his mout. Eh, Augie T, he even got one hana hou. David Sedaris nevah get hana hou. I wondah if David Sedaris felt bad about not getting one hana hou? Probably not, yeah, cuz probably he no even know what one hana hou is. So when he wen wuz pau, if everybody wen chant "Hana hou, hana hou," he probably wouldn't even know what for do. So maybe das why nobody wen say 'em. But instead of saying hana hou, dey could've said, "Encore, encore." But I guess book

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authors no usually get calls for encores. See, he should've sang one song. What? How you knew had *The Ultimate Fighter* wuz on TV now? Yeah, I can watch dat? But only if you not watching."

Kawehi get all irkatated wit me sometimes, I suppose I could jus ask, "Oh, can change da channel?" But where's da fun in dat?



Now dat my ol'man gone, my maddah, when she look back, she laugh when she tell da stories. Like how her and my ol'man used to take us go out eat at restaurants. If so happen we had da smash nose waitress, da crooked teet one, or da puka puka face one, my ol'man would send 'em back. My maddah says he would tell, "Go back and go tell da young one go come." Wuz so embarassing, but at da same time flattering she said, cuz da fack he wuz with her meant he thought she wuz somewhat of one prize.

She even looks back at how he went to strip bars through her rose-colored glasses. We knew when wuz payday, cuz he would come home supa late. Straight from da construction site he used to go cash his check den he nevah used to come home till early in da morning. We all knew it bothered her. We remembah da arguments. Dey say I wuz da youngest so I probably remembah da least. But I tink my bruddah and sistah blocked it out aftah awhile. While I heard every word dat wuz said.

"And wea you wuz?"

"Out wit da boyz."

"And why you always gotta go out wit da boyz? "

“Cuz we work hard. We deserve one break for get away.”

“What about your family? You saying you need for get away from your family?”

“I nevah say dat.”

“What dat on your face?”

“Honey, I nevah do nahting. You know how it goes. Sometimes dey kiss you for try hustle more money outta you. But I wuz jus looking. Nahting wrong wit looking. What? What?”

When she talks about it now, it’s like wuz no big deal. She said our faddah could’ve had any woman he wanted, but he always came back home to her. But back during those days, I remembah my maddah would stop talking to him, for couple days sometimes. Da maddest I seen her wuz when she nevah talk to him for ova a week cuz Auntie Melanie ate her ice cream. Dat wuz one sore spot for her for long time.

But I guess from how she only talks good about him nowadays, I tink she wen finally let go da hurt. Hard for her stay mad especially since he gone now. She tell, “Some husbands for relieve their stress dey hit da wife. Some go bar every night come drunk. Some go gambling. Some do all kine illegal mischief. I lucky, your faddah, his only vice wuz liking too many women. I guess what dey say is true, boyz will be boyz. Even though he pass away too early, at least he got for enjoy.”



Tonight some of da guys from work supposed to stop by our Christmas party and bring their families too. I not looking foward. Dey ack weird when dey in front my family. It’s like I don’t know them anymore. Who are these guys? Who are these strange people in our house?

I like see my real boyz. Like how dey is when we get togeddah every once in awhile for watch UFC Pay-per-view. Get one stereotype dat guys who all into computers stay home play video games for fun. But das guys who work on da computers. We fix da computers so we no care about dat kine. Raddah than watching computer people fighting, we raddah watch real men scrap. When we have guys fight night only us guys is allowed. But we still let Andren come.

Da first rule of fight night is no talk about fight night. So everybody is free for say anykine without fear dat Andren going report back to his wife and tattletale what Rocky did or who Wilder did.

An'den, we eat what we like eat. We drink how much we like drink, providing nobody gets drunk cuz bumbye as da host I going be liable.

Everybody gotta chip in equal. So even if half da time Andren stay closing his eyes cuz everybody bleeding on da TV, he still gotta pay same.

Da last rule is women is not allowed. . . unless they're a famous pornstar. We added dat clause cuz one time Andren wuz all acking up cuz his wife wuzn't dea. He wuz saying stuff like "Ho, what if I meet Tera Patrick, I guess I not going bring her ova meet you guys den."

It's been twenty two fight nights since Andren said dat and we all still kid him about it. Wilder, he always hands Andren two papah plates or two forks, hoping for bait Andren into saying "How come I need two for? I no eat dat much." It's all so Wilder can tell, "Oh, one is for you and you can give da oddah one to Tera when she come." One day I know Andren going surprise us make us eat our words. Part of me would be thrilled if Tera came ova for keep us company. But one noddah part of me going be all like "Lose money, brah. We paying \$44.99 for watch da fight, but nobody watching da fight. We all looking at Tera. Only her enjoying da fight.

It's not like da rich pornstar cannot afford pay for her own UFC pay-per-view."

I dunno what da women tink we all doing. Dey probably tink we getting all caveman and yelling stuff like "Die you fahka!" "Kill da fahka!" "You fahka, fahk 'em up, faaaaaaahk."

Maybe some guys do dat, but serious UFC aficionados such as ourselves we can get into some pretty serious and debates.

Like during da BJ Penn vs. Georges St. Pierre fight we had some pretty deep conversations. Wilder and Rocky can get very stream of consciousness when dey drink. Wilder and Rocky just go off sometimes. Go off da deep end dat is.

Wilder wuz all like, "Eh, if Georges St. Pierre wuz name Georges Pierre St. den his initials, instead of GSP would be GPS like da way dey track you with da satellites."

Den Rocky wuz all like, "Yeah, and what if da match wuz BJ Penn versus GPS, and BJ had for keep from being found?"

"Like hide and go seek?"

"Yeah, like hide and go seek."

"Oh, den he could do his ancient Hawaiian training and grab da heavy rock for sink under water and run around in da ocean like how he did in his promo video. Da satellite no can see him if he stay hidden under water, right?"

"I dunno, I tink can. And ho, what if da satellite had one laser? He might be able for avoid getting killed if he went into one crowd I tink. If he wuz in one crowd da GPS laser might take out one group of people den GPS would get disqualified."

"Or what if BJ Penn wuz wearing one suit of armor or one cloak of invisibility like from *Lord of the Rings*? Dat might defeat da GPS."

“Unless wuz GPS to one higher power.”

“What’s dat? What’s even more all seeing than GPS?”

“Why, God of course.”

“Ho, yeah. So what if wuz BJ Penn versus God? You tink BJ could beat God?”

“Hell yeah. BJ would make God tap out.”

“How da ref going call dat match? How you know if God taps?”

“If get earthquake, das means He tapping da ground no?”

“How you knock God out?”

“You fight ‘em night time.”

“Why night time?”

“Das when He seeing stars.”

“What if rain?”

“Das means God sweating and gotta work on his cardio.”

“BJ gotta work on his cardio too.”

“If dey challenge in Hilo might be one good match cuz Hilo rain planny. So God going probably come tired fast in Hilo.”

“You would tink God, since he’s God, you would tink He would give himself good cardio.”

“I figgah maybe before He wuz in good shape when He worked hard creating da universe and all dat. But nowadays He only taking it easy. He retire already. He jus kickin’ it back watching all da little humans in da world with all their little human people dramas. Dis planet alone get like seven billion reality shows for him for watch.”

“Das planny shows and planny stations he must get. His cable bill must be unreal.”

“I wondah if he gotta pay tax on dat.”

“Everybody gotta pay taxes.

“Eh, you know who keeps track even more than GPS, even more than God?”

“Who?”

“Da IRS.”

“Yup. BJ would lose. Nobody hides from da IRS.”

Sometimes Rocky and Wilder get all punchy and I gotta break dem up. Das my real boyz. Tonight when dey come, I know dey going be on their best behavior. Their best weird behavior. When I ask dem if dey like someting for drink, usually dey say “shooooots” or “yuuuuups.” But Christmas party time dey tell, “If it’s not too much trouble, a beverage would be splendid. Thank you.” And instead of telling “I going bachroom” dey ask permission “May I please use your facilities?” I feel like I their elementary schoolteacher when dey get like dat.



Kawehi playing wit all my nieces and nephews. Dey like her. Dey no always like my girlfriends. My ex-ex-ex, Jamie wuz one smoker so she hardly stayed in da house whenever had one party. My ex-ex, Annabelle wuz quiet so people thought she wuz stuck up. My ex, Brenda wuz more friendly, but people wuz turned off by what she did for one living.

Technically she wuz one stripper, but she liked for be called one exotic dancer. She said da word stripper had much seedier connotations and she only performed at upscale gentlemen’s

clubs. For make da comparison she said I wouldn't call my braddah one trash collector, right? I would call him a sanitation engineer. I just told her I would call 'em like it is. He's da rubbish man.

Brenda would insist I not use da word stripper when introducing her to my friends. So for fun, I'd tell, "Guys, dis Brenda. She does adult cabaret." And dey'd be all like, "Ooooooh. Wowwwwww." Den later on when Brenda wuzn't dea, dey'd ask me, "Eh, what dat, adult cabaret?" So I'd say, das means she's one stripper. And dey'd be all like "Fo' reals?!" "Right on!" "Das da how!" See, you gotta be clear when you communicate. No mo' fun showing her off if nobody knows what is dat.

For awhile I thought maybe Brenda and me maybe had chance. Me and her wuz on da same wavelength. She said kids wuzn't in her future. She pointed out how some jobs is good if you pregnant, but not her job. She said her friend delivered pizzas for Magoo's when da friend wuz pregnant, ho she got good tips. You would tink one pregnant stripper would get some love, considering she going be starting one family and all, but lotta her friends dat got knocked up got bood off da stage when dey started showing. And lotta dem ended up retiring before their prime. Maybe couple wen get back to their old form, but lot of dem had weight issues aftahwards and ended up just having more kids. She said dat some people tink da recession is da worst enemy of da stripping industry, but actually when da economy goes down, stripping revenue goes up. Cuz guys need one escape from da real world. So da worstest ting dat can affeck da business wuz actually losing their best workers who got hapai. I thought wuz good dat me and her agreed on dat. Dat and da fack dat we both also agreed dat we should be allowed for see oddah people. Dat one wuz good at first. Until I realized she actually meant what she said and

I wuz one of five boyfriends she had. Two wuz jus sugar daddies. So in actuality, I wuz one of chree. I like for say dat for make myself feel bettah.

Me and Kawehi been going for actually kinda long now. Today she being good. Usually when get kids around, she no stop throwing da hints. Like whenever we go to da mall, she gotta stop and tell "Oh, cute your bebe" to everybody's bebe. One time she went up to one older Japanee lady with one stroller and she wen tell, "Cute your bebe" and turned out da crazy lady had one dog in her stroller. Well, I thought wuz one dog. I nevah look good so might've jus been one really ugly bebe.

Da worst one is when we gotta go somebody's baby luau, she point at everybody's kid, "O, look, cute da bebe. Cute da bebe, yeah?" Aftah awhile dat jus comes annoying cuz she sound j'like one broken record already. But no get me wrong, I not one kid hater. I like kids. So long as I no have to bring 'em home wit me. And while I admit, I seen couple cute kids before. Like when I look at my photo album and I see myself when I wuz small. But da way Kawehi make. She make like every single kid in da world is cute. I can definitely say every kid is NOT cute. In fack, some is downright ug-lay. Like my cousin guys' one. I dunno how two small Japanee people can have one bebe dat big. It's like Melveen Leed and Konishki had one bebe. Paint 'em orange; da bebe can pass for one basketball already.

Jus when I tink I safe, Kawehi comes back and asks me for reconsider putting on da suit. She says how can I disappoint my public? She goes behind me and uses her hands for point my head in da direction of all my young nieces and nephews.

"Kids is cute," she tells me as she holds my head firmly in place.

"Kids is cute, but so is puppies. I buy you one puppy if you like."

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"Kids is cute."

"Kids make doo doo and cry planny."

"Kids is cute."

"Kids cost money. Gotta pay their diapers, food, college tuition. Mo' bettah buy myself one Porshe already."

"Kids is cute."

"Kids run around and break stuff."

"Kids can take care us when we come old."

"One, who's to say we still going be togeddah fifty years from now? And two, das what nursing homes is for. If I rely on my kids den I'd be taking away jobs from all da non-English talking people."

"That's racist."

"Why racist? I nevah specify one race. I jus saying lotta da people who work nursing homes is non-English talking people."

"I don't wanna talk to you anymore."

"Okay, promise?"



I wuz da youngest child so while everybody else had activities for go, like soccer and girl scouts, my dad when jobs wuz slow and he had time on his hands, he would have to pick me up from school for watch me. One time wuz Wednesday and I guess he forgot school pau'd early on

Wednesdays so I waited around for a while and finally decided for walk home. I figured if he wuz on his way he'd see me on top da sidewalk going in da opposite direction.

When I got home I wuzn't sure I wuz at da right house, cuz had somebody else's car in our driveway. And had one stranger person in our house sitting on da couch wit my faddah.

"Wotchoo doing home early? You wen cut school?"

"No. It's Wednesday."

"Wednesday? Oh yeah no. Sorry about dat. Eh, you like me take you go get ice cream for make it up to you?"

"Who's dat lady on da couch wit you?"

"Oh, oh. Dis yo Aunty Melanie."

"Aunty? How come we no see her at our family parties?"

"Das cuz she your calabash Aunty."

"Calabash? Is dat like one bowl? Das da kine bowl dey pass out in church, yeah. For put money inside. Is she calabash aunty cuz people put money in her?"

"Uhhh, yes, but no. Das actually kinda funny. When you come mo' old I go explain to you. But all you gotta know is in dis instance calabash means she not blood related to us. We jus really close so she's j'like your Aunty."

"But how come I gotta keep 'em secret?"

"Cuz your maddah no like Aunty Melanie das why. So if ma eva found out, I going be in big trouble. You no like get your faddah in trouble, ah? So we go get some ice cream."

"But we not allowed for have ice cream till aftah dinner."

"I not going tell if you not. Your daddy can keep one secret too."

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At first I felt like I wuz special. Cuz my dad had one secret dat only me and him knew. Well, me, him, and Aunty Melanie.

Dat day wuz my first before dinner ice cream. And it wouldn't be my last.



When you go Rainbow Drive-In and you cannot decide what for eat, what you get? Das right, da mix plate, cuz da mix plate get little bit of everyting. When you go Waiola shave ice and you cannot decide what flavor for get, you get rainbow. And das life. You like sample everyting. I tink das why I get hard time settling down. How I know Kawehi da best pūpū on da platter when still get so many more for sample.

Outta all da women I dated, Kawehi comes closest to being someone I might marry. Cuz I nevah really had da one before, I not really sure how I supposed to feel like. She da only one I no need worry about anykine.

Wit Jamie I used to worry about her health. She smoke, eat any kine, hated any kinda activity dat made her sweat. If I get marry, I no like my wife die young. Bumbye I going have to go through da trouble of finding one noddah one later on. Wit Anna we nevah really talk. Well I talked and she just looked like she wuz listening. But I tink she jus liked for keep to herself. She nevah told me what she wanted for do or how she felt. Wuz always one guessing game wit her. Even when making love time she make no noise. Not even one peep. So dat I wouldn' get creeped out, I would just pretend we wuz astronauts and we wuz making love in space. Wit Brenda wuz junk cuz she wuz only my part time girlfriend cuz I had for share. Wuz hard seeing her cuz she

always had all kine scheduling conflicts.

I guess in some ways Kawehi is kinda like Rainbow shave ice. She keeps fit, she talks, and she's loyal.

We met at one computer expo. She wuz answering questions at LavaGames' booth for their latest phone app game, Surf Turf Wars. At first I thought she wuz one of those booth models dat companies hire for draw guys to their booth. Usually booth models dunno nahting about da product. Den I found out she da one wen program da game. Wuz one pretty interesting game actually. You can decide if you like be one Local or whatevah place you like represent. Den you get into surf battles or surfing exhibitions. In battle mode you can either defend your turf or invade oddah people's turf. So if you one Local braddah you can try invade Australia for show 'em Hawai'i n ka 'oi. If you dominate ova dea den all their locals kow tow to you fo' add dem to your Hawai'i crew. And you slowly amass your surf army for take ova da surfing world. In exhibition mode you not about da competition, you about exchanging of culture and knowledges so you travel da world for share techniques and learn about oddah peoples. Exhibition mode wuz more relaxing. I get enough stress at work—I nevah need one game for get me more amped up. She wuz suprised I liked exhibition mode bettah. She said most guys wanna conquer. And mostly da girls play exhibition mode.

"So you saying I one girl den?" I asked playfully for see what she wuz going say.

"No. I jus saying you play like one girl."

"And which mode you play?"

"Depends how I feel."

"So you one fo' real kine surfer?"

“Actually no. I’ve only been out a few times. But I wanna learn someday.”

“You like me help you learn?”

“Are you offering for teach me?”

“Uh, no. I no can surf so good either, but if you like, I go treat us to lessons. So when da polar ice caps melt and da big wave comes, I like us get chance. Safety.”

“Hmm. . . concerned for my well being. I like dat.”

She said wuz da most unusual pick up line she evah heard. Das why she agreed. She said usually da dorky guys at da computer expos come up to her and go, “So I guess you’re into software, but are you also into a-hem, a-hem, hardware.” Dey tink they’re being so cool with their double entendres and all. So I usually just look at dem like I have no idea what dey’re talking about and I just stare blankly at dem until dey leave. Da worst one she said is when guys come up to her at da booth and go “You’re hot,” cuz there’s nothing really she could say to dat. I nevah reveal to her dat as I wuz walking to da booth, I thought about saying “You’re hot,” but I got so caught up in da conversation dat I forgot what I wuz going say. Good ting.



Da main ting in one relationship is trust. Das why I dunno about Andren and his wife. His wife no trust him. Actually, she says she trusts him, but I tink so she jus no trust us. To me, das same smell, but. One time Kandy came by unannounced during our guys’ fight night. She wuz suspicious what kine mischief we wuz getting her precious Andren into.

“Okay. You are watching fighting. I just wanted to check.”

“I said we going watch UFC,” Andren told. “What you wuz worried about?”

“I wuz jus worried you guys wuz all sitting around watching porn videos.”

I whispered to Andren, “Eh, good ting you nevah meet Tera Patrick today. You would’ve been in trouble.”

“What wuz dat?” Kandy gave me da eye.

“I no get it,” I told her. “Even if we wuz all watching porn togeddah. What’s wrong wit dat? ”

“It’s, it’s. . . hurtful. How would you feel if your partner was watching that smut?”

“I’d say let’s watch togeddah honey.”

“You would say that.”

“Would you raddah Andren be out and about screwing real women he talked to in bars?”

“Andren doesn’t go to bars.”

“And Andren doesn’t talk to women. See, so why you worried? Why, you worried he going poke da TV screen? ”

“Those type of movies are all unrealistic male fantasies and are all created by one industry dominated by men. They morally degrade da women in those films. I don’t like it. I just don’t like it.”

Wuz one mistake for Kandy use dat as her argument, cuz I had my numbah one argument winnah all ready in hopes she wuz going say dat.

“Porn not only stimulates people’s private parts, porn also stimulates da economy. Porn is one multi-billion dollar industry in America. See, so if you got rid of porn, bumbye sexy people all no mo’ job.”

I dunno if everybody actually buy into my bumbye people no mo' job argument dat I always buss out, or if by dat point dey jus tired of arguing wit me. Either way I get da last word in so I win.



I couldn't lie straight to my mom's face. At first I nevah know she wuz interrogating me. By da time I caught on, wuz too late. I tried my best for avoid answering for keep my dad's secret. But she knew how for get da answer she wanted.

Dad wuz busy watching TV when mom approached me in da kitchen. I remembah my mom's Karen Carpenter Christmas music wuz playing. My mom wuz busy cleaning so da house would be spotless for da family Christmas party. All of a sudden she wen just stop, mid-cleaning. She wen calmly walk ova all da piles of laundry she wuz sorting and she came ova to me. I thought she wuz going ask me for help or someting. I knew wuz odd, cuz usually when she doing her cleaning, she in her zone and she no stop for nahting.

"What you did aftah school yesterday?" she asked.

"Dad wen pick me up, den we came home so I could do my homework."

"You nevah stop no place? You can tell me you know. I not going be mad."

"Oh yeah. Dad took me Dave's Ice Cream. He wanted das why. I forgot."

"Das nice. And what flavor you had?"

"Mint chocolate chip."

"Oh. And what flavor dad had?"

"His favorite, Poha Berry."

"Das all you guys had?"

"Yeah."

"Den how come get chree ice creams on dis receipt I found while I wuz emptying out your faddah's pocket?"

"Oh. Why, you tink dey wen over charge us?"

"Wuz dea anybody else dea with you guys?"

"Define 'with.'"

And wit dat she wuz through wit me. She went straight to my faddah and I overheard 'em when he broke down and told her about Aunty Melanie.

"So I see you had ice cream with this Melanie. So when you two had your ice cream, did you let her lick your cone and put it in her mouth?"

"Wuz just ice cream."

"You only supposed to have ice cream with me."

"Wuz just ice cream."

"Maybe dis time wuz jus ice cream. But who knows about oddah times I no know about. Wuz there times with hot dogs? What about doughnuts? Maybe you helped yourself to some pig-in-a-blanket, huh? And did you have any dessert? Did she ever offer you any of her pie? Did you eat any of her HOE-made pie?!"

At da time I thought da conversation seemed really dumb and I thought my mom wuz one germaphobe when came to food, but looking back I get it now.



I nevah got for ask my faddah if she stopped seeing Aunty Melanie cuz of what mom said or cuz of what I said to Santa. Tings wuz kinda tense dat Christmas aftah my mom found out dad's secret. People in our family wuz taking sides. My faddah tried for do his best jolly ol' St. Nick dat year at our Christmas party. But he found he couldn't say anyting without my mom's sisters, my real aunties, saying someting. Wheneva my faddah said "Ho, ho, ho." My mom's sisters couldn't keep from saying "That's da kine dat he likes." Everyting dey said just kept reminding my mom. She just stayed in da corner and kept to herself dat night.

When my cousins went on Papa Claus' lap dey wuz none da wiser. Nobody our age caught on to da snide commentaries all da aunties wuz making. To us "ho" had only four meanings dat we knew of.

One ho could be one garden tool you use for plow da yard. But we nevah hardly used 'em for mean dat. For us we mostly used short, meejum, and long ho.

We used short ho, das one real abrupt ho, for express mild irritation. Like, "Ho, no need ask me if I like go Chuck E Cheese too."

Dis is not for be mix up wit da similar, but slightly more longer Hooo, which is one expression we used when in suprise or disbelief. Like we tell, "Hooo, Tyrell scored 24,000 points in Centipede! Das one new high schore. "

And lastly, we had long ho. We used long ho as our rallying cry for tell everybody try come by us kine. Like we tell, "Thundercats Hooooooooooooo!"

How wuz we for know one "ho" wuz cut short for da word "whore" when we nevah even

know what one “whore” wuz?

Even though my braddah and sistah wuz older, at da time I no tink dey knew what wuz going on between our parents. Dey wuz all too caught up in their own dramas. My braddah wuz all into his soccer friends and focused on becoming OIA soccer champs. And my sistah had her girl scouts with their meetings for come up wit da next girl scout cookie concept. My sistah’s cookie pitches wuz all named aftah Pacific islands. Not cuz she had one affinity for island peoples, wuz only cuz she wuz just trying for come up wit someting similar to Samoa. But she couldn’t grasp dat da name Samoa wuz one pun like I like eat “sa’more.” She just thought dat Samoan people liked eating lotta vanilla cookies dipped in caramel, topped with coconut and drizzled in chocolate, and dat Samoan people ate a lot of it das why lotta dem came so large. For her Tonga cookie concept, she consulted her Chemistry teacher who wuz Tongan and asked him what type of foods did Tongan people eat, and he said. . . everyting. So she put everyting she could tink of into her cookie submission. Her would-be Tonga cookie had chocolate, oatmeal, peanuts, hazelnuts, almonds, coconut, peanut butter, caramel, mint, vanilla, M&M’s, Rice Krispies. Corn Flakes, macadamia nuts, gummy bears, kakimochi, furikake, li hing mui, cuttlefish, and da kitchen sink. Her cookie prototypes only proved to us dat there can be too much of one good ting.

Dat year, my braddah I dunno how he could even tink of asking Papa Claus for more Transformers, but he did. He even asked if Santa could have his elves create one special garbage truck Transformer for him. Thinking back, my braddah wuz probably destined for be one rubbish man. He said his original Transformer would be named Compactor.

My sistah when she wuzn’t making Mrs. Frankenstein’s Cookies, she wuz exploring her scientific interests. She wanted for be da first nuclear physicist in da family even though she

{PAPA CLAUS}

couldn't really say da word physicist so good. She would say she wanted for be one nuclear "physics-ist" or nuclear "physicians." I used to ask her, "How you going become something you cannot even pronounce?" All she wanted dat year wuz dis toy from Radioshack called Armatron. Wuz one little electronic crane arm she could control when she pretended she wuz doing dangerous scientific experiments. I imagined she could even use 'em for grab on to some of da hazardous cookies she wuz making.

When came time for me, I could sense Papa Claus' sadness.

"What toy you like dis year, little man?"

"I no deserve one toy."

"Why? Haven't you been one good boy this year?"

"No."

"No?! Das not what I heard. My menehune scouts said you been outstanding."

"I tink I made my parents not like each oddah."

"I tink you must be mistaken. I know for one fack your mommy and daddy love each oddah."

"But dey don't talk no more. Usually when dey stop talking it's just for couple days. Dis time it's been over a week."

"You know how it is. Modern couples today, so busy. No mo' time talk story."

"It's not cuz of me?"

"Children is nevah for blame. Sometimes faddahs do stupid tings."

"I know what I want Santa."

"What you like? Transformers? Funny kine science toys?"

"I no like anyting for myself. I jus like my daddy for apologize and tell my mommy how sorry he is."

"Santa nevah really did anything like dat before. Santa dunno if he can. Santa could try help your daddy, but Santa dunno what for tell. Santa no more da words."

"Can Santa help my dad find da words?"

Wit dat he just paused, den took me off his lap. He went in da oddah room and he went up to my maddah and I dunno what he said or where he found da words, but da two of dem wuz hugging in da end. Den she wen go slap his head. But aftah dat he smiled and dey wen go hug each oddah again. Dat wuz one really good Christmas.



My sistah wen pretty much give up pushing da suit on me. She trying for get somebody else, anybody else for do 'em. She only ask my braddah once, cuz he get da best excuse. He just came straight from work so he nevah bocha yet.

I see her making da rounds asking everybody. Da guys from work, dey jus make like da Tree Billy Goats Gruff.

Andren tell, "Oh. Tank you for asking, but I not plump enough for be Santa. You should ask my co-worker Rocky. His belly's bigger than mine."

Den when my sistah ask Rocky, Rocky tell, "I flattered for be considered also, but I not big enough for be Santa either, but you like know who get one even mo' bigger stomach? You should ask my co-worker Wilder."

Den when my sistah finally find Wilder, Wilder tell, "Eh, so what you saying? If anybody, you should ask Andren. Andren eat way mo' than me. He always grabbing two plates."

"You always giving me da second plate. And da second plate, das not for me, das for Tera," Andren says in his defense.

Overhearing, Kandy with her big eyes, goes ova to Andren and says "And who's Tera?!"

"Oh, she's just a pornstar I nevah met. Inside joke, honey."

"We go see how funny dat joke is when we get home."

I glad my family is getting for see one glimpse of how good fun my co-workers can be. Tinking about 'em, I tink I used to be li'dat too before. Like two different people depending who I wuz with. I know I used to ack different when I wuz around women. But since I found Kawehi, I dunno. I tink I ack same.

Maybe I being selfish. I know my manly faddah probably nevah like putting on da Santa Claus clothes either, but he jus did 'em for make ma and us happy. I wondah if dat made him feel good or what? I call my sistah ova and her and Kawehi take me to da kitchen wea dey help me put on da suit. Da clothes still get his smell on top, dat Old Spice smell. My sistah asks me if I know what for do. I tell her shouldn't be one problem.



During da car ride home, Kawehi asks me what changed my mind. I tell her I just realized what's important and dat maybe I little bit more open to getting married now. So for play around during da long car ride home we have anoddah one of our debates of da virtues and

vices of marriage. Usually I win these debates, so it's always pretty pleasurable for me for be argumentative.

"Marriage is difficult," is da contention I put forth.

"World peace is difficult. Should we not strive for someting jus cuz it's hard?"

"Cost lotta money for get married."

"But sometimes couples come out ahead cuz people give money to married couples at their weddings."

"You can have only one sexual partner."

"Ah-ha, but dat means less chance of catching diseases."

"Do we really need for get married for express our ultimate love for each oddah? If I jus say I love you, das nuff, ah?"

"No."

"Marriage is just one piece papah saying people love each oddah. Cuz basically, marriage is just one societal invention. It's just one formality. Cuz even if we got married, we would still love each oddah da same, right? Marriage is just one big government conspiracy. Da government is in business of selling all kine licenses. For get married you need one license. For ride your bicycle you need one license. For go fishing you need one license. For have one dog you need one license. Das all kine extra taxes da government stay imposing on you. We should join da Tax Party protesters and rebel. We should be advocates of doing away wit dis whole institution known as marriage."

"If you had your way and there were no marriages, den tinkin of da consequences to your reckless actions. If nevah have marriages, den wedding planners, wedding photographers,

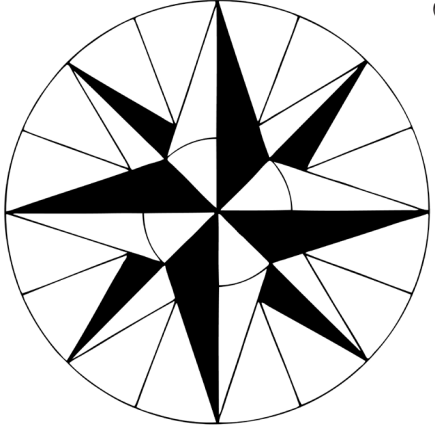
wedding limo drivers, wedding cake makers, wedding singers, wedding gown designers, wedding caterers, wedding ring store owners, wedding banquet hall workers, wedding ministers, bumbye you know what would happen. Yup, Bumbye. . . dey all. . . NO MO' JOB."

I gotta admit, das one pretty good argument. She has me with dat one.



N

disnified eyes



Crustacean trees

The jungle revels in debauched lewdness.

-Werner Herzog

Lawless, the only equilibrium
chaos, buoyed by the tangled fen
of trees stubborn or stupid or admirable enough
to insist that water is land. Justly
punished, their imperialist fervor:
forced to display their greatest indignity
– wormy guts, secret histories –
stilted over what sustains
and would drown them.

Crustacean trees, slow nomads
crawling from hostile germination,
bearing to stark daylight their grotesque
exoskeletal ribs, who promenade
what they would conceal
in this brackish morass
of vulgar surfeit,

to disnified eyes an enchanted pathway, petrified
corridor to kingdoms of balance,
braided by an intellect, forever
preserved, forever frozen, an intricate
delicate lattice.

Mangroves of the Sierpe † Joseph Sacksteder

But crabs are undignified
– they do not bury their dead –
in the blitz of frantic scuttle
sculling blindly backwards.
Crocodiles, too, have no hindsight,
no foresight, seeing only/always side-
long, askance, lurking unseemly, obscenely unseen,
nature’s perverts.

Not petrified, not yet –
stagnant, not static,
this arborous ouroboros –
slower than patience,
slower than patience,

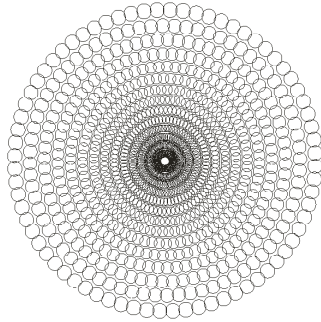
but roiling
but choking
all the same.



Strange Fruit



Paper Heiau



Peanut Cowboys



The Noble Savages

By D. Kūhiō

I suffered no pain, my hunger had taken the edge off; instead I felt pleasantly empty, untouched by everything around me and happy to be unseen by all.

-Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*

Lauhala, Underground Organs, and Empty Stomachs

The amber glow of horizon over the dark Pacific is not what it seems. It's just a streetlight outside my apartment window, slicing through my dozy eyes. So I shut them tighter and the warm scene goes away. It's freezing in my apartment. I couldn't pay the last gas bill. So I just layer myself with two Hawaiian quilts that have found their importance in this city. Before heaving myself out of bed to get ready for work, I try replicating that morning sunrise again, squinting. It doesn't come.

My walk to work is made through fog that feels like water-soaked cotton sliding across my

cheeks through the darkness. It's five in the morning. The cardboard forts and blanketed trains of shopping carts are parked in front of the city shops. I try to imagine the sleeping positions of the homeless men and women inside them. My footsteps are brisk with respectful precision, trying not to disturb these people who fight for those cold pockets of storefronts on a daily basis, to hold them for only a few hours. Every streetlight is a star.

Jon is with me this morning. He drank too much last night and fell asleep on my couch with a tumbler of whiskey in hand. We are walking side by side through the cold now. The fog is revealing only the lower halves of the buildings in the financial district. They look like the bottoms of giant square tree stumps in some cubist version of a rain forest. Jon's ginger hair glows as we pass under the streetlights. I remember watching his tilting glass and the trickled ribbon of liquor on the hardwood before I slipped it from his hand and tossed a blanket over his chest. The perforated contact of liquor with floor reminded me of the sound that that Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka trading card made in the spokes of my childhood bicycle; hot summer days spent racing down Kilauea Avenue back home.

"Your neighborhood is unusual in the morning, Maka," Jon says, rubbing the alcoholic sleep from his face.

"I know, man." I blow heat into my cupped palms. "I think that's why I like it." I smile at him in the dark, my hands taking shelter in the thin pockets of my green wind-jacket. I bite my collar to bring it above my chin. I'm guessing Jon enjoys my company as much as I enjoy his. There we were again, last night at my place, sharing comfortable silences between talking about everything and nothing. We just sat there, taking sips, listening to the sounds coming through the warped walls of my apartment: some drawers sliding open on the left, someone playing Marvin

Gaye on the right, a pair of high heels clacking above our heads before hearing the slamming of a door.

The imperfections in the sidewalks shine as water puddles under the halos of the streetlights. Cold is soaking into my shoe a bit, and quickens up into my spine. I think about Kwami: the three silver-steeled hoops in his bottom lip; his dreadlocks hiding his face. He hasn't shown up for work in three days.

"Thanks for letting me crash," Jon says. "I like your place. What'd you call that mat in your hallway? Lau, something?"

He seems a little out of sorts this morning, turning left when we should be turning right. But I assume it's because my route to work is not his own. We all have our patterns. Even though he lives a few blocks up from me, our neighborhoods are vastly different. His is filled with high-society types: socialites, financial executives. Jon always tells me that he comes from this wealthy family that loves, but doesn't understand him. Whenever he says this, the drooped corners of his mouth look like my own whenever I open another bill in the mail.

"Lauhala," I say, turning my face in Jon's direction, acknowledging his gratitude while we keep walking. "Don't mention it. You'd do the same for me. Only, I don't think your mother'd like the sight of my dirty shoes on her expensive coffee table." We chuckle in the cold and I observe the visual patterns our laughs make as we exhale each warm breath into the chill. Shoes, in the house: The thought, once so foreign to me, makes me sigh. I send up one more puff of warm breath alone.

We hang a left on Leavenworth Street. Steam plumes up through the holes of the sewer lids as if there's an enormous underground organ playing a song beneath the city. Across the street,

the bookstore lights are on which means Jeffrey, our supervisor, has already arrived. Our two-story building is nestled between two larger, corporate monstrosities—they are in the Bauhaus style, and beg to be tagged by the young graffiti bombers that I've met through Kwami.

The bookstore looks like the middle of an H that's dropped down to the ground between the two buildings on each side. Large bay windows stretch ceiling to floor, and line the street-side walls of both levels. Inside, we've set up equally tall wooden bookcases to channel the sunlight through the windows and into aisles that stretch to the center of the store. Even after working there for as long as I have, I can still admit that the effect is beautiful. On some mornings, I catch myself gazing out. My hands stop shelving books, as if they've minds of their own; like they're waiting patiently for that deep orange glow, fluxing through, to ricochet off each of the book spines.

Inside, I know for sure that Jeffrey's sipping his soy latte with pretentious purpose while deciding how to work us to death again without lifting a finger himself.

I wonder what he's going to do about Kwami.

A homeless man is huddled under some insulation padding in front of the service bell to the bookstore. After I cautiously step over him to ring the buzzer, and before Jeffrey saunters to the front door to let us in, latte in hand, I catch a glimpse of the summer day beginning to fracture between two skyscrapers behind us. My chin is still tucked into my tall collar. Every summer here is like a warm heart beating through the windows of the bookstore. When we are sealed up inside for most of the day, I have visions of Hau Bush beach at noon, picking limu from the reef, and the way sunlight glistens off freshly cubed poke.

"Morning gents," Jeffrey says. All chipper in his lactose intolerance.

I let Jon reciprocate the pleasantries, and I just nod as we enter. It's much warmer inside. The company leaves the air conditioning off during our shift to save money. Jeff locks the door behind us and we are sealed in for the next five hours. I can smell the pages of every book and it soothes my empty stomach.

"Is Bry-Boy here yet, Jeffrey?" I ask. I'm squinting away from the track lighting shooting beams of holy light onto the Bestsellers table. Bry makes us a team of four, including Kwami, not including Jeff. All our paychecks say Book Shelves under job position. We are the menhune of the bookstore, and when we get too full of ourselves, we are dispensers of culture. I don't even bring up Kwami with Jeffrey.

"Why, yes. I believe he is, Kamaka," he answers. Smart-ass prick. "Unless I let in his doppelganger this morning." He sips his coffee and the matte white foam contrasts with his shiny upper lip. Probably lip balmed, thrice over, cherry. I imagine his hands to be extremely soft, like a baby. He's always lotioning, oiling, lotioning. But it's fine, because I can always smell him coming. A sudden whiff of apple cherry extracts weaving through the bookcases means—look busy.

"Why don't we start with Self-Help this morning," Jeff says. "Then we need to get through Health and Medicine. Oh, and Kamaka? You can replenish the bestsellers if you don't mind. You're good at that." He doesn't know he is smiling at the coiled snake behind my eyes. It's waiting for him to get closer.

Post-Human Futures, Peanut Cowboys, and Shelving In the H's

Four days ago, Kwami and I were shelving books in the African-American literature

section. He was on another one of his philosophical tirades, and his slightly slurred speech told me he was still smashed from the night before. His sermons were always spectacular whenever his sweat smelt like vodka.

“Shoot, Maka!” Kwami shouted as we shelved. “You gonna tell me more bout those peanut cowboys? That shit iz dope, son!” There was more lint in his dreadlocks than usual and they hung down over his face like the gnarled vines of the banyan trees back home. This told me he had slept in the streets again. He was referring to the conversation we had had about Hawaiian cowboys. That morning, another deep orange dawn lit up the tinted glass of the building across the street, and we were bathing in it.

“You mean the paniolos.” I turned to answer him while stretching, arm extended, to shelve the hard cover, annotated edition, of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: first published in 1852, also cross-referenced in our African-American Studies section—third floor, go up the escalator, hang a right when you reach the life-sized cardboard display of Suzie Orman.

Kwami was in the H’s, shelving Alex Haley.

“Word! Paniolos. Sorry Makaz no dizrespek.”

I never, ever, think Kwami disrespects me, even when he runs off to the Bibles section and comes back to recite, badly, from Da Jesus Book. He has no filters and I admire that about him. It makes him decent in my eyes.

“They’re just cowboys,” I answered. “I forgot why I mentioned it though. Maybe cuz you was talking about da conquistadors dat time.” He’s the only one I’ve felt comfortable speaking Pidgin to. “Or maybe cuz you was going off about George Washington Carver and how he wen invent peanut buttah.”

“Haha, yeah son! Carver was the Black Leonardo Da Vinci!”

Kwami couldn't remember most of that conversation. I knew he was drunk that last time too. He clearly had been going through something, but what, I did not know. We were close, but only in the way an island is close with a hurricane. Just torrential gusts that flip your reality upside-down, leaving you stripped of everything you thought was dear to you. There in the rubble, you stand naked, and thankful for that brief and violent glimpse. He tried to tuck a matted dreadlock back with the rest, burping while he slid Zora Neale Hurston onto the shelf. Bubbles of vodka drifted toward me and popped in midair.

“Yeah das it,” I continued, pretending to myself that he was present in the conversation. “Da vaqueros. Dey brought deir cowboy-ways ova to Hawaii. Actually, doze fucking Conquistadors brought it to da Americas in da sixteenth, I tink. I go look um up real quick. Be right back. Watch my back for Jeffrey. Tink he stay using sumting wit coconut in it today.”

I didn't wait for a response from Kwami, walked away, and passed by Jon and Bry-Boy, shelving in the Science Fiction section.

Bry-Boy is the newest Shelver. We cut him some slack because he's a fast learner. We all have this unspoken understanding between us, and this we explained to Bry-Boy on his second day (most newbies, don't make it past the first day, not realizing how physical the job actually is). Being trapped inside of a bookstore for five hours everyday is probably the most freeing experience of our lives right now. All personal problems, besides the ones we choose to share with each other, seem to get locked out as we are locked in. All we have are each other, the printed words, and our desperate search for the right ones.

“What's on the menu today, Bry?” Jon asked him.

Bry-Boy flipped the book over to read the title and spoke in Jon's direction. "*Supermen: Tales of the Posthuman Future*. Any good?"

Jon's knowledge of all things literary is formidable, and scary at times.

"Ah! That's that anthology of short stories right?" Jon answered through his teeth. "All different takes on what we evolve into in the future." He had an arm's length of hardcovers between his palms and his chin, looking like he was performing some T'ai Chi posture: Needle At Bottom Of The Sea—With Books In Outstretched Hands.

With all that brain, you'd think Jon would've fit in with the over-educated wealth of his family. But each night at my place, he would vent about how his Ivy League brothers would go on and on about their latest investments, pulling their trousers down to see who had the biggest trust fund. He'd speak of how his equally rich girlfriend never really engaged him in his random musings on things: the deceptive humor of Jorge Luis Borges' short stories, the origins of human virtue, and the moments when you pass by your own reflection on the street and can't recognize yourself. They just don't get me Kamaka, he'd say. One night, a few years back, Jon showed up at my door smelling like a bon fire, the right side of his face bashed in. He tried to laugh through his split lip at my horrified reaction. "Preppy jocks," he said. "Don't like it when you burn American flags on the beach." I let him in and we watched the replay of Bush landing on that aircraft carrier in the Gulf.

"Yeah Bry, check that one out. How's that Michel De Montaigne book I gave you? Liking it?" Jon asked sounding normal again, his hands and chin now free of books.

"Yeah, I finished it last night." Bry-Boy's spiked blonde hair pointed in three different directions like confused missile turrets. "I liked it. Great stuff. I brought it to work for you. Thanks

again.”

“Nah, man. Keep it. We don’t really lend books here, Bry,” Jon said.

In this artificial village that is our bookstore, it’s rumored that Jeffrey is about to get fired. The gossip has been spreading in cupped whispers through our rowed and columned geometric forest. We’re all secretly hoping for Jon to take his place as the new chief of our little tribe.

I was about to probe Jon’s brain about the vaqueros, when a loud crash, and then the soft but heavy sound of books hitting the carpeted floors echoed through the store, and dissolved the thought. It came from Kwami’s direction. We all stood there, Jon, Bry-Boy, and I staring at each other with large eyes.

Origin Myths

The first time I met Kwami was two years ago. I thought our management was crazy for hiring him at first. I had never met anyone like Kwami in all my life. Two seconds after the smell of lavender—ultra moisturizing—stung the tip of my nose, I saw Jeffrey, who was pigeon-chested, trying to make up for his lack of verticalness, turn into the aisle. Kwami’s six-foot frame loomed towards me. His dreads were cleaner than, nicely formed and to the root. You could see his whole face when he tied them into a bun. His dark black skin was beautifully rich then too, no rash or sores anywhere. There were no holes in his black and white flannel that hid his beer belly, and his baggy jeans were only slightly frayed at the edges. He twisted one loose dreadlock between his fingers; head tilted, three evenly spaced piercings on his large pink bottom lip, and shook my hand solidly. Weeks later when he found out I was from Hawai’i and part Hawaiian, he called me

a noble savage for a week straight.

It's all G. I reprazent the lineage of strange fruit, son!

He rapped out some of that Billie Holiday song, beat-boxing between the verses:

*Pastoral scene of the gallant south,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.*

He spit the words into his fist belligerently, even when he was sober—fingers curving around an invisible microphone.

Maybe I saw the crack in him. You know the crack. That little fracture in all of us that reveals more than we'd like to admit. I felt that chaos, lurking beneath his skin, bubbling thick like pahoehoe lava. He walked that line between absolute delirium and mind-sobering truth that always brought me a kind of private confirmation that I wasn't crazy. For some reason, I wanted to tell him that my skin used to be much darker.

He came over to my place a lot back then too.

"Believe it or not, I just dropped out of Yale," he'd said.

"Yale? Damn Kwami. Dat's uh, impressive."

"Haha! I know what you're thinking, Kamaka. I know. I don't look like the Skull and Bones type." He made an X with his forearms and raised them in front of his face, striking a pose in my apartment. "It's all good, son."

"What da hell you doing working at a bookstore den, man?" I really wanted to know. I

told him I'd been asking myself that question, since I dropped out of art school. I wanted to hear someone else's answer.

"Well, the street art scene is pretty tight out here, man. It's the only thing I can stand doing, really."

"I hear you. Anything in the works?" I ask.

Yeah man. I already have this project lined up at this café in Chinatown. The owner wants some art put up on her walls. She wants to attract a younger crowd.

"Das great news, man!"

"Haha! You can tell that to my Pops. He's about to cut me off, son!" He stopped smiling when he said that and began to play with one of his dreadlocks. "Yeah my folks think I'm crazy. But, I got dis! Us savages gotta stick it out. Right yo?"

I was the first to run over to where I left Kwami, back in the H's. Before I could see anything, I heard the sound of fists smashing against something hard, and then the sound of wooden shards peppering the tiled floor. Turning the corner, I saw him standing there, in the middle of a collapsed book case: his fist was bleeding, and blood trickled from his knuckles down to the broken shelving and scattered books lying at his feet. Multiple dust-jacket pictures of Lorraine Hansberry, and Jamaica Kincaid stared up at us from the wreckage. A Maya Angelou book lay on the floor with wide-open covers. He was steeped in destruction up to his knees.

"What the fuck, Kwami?" My arms raised; fingers clasped above my head.

"Sorry, Maka." He couldn't even look at me, and fell to the floor cross-legged, elbows dug into his knees. He spoke through his tears with his head in his hands. "My family don't give

a fuck, man! I'm such a fucking loser. Ever since I told them what I'm doing out here, they've disowned my black ass!" His tears ran down the contours of his face and made the metallic hoops on his bottom lip shine.

"Kwami," I said, kicking aside broken shelves and books to make a path to him. I bent down and swept my hand across his back over and over. Jon and Bry-Boy had already begun picking up some of the books and were stacking them off to the side quietly.

"Doctors or fucking lawyers, Maka. That's the only way to be."

My fear wasn't Kwami's state of mind, or his injuries. I could smell the lotion in the air.

"Let's get this shit cleaned up before Jeffrey gets up here," I said.

"Yeah, there's an extra bookcase in the storage closet," Jon said, pointing behind him with his thumb. "Why don't you go get that, Kamaka? Bry, could you go with him? I'll clean this stuff up."

Jon and I convinced Jeffrey that the bookcase toppled over on its own. We explained it to him like children explaining why a cake suddenly went missing—frosting smeared all over our faces. But he bought it. That was the last day I saw Kwami. I made him hide out in the kids' section to sober up on the floor pillows, between Early Readers and those thick books that babies like to chew on. When the store opened at ten o'clock, he was gone.

Walkabouts and Talkabouts

Under the divine light of Bestselling Hardcover, I stack the John Grishams and Eckhart Tolles in neat towers. I alternate the book spines as I build the paper heiau around the wood table

closest to the store entrance.

Jeffrey is lingering behind me. I hear the foam slurping through his teeth.

“So, Kamaka,” he begins. “Any word from Kwami?”

I want to tell him that I’ve heard from Kwami and that he’s got this great new job, even though I haven’t. I want to tell him that I know what he does while we are busting our asses to make him look good. I want to ask him what he would do without us. But I don’t.

“No, I believe I haven’t, Jeffrey,” I say without turning around to speak to him. I run my fingers along the columns of books, wondering what I can afford for lunch with the loose change in my pockets. “Maybe he’s really sick.”

“I know you two are close,” he says, laughing a little. “But I want you to keep this to yourself until it becomes official. I am letting Kwami go. He’s had three no shows and that’s grounds for firing.”

I don’t tell him the other unofficial news, and smile at him without showing any teeth. A little past noon, I leave the store for my half hour lunch break. By now the streets are filled with people and the city air removes the smell of books from my clothes. The storefronts are swept clean, no cardboard forts. I decide to skip eating—it would only be a boiled egg and a banana anyway—and head for the one spot that I hope to find Kwami.

I weave through streets, between buses tethered to electrical lines which spread above my head like giant spider webs, through pods of small but hardy Chinese women with pink plastic bags, and around the posh bagel shop and eateries that sometimes make my stomach growl. I find him in the alley, outside the Chinese café. The place is full of smiling teenagers huddled in groups around their laptops. He’s sitting on an overturned wooden box outside the entrance, next to neat

piles of soggy flattened cardboard boxes wrapped in twine.

He sees me coming, jerks his head up acknowledging me. I squat down next to him, balancing all my weight on one foot.

“Sup, dude,” I say. I don’t ask him how he’s been. I don’t know how.

“Wassup, Maka.”

For a few seconds there’s only silence. We watch the vendors enter and exit the stores around us. We don’t even look at each other. Broken English conversations, and the smells of a Chinatown afternoon are spilling into the moist alley air: *Where you want dis one Mr. Kang?* Ripe mangoes. *Ova here.* Dim sum. *No that’s not fo sale.* Wet asphalt.

Then Kwami starts.

“Listen bro, I m sorry for pullin a berserk at work.” He twists one of his dreadlocks again and it breaks free from his scalp and flops like spaghetti between his fingers. “Oh shit, son! Now, that’s fucked up!” He laughs and slides it into his shirt pocket. The owner of the café, a small Chinese woman with a bright red dress that seems to match her cheerful demeanor, comes outside to hand Kwami a menu. She sees me there, too, smiles and walks back inside. This is when Kwami explains to me that she gives him free food for all his help with bringing in business for her.

I’m still kneeling, and catch our reflection in some windows across the street from us. I stare, and see Kwami looking at us too. The black brick wall behind us is filled with Kwami’s artwork: Enormous portraits of famous thinkers like Confucius, Emerson, Chief Seattle; beautifully rendered using spray paint. Under each face, Kwami has written a quote. Our reflection shows us sitting between two of them, written in large red lettering, still wet and

dripping:

SOMETHING - - RALPH WALDO EMERSON
WHEN A MAN IS PUSHED, TORMENTED, DEFEATED, HE HAS A CHANCE TO LEARN

ALL THINGS ARE CONNECTED LIKE THE BLOOD WHICH UNITES ONE FAMILY.
- CHIEF SEATTLE -

“So what’s next for you, brah?” I ask.

“Hah. Look at you. Noble Savage! Always thinking ahead. I like that.”

He talks about his father always putting him down. I talk about how I hate living paycheck to paycheck. The woman comes out of the café again and hands Kwami two manapua, some halfmoon dumplings that Tūtū always brought home from her trips to Honolulu Chinatown, and a bag of fortune cookies. “You eat, no moa fortune insigh,” the owner says, pointing to the clear plastic bag. “For you and your friend. Still taise good!”

After Kwami and I thank her, she heads back into her café, smiling at all her customers.

“So, I gotz one space left on this wall yo!” Kwami says. “Whatchu think Makz?”

“Who’d you have in mind?” I ask.

“Oh, I don’t know. Spit some verse at me, son!”

“Well,” I begin, “there is dis one ‘ōlelo no‘eau dat’s always stuck wit me.” A breeze blows

through the street and sweeps the hair from our brows. "He puko'a kani 'aina."

"That sounds dope! What's it mean?" He stands up, pulls a pen and sketchbook from his back pocket, and sits back down on the wooden box.

"It just says dat eventually, a coral reef hardens into land," I answer, closing my eyes when another breeze brushes across my face.

"Nice one, Maka. Who said that?" he asks.

"Not sure. It's jus one Hawaiian saying my grandfather always told me."

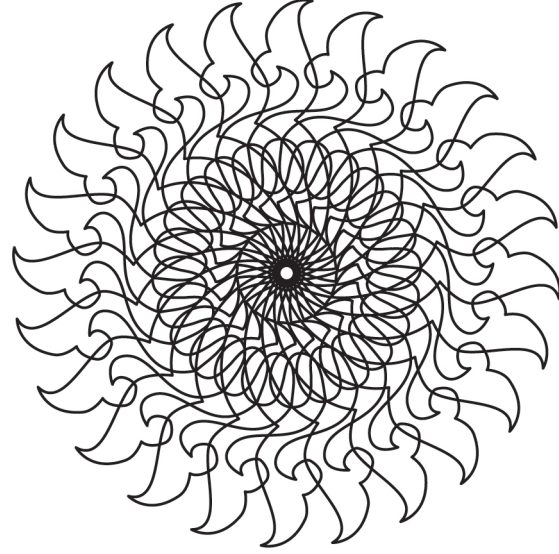
"That's tight. Stay still, bro." He starts to sketch me.

"What da fuck you doing, Kwami?" I say laughing, covering my face with my hands.

"Nah. No worries, yo. I do you justice. I swear."

I forget about the time, and about going back to work to finish my shift. Jon eventually calls me on my cell phone, and I tell him where to meet us. We sit there, Kwami and I, talking while the shops begin closing down. Metal shutters are lowered and the hustle for sleeping spaces begins again. Jon shows up with Bry-Boy in tow, and with a bottle of whiskey he stole from his father's endless stash. We all listen to Kwami talk about peanut butter, alternating between laughing and nodding seriously. When we are not talking, the air is filled with crunches of fortuneless fortune cookies.





Терлось тельце телка

(untitled)

There, shadows plough fallen eyelashes,
 There, in the realm of pre-adamic intelligence,
 Centaurs take umbrage like deer,
 Burying tomahawks into competitors.

1958

There, a sky of rooms hung with red calico,
 A feathery wild boar breaks out into the smoke;
 Naked legs lament in the catacombs,
 Being fingered like harmonies.

1958

Там тени павших пашут на ресницах,
 Там, в царстве доадамовой смекалки,
 Кентавры негодуют по-оленьи,
 В соперников втыкая томгавки.

Там, кумачом завесив небо комнат,
 Перистый вебрь выпрыгивает в дым;
 Нагие ноги ноют в катакомбах,
 Перебираемые, как лады.

(untitled)

The cow cuddled the calf
All through the stalls of the stable,
The cow's nose nudged the calf
Out into the open lot.
The calf came out of the cow-barn
Ahead of the herd, loped through the lot
And basked in the field like a dappled sunbather,
Asked for nothing but stems and petals.

1958

Терлось тельце телка
Об устойчивые стены стойла.
Нос коровий тельца толкал,
Выводил на пастырь просточный.
Теленок вышел из коровника,
Стадности не стыдясь, пересек пастырь
И нежился в поле пестрым курортником,
Жил, пережевывая стебли и лепестки.

(untitled)

A cannonade shot out underfoot like a deck,
 The gunner downed on the autumn detritus,
 As the pet of a battalion
 Bumped the back of his head on the boards.
 The pig-tailed sutler swaddles the fallen one
 in a tobacco-pouch,
 permeated with formaline and sap,
 in memory of the Emperor Paul.

1958

Пальба из-под уходила как палуба,
 Падал пушкарь на осеннюю подстилку,
 Словно батальонный баловень
 Бил о поле затылком.
 Павшего запеленает в кисет,
 Формалином и соком древесным пропахший,
 Маркитант-носитель косы
 Памяти императора Павла.

(untitled)

An elk lifts a cross of branching antlers,
like an idol, over the underbrush.
He cuts out his right to the cow
From the tenderest muscles of his rival.
A hunting horn sounds in the glen
And wounds as far as the salt,
The comely virgin doe breathe in
The cruel scent of father and son.

1959

Сохагый крест рогов, как идола,
Возносит над кустарником.
Корову не выигрывает, а выпиливает
Из самых нежных мышц соперника.
Звучит в юдоли гонный рог
И ранит бок до соли.
Вдыхают важенки пригожие
Жестокий запах отца и сына.

(untitled)

Animals put on their shoes in snowy tracks
 Or go to ground.
 Plants tormented by the cold
 Into labyrinths if roots and bulbs.
 People shrink as small as shoes
 Like little boats on reservoirs.
 Under the ice, as under a warm sky,
 Photomeadow, photowood, photosummer.

1962

Животные обуваются в снежные следы
 Или впадают в логово.
 Растения гонимы холодом
 В лабиринты корней и луковиц.
 Люди уменьшают до размеров обуви
 Присущие водоемам лады.
 Подо льдом, как под теплым небом,
 Фотолуг, фотолес, фотолето.



By Philip Asaph

She was a social researcher, and had actually been affiliated with Harvard University as part of a team which had issued an important, ignored report on the mental health of the American people. Though nobody would accuse me of the superficial type of laborer who judges his customers on the basis of their externals, this was a credential that rocked. She was also nice to look at, and I was looking a lot.

A pretty middle-ager who knew she was pretty, she wore a white jacket over a button-down blouse and a pair of pressed jeans. Her jewelry was a series of subtle accents, rather than anchors, and her voice rose beautifully from the belly. She was the kind of woman other women would be quick to notice, but slow to condemn. She wore her sunglasses easily in her hair and had a habit of touching her hip, an unconscious gesture which captured my attention and inflated my chest. The way she tilted her head communicated an alert intelligence.

She was new to Long Island and therefore probably shocked by the preponderance of curt cashiers and the impossible cost of living. She was a stranger to me, a name on some wooden crates in the warehouse, where her stuff had been in storage for a month. I was just one of three grubby gentlemen making the local delivery, the one with a faded red bandana on his head, a tiny diamond shining in his ear, a beard now sprouting undeniably gray hairs and a case of god-begging loneliness. My life was a desert and women were water. So yes, I wanted to impress her. Maybe flash a credential of my own.

I briefly considered telling her that I was not only an artist at moving furniture, but a writer as well, and had once won a free ride through grad school on the basis of ten pages of poetry. Like all unpublished authors though, I dreaded the inevitable question, Have you published a book yet? So as I humped her belongings into her new home, I kept hoping the lady would catch a glimpse of my soul. Or at least notice my flexing biceps.

"Where would you like this piece?" I asked her, my voice light and easy as I fought a bulky white chair through the doorway of her kitchen.

"In the den," she replied with a smile and maybe half a wink, "facing the fireplace."

Wow, I thought as I set the heavy, wing-backed chair on its legs in the den, beauty, brains and manners. Good communicator too—she didn't talk down to me at all—and she was pouring out her guts from the get-go.

She was originally from Texas, where she had left her husband, an oil executive, after he--under the influence of vodka martinis and lots of cocaine--had totaled his third Mercedes when he'd missed the driveway and smashed into a tree on the front lawn. Then he'd fallen into the foyer with a nineteen-year-old stripper, who'd announced, "Hi, I'm Pepper, and I'm down for a threesome--got any strawberries?"

“How did you know she was nineteen?” I asked.

“I asked her,” the researcher said.

“What were the strawberries for?”

“I have no idea; I left immediately.”

Adjusting the sweat-soaked bandana on my scalp, I thought about strawberries and sex. How were they connected? What had I missed? Wrinkling my eyebrows as I went out to the truck, I wondered if I was a guy who lacked creativity in the sack. And then I was back in the kitchen, projecting confidence like a rock star.

We were bringing everything in through the kitchen because that was the most efficient route—less steps. Men who are still working hard when they’re older are men who have learned to work smarter.

“After seventeen years of marriage,” she continued, “my husband comes home with Pepper the bimbo, and then tells me to go get the Viagra. Can you believe it?”

I looked at her body without looking at it and got a little lost in her face. If she were a wife of mine, I would not be crashing into trees with any fruity teenager. But yes, I could believe it. Alcohol makes all things possible, cocaine accelerates what alcohol creates; and middle-aged husbands are notorious for the old-monkey/young monkey mid-life madness that always ends badly--or sadly--for everyone, except the nineteen-year-old stripper.

“Terrible,” I told her, shaking my head as I carried a stack of cartons marked POTS & PANS toward some open floor-space near the refrigerator, “Terrible.”

If I was not overly moved by her story, it was because I had heard similar tales during many jobs before. People get freaky when they move and since movers are the quintessential nobodies, people tell them all kinds of private stuff. What’s your mover going to do--write a book?

It’s not that I was numb to her situation or ignorant of the state of mind it produced. I too knew the misery and madness of divorce. On that particular day, however,

my sympathy for other people's emotional injuries was at low tide. My right shoulder was hurting like hell; it felt like ground-up glass in there. Her damn pots and pans were definitely not aluminum—they had to be cast iron. I was gritting my teeth and cursing silently when I set those cartons on the floor. And perspiring profusely. But as I straightened up and faced the customer again, I was smiling like a guy in a toothpaste commercial, because happiness is attractive and suffering is not.

"Is that all you have to say?" she asked, her voice as flat as the world before Columbus. She was about to pour me a glass of lemonade. Two glasses were on the counter and the container was in her hand. "Terrible?"

"Pepper deserves the scarlet letter branded across her forehead," I replied. "And your former husband should get both his boys snipped off. How'd you do in the divorce settlement?"

"Quite well, thank you. I used his own video as evidence."

Liar. She knew what those strawberries were for.

I guzzled down the lemonade then slid the glass across the counter for more. She poured me another which I drank just as fast, feeling grateful that she had finally noticed I was dehydrating. She didn't know it but she had passed her first big test by seeing me as a human being. Her next test was whether she would remember the other two men, who were so thirsty their bodies had ceased sweating. I wiped my mouth nonchalantly, hoping she'd pick up my thought-waves, but she wiped an imaginary spill off the counter instead.

Okay, maybe next trip, I thought. She was way too pretty to judge harshly.

I was just about to head back to the truck for another carry when she told me her ex would have made an excellent case-study.

"He's a perfect example of what's wrong with us."

“Dysfunctional to the max,” I agreed.

I could tell she was about to launch into it, the findings of her research. Like anybody whose work had been part of something big and important, she wanted to yak about it. I didn’t mind, I liked learning; it was refreshing to be communicating with an intelligent customer. But I also needed a cigarette, especially if we were going to get into anything heavy; so I asked her for two more glasses of her generous Paul Newman’s lemonade.

“For the other guys,” I explained.

She wasn’t going to get it without help, I saw. Perhaps my brothers with their messier looks and lesser vocabularies passed under the radar of the lady’s social graces. Happens. All the time.

“I can’t believe I forgot about them,” she said, surprising me with a credible tone of embarrassment.

“Where are my manners?” She poured two more glasses and put them in my hands. “And tell them to come back for more whenever they like.”

Good save, I thought, giving her a B minus. Then I told her the guys needed my help in the truck and that I’d be back in a fast five. She smiled, moved her hair, and sipped her lemonade. She liked me; I could tell.

Waltzing the glasses down the driveway and up the ramp like a make-believe waiter, I joined my buddies who were already on a smoke-break.

“Here,” I told them, “She said she thought you might be thirsty.”

“About time,” one said.

“What? No beer?” said the other.

Sitting on the edge of the truck and rotating my shoulder like a bird with a bad wing, I smoked a butt, taking the working person’s vacation and maxxing out every second of it. The sun on my face was a mighty fine thing; the breeze on forearms, pure luxury. It was very nice indeed to notice the flowering trees, especially the pink one,

a dogwood. Then I saw two white moths wiggling in the air over the lawn, and then a bumble bee. It was the big one, the queen, hovering like a B-2 bomber over some dipping daffodils.

Amazing, I thought, how suddenly every year it's spring.

"I see how you're working that nice-guy thing," one of my coworkers said. "That's maybe gonna pay off for you. Chicks fall for that shit all the time."

"You got a shot," said the other. "She's definitely checking you out, so keep your stomach sucked in and cough up a sense of humor. Guys who are fun get laid; the serious ones masturbate."

"Hey, thanks for staying away," I told them both as I retrieved their empty glasses, pinching them between the fingers of one hand. "Very cool of you to give me some space with the lady."

"That's right," said the one who was closer to the world, "So if we work together tomorrow, you can buy me breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Just remember: Get her laughing now, you'll have her moaning later."

"You're wise," I said, grabbing a pair of dining room chairs with my free hand, "And if this were some Long Island girl on a barstool, I'd take that advice and run with it. But first off, she's a transplant from a different state and second, she's woman of some depth and dimensions. Know what I'm saying, bro? She's like a mansion with many rooms in it."

He turned to the other guy at once. "Bet you five bucks he blows it."

"I'll take that bet," said the other. "Some girls go for the sensitive type, especially if the last one was a monster. Plus, I think you're forgetting the obvious: The pants of recently divorced women are famous for coming off fast."

"Wanna make it ten?"

"Ten it is," said the one who seemed to be my

supporter.

“A fool and his money,” said the other.

The guy who was for me shook his head.

“I’m just seeing what’s right in front of me. She’s gone to college and so has he. And the overeducated ones get off on ideas. Didn’t you hear them before, when we were carrying the couch in, talking about the failure of the American education system? That’s foreplay for them.”

“Ah, you’re a dreamer too. Keep watching, he’ll drop the ball.”

“Hey,” I said, “I’m still here.”

But neither ceased their argument, so I split. Carrying the chairs and glasses down the ramp and up the driveway, I shook my head as if to escape a buzzing bug, and threw them both in the back of my mind along with the beatings of childhood and a lifetime of rejections. True, when it came to seduction, I sucked. But this was something new; I was not a book being judged by its cover. When I stepped through the doorway of the kitchen, my intellectual conversation with the babe resumed at once.

Actually, it was more like a lecture than a conversation. But I was cool with that. She was a social researcher and I was a mover. She was filling in my blanks. “Tell me more,” I kept saying as I schlepped her possessions, and trip after trip, she did.

She spoke of our declining times as ominous, yet her tone remained matter-of-fact, almost scientific. I started to worry that she might be clinical in bed. But she also spoke as one having authority and that gave me the good tingles, because intelligence is almost as sexy as kindness.

She spoke; I listened. We were doing the Mars and Venus thing to perfection. I really got the vibe that she was speaking to me—the guy with the biceps and half a brain—which sure felt like a shot of B-12 for the self-esteem. God, it seemed, was throwing me a bone. We were gliding toward the dream of a friendly union, discussing things that

were meaningful, not playing conversational tennis. Real communication—it was like an aphrodisiac. Before I knew it, my mind was fast-forwarding to everything except our divorce. Sure I was reading her right, I imagined myself later that evening—after a shower, of course—reciting poetry to her in the big queen bed I had assembled upstairs. Hey, maybe we'd even feed each other strawberries.

Still, I knew I had to step carefully. Sometimes on moving jobs the customers seem to be speaking to you when in fact they are not even seeing you. They're just seeing their things in your hands and mostly speaking to themselves. But this one was different—special? She was maintaining the eye-contact without a blink and dumping concepts on my head as if the two of us, talking about anything, were as natural together as peanut butter and jelly on Wonder Bread. The shit she was saying was as real as it gets.

"The mental health of the American people," she said at one point, "is deteriorating rapidly."

Rapidly—that was the word that got me.

She was seated on the kitchen counter at that moment, her denim legs crossed. I was carrying a white ottoman. I stopped moving.

She had kicked open a door inside my head and across the floor of my consciousness a widening fin of light was spreading. I started thinking of things I had been thinking of for years, but seeing them differently as a form of mental illness, a collective insanity, a growing snowball rolling downhill. Maybe she felt like a lady who had just been put on hold. That I couldn't help. My mind was moving back through time—my own time—my personal period of American History and the view was quite a shock.

I thought of all the streets I had known my whole life; what they had been like when I was twelve and what they had become. I remembered how I knew my neighbor's names and how now I knew only their fences. I remembered the kids I had gone to school with and how many of them

were dead. Or in jails. Or in psychiatric facilities. Or so physically transformed by the psychological storms of their lives that they were nearly unrecognizable.

I'm no math-guy, but I even thought of statistics. Ten years earlier, for instance, Long Island had five hundred gang members; now it had five thousand. And once, within my own life-span, it had been home to none. How was all this—and so much more—even possible in so quick a skip of time?

The lady's lecture had awoken me, and it just crushed the last of my lust like a phone call from Mom. This was the big stuff. We were all in the same melting pot and the pot itself was melting.

"You are so damn right," I said. "Deteriorating rapidly. That's exactly what's happening, and it's been happening for decades. What a moron I've been. For years, I've been listening to these people who keep saying we've always been crazy. But the truth is we are way crazier than we used to be. That's a blatant fact. Which is probably why I missed it."

Then I set the ottoman on the floor and sat down on it.

And that, I think, was my first mistake. I presumed our discussion had just become more important than her furniture, and that it transcended our meaningless positions as customer and service-worker. I also assumed, if only unconsciously, that we were equals. And it sure felt good to sit down.

I pulled the bandana off my head, wiped some of the sweat off my face with it, and then stuffed it into my back pocket. She seemed surprised that I was bald, a bit of strangeness on her part which I chose to ignore.

"How bad is it?" I asked.

"Twenty per cent of the population," she said, "if diagnosed, would be confirmed mentally ill."

"Twenty per cent?"

"Yes."

"And it's getting worse all the time?"

Now she seemed impatient—fingernails clicking the counter. "Yes."

The fear flew through my stomach then. It was just like the fear you feel late at night when you're walking alone through a bad neighborhood and suddenly a car backfires—or was it a gunshot? My eyes raced back and forth across her terra cotta floor tiles as the metaphors flashed through my head. Imagine one-fifth of an apple pie writhing with worms. Or a fifth of a book of matches on fire.

What happens to my country, I thought, happens to me. And that's when I must have made the next mistake: I looked at her.

My stares, I've been told, can be a tad intense; and maybe my face right then was twisted and desperate. But we were talking about America, the emergency. Her opinion seemed critical. She was surely much more than some Paul Revere. This was a social scientist, affiliated with ivy, and one who had been out in the field. A mere messenger she was not. She had been collecting and assessing the evidence, and she probably had a whole saddlebag of ideas for solutions.

"What can we do about this?" I asked.

"About what?" she asked.

"About healing our nation."

Her face soured and she appeared annoyed. It was as if she thought I was pretending to care about what she was saying in order to learn the color of her panties. Or did she think I was trying to shirk work? Or did she feel I was some kind of flake because I'd used the word "healing?"

She was definitely thinking badly of me, but she was mistaken. I wanted to hear more about our country and what she thought we could do to help. I wasn't even looking at her breasts anymore. Her lecture had snapped me out of decades of stupidity. I saw how all my personal

problems were absurd and irrelevant, a circus of vanities that didn't mean squat in the context of the problems of the nation that contained me. I wanted to be a better citizen now. More loving, more neighborly, whatever. Didn't she understand that—and feel the same way?

Obviously not. The transformation of her personality was as palpable as the zing of cold air on a cavity. She uncrossed her legs, slid off the counter. She touched her denim hip, but the gesture was no longer attractive. Under the shoulders of her light white jacket rose a shrug like a prize fighter's.

"Whoa," I said, "what just happened to us?"

"Nothing," she replied.

She plucked the sunglasses from her hair, folded them slowly then slid them onto the counter behind her. "Am I paying by the hour for this?"

I stood up immediately and picked up the ottoman. "Yes, where would you like this?"

"That," she said, taking a distant sip of lemonade, "looks like something that belongs in the den. Right in front of the white chair you brought in before." She tilted her head. "Don't you think?"

Now I was deteriorating rapidly. My self esteem felt like a sleigh ride down Suicide Hill and my face was tingling, no doubt turning red.

Switching my head into automatic, becoming more like a machine than a man, I carried her ottoman into the den. I set it down gently in front of the chair and kicked it in place. Crossing through the kitchen again, I didn't say a word. I ignored her completely, as if she were some crazy homeless lady on the street, and went back out to the truck for another carry. As I came up the ramp, one of my brothers, seeing my face, instantly thrust out his hand to the other.

"Ten bucks—pay up," he said as if I wasn't there, or was, but was just another piece of the furniture.

Make him talk, she said,
her four-year-old face testing
how far she could push me to go.
We'd rolled out a torso,
arms, legs. An oval head.
Grafted tiny fingers onto the palms
of two pancaked hands. Pinched
a slim nose. Painstakingly
pasted lips, eyes, brows.
Play-dough gingerbread man.

I peeled him up off the table.
Squeaked a small speech
through clenched teeth, a ventriloquist,
fooling no one. No, she insisted,
make him really talk.

You do it, I said,
and laid the man down for her,
hoping to expose our own feet of clay.

She danced the little guy
in a jig so rough he fell
to pieces. Which she scooped
and shmushed. A formless wad.

Okay, she said,
let's make a snake!

(1)

Grandmother's *paandaan*,
Baba's gold rattle,
a black and white photograph
of the palace in Amroha
was gathered with the deliberation
of a librarian. When they left India,
my family counted everything
they would leave behind:
none as important as
my great grandfather's dagger—
Persian inscribed handle
telling the tale of a tall
foreign man, killing
a savage native tiger by hand.

They took horse drawn carts
to the outskirts of *Moradabad*,
walked miles to the railway station,
onward to Delhi, swinging their
way down *Jodhpur*, *Jaisalmeer*
into Pakistani *Sukkur*, finally to Karachi.

On the train, when my father- a baby then-
cried, grandmother read the Koran
grandfather recited *Ghalib*.
A reporter took a snapshot
of the family- emaciated infant,
surrounded by his sisters
in dirty *gharaa* skirts
that were embroidered
with silver and golden threads
by the finest craftsmen of North India—
An *imam zamin* on each little arm
protecting them from the evil eye
and the fatigue of hundreds of miles.

(II)

I was born on the second floor.

*Looked outside at the great mango tree
trying to break free from the cemented
walls that confined its movement.*

My grandfather told me his story:

After we emigrated from India in 1947,
we cut Karachi into a Square *Federal B Area*,
a Triangular *North Nazimabad*, an octagonal *Liaquatabad*.
Laid roads, spun roundabouts like tops.
We immigrants were called *Mohajirs*.
Most of us built single story homes
on 800 sq ft of government
allotted land. When we filled ours
with your *chaachi's* * dowry
— new kitchenware, a *Taj* watercooler,
uncoordinated pieces of furniture,
a brand new motorcycle—
we had to build the first floor.

When your father was married
we raised another floor,
and then you were born.

In 1984, your uncle's family
decided to leave for America—
the first floor became haunted by *Djinns*
demanding to keep the place clean,
light incense and leave sweets
into a great absence every Thursday.

Just like the rest of the city, our house
grew taller and emptier.

* - Uncle's wife

(III)

My grandfather said

“nothing grows under a Banyan tree.”

I put my cheek against the Mosque’s emerald floor,
then go towards the *waterpump* bus stop to his grave.

There was a door to the graveyard.

Now broken wood hangs from rusty hinges,
leading to a narrow entrance
covered on both sides by Banyan trees.

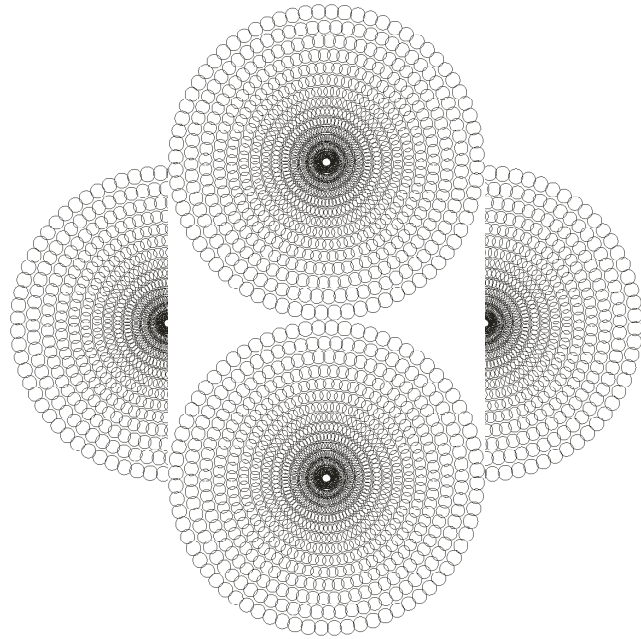
Rosewater on Rose, and Incense mark
territory of the dead.

The sun hides behind large Banyan branches.

My grandfather speaks:

“Right after partition, us North Indians
took over Sindhi farmlands
stole doors and hinges...”

He hasn’t settled in his grave yet.



Philip Asaph teaches poetry and fiction at the Long Island High School for the Arts. He is also a furniture mover. “Us” comes from his collection of moving man stories, *Brothers of the Ox*, a manuscript of fiction which reads like a memoir.

Kathleen Boyle lives in San Francisco and works as a Public Defender. Her work has recently been published or is forthcoming in *Poet Lore*, *Marginalia*, and *Scythe*, among other journals.

Dr. Paul Coleman is an astrophysicist with the UH Institute for Astronomy. At UH, Dr. Coleman does public outreach, research, and teaches. He is the Institute for Astronomy project scientist for the Faulkes Telescope North, the world’s largest telescope dedicated to use by K-12 students, and he is the director of the IfA’s Research Experience for Undergraduates summer program, which is funded by the National Science Foundation. He is also a member of the University’s Kualii Council, a body of Native Hawaiian professors, instructors, and graduate students at the Mānoa campus.

Craig Cotter was born in 1960 in New York and has lived in California since 1986. His third collection of poetry, *Chopstix Numbers*, is available from Boise State University’s Ahsahta Press. Poems from his new manuscript *After Lunch* have appeared in *Global Tapestry Review*, *Lungfull!*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Alimentum*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Court Green*, *Mudfish*, *Inkwell*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Euphony*, *Margie*, *Hawaii Review*, *The Antigonish & Aufgabe*. Three of his poems were nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2009.

Greg Evason writes novels.

Peter Forman is a student in the University of Hawaii’s Master’s Degree Program in English. He is the author of *Wings*

of Paradise, Hawaii's Incomparable Airlines. Peter's pilot logbook includes many thousands of hours flight instructing, island hopping in twin-engine planes, flying internationally as a captain with TWA, and sharing the joy of flight in his Great Lakes open-cockpit plane.

Lowell Jaeger teaches creative writing at Flathead Valley Community College in Kalispell, Montana. He is author of four collections of poems: *War On War* (Utah State University Press, 1988), *Hope Against Hope* (Utah State University Press 1990), *Suddenly Out of a Long Sleep* (Arctos Press, 2009), and *WE* (Main Street Rag Publishing, 2010). He is founding editor of Many Voices Press and recently edited *New Poets of the American West*, an anthology of poets from western states. He previously edited an anthology of Montana poets, *Poems Across the Big Sky*. He is a graduate of the Iowa Writers Workshop, winner of the Grolier Poetry Peace Prize and recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Montana Arts Council. He lives in Yellow Bay, Montana on Flathead Lake.

Arthur Winfield Knight recently completed a trilogy based on maverick movies director Sam Peckinpah: *Blue Skies Falling* (Forge 2001), *Blue Moon Rising* (Sabella Press 2009) and *Final Cut* (Milverstead publishing 2010).

Monica Keawe Kaluakini Lee is a multi-ethnic writer born and raised on the island of 'Oahu. Her work has been published in *Oiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal* volume 4, *Vice-Versa* Issue 6, and at *The Examiner*, an online newspaper. She is an undergraduate English student at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and is currently working on an eye-opening book of short stories and poems about growing up in Hawai'i.

J. Kates is a poet and literary translator who lives in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire.

D. Kūhiō writes stories under his grandfather's mango tree.

Christina Low has also been published by *The Hawai'i Reporter*, *Vice-Versa Journal*, *RipRap Journal*, UHM's "Selected Papers," and has forthcoming publications in *The Hawai'i Review*, *Make/Shift Magazine*, *Hawai'i Woman's Journal*, and *The Driftwood Review*. She recently graduated with her MA in Creative Writing from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and teaches English at KCC and UH West Oahu.

John McKernan is now a retired comma herder. He specialized in replacement procedures for depleted semicolons and the rehabilitation of derelict exclamation points. He lives—mostly—in West Virginia where he edits ABZ Press. His most recent book of selected poems is *Resurrection of the Dust*.

Joe Sacksteder teaches and takes classes at Eastern Michigan University, where he is editor of the journal *BathHouse*. Recent and forthcoming publications include *Puerto del Sol*, *Mississippi Review*, *Filling Station*, *Big Muddy*, *Penumbra*, and *Aethlon*. He also makes short films with the Ann Arbor-based Lionbelly Media.

Faisal Siddiqui was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan. He is Director of Services, working for a mid-size IT consulting company in Southern California. He has a BA in Computer Science from the University of Texas at Austin. His poems have been published in *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, *International Poetry Review*, *Malahat Review*, *New Letters* and *Tuesday: An Art Project*. He has upcoming publications in *Notre Dame Review*.

Jade Sunouchi has an MA in English from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. She is a poet and recipient of the Academy of American Poets' Prize and the Myrle Clark Award. Her latest poetry collection, *Skin of Yellow Flowers* (2009), emerged from her 2008 travels in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

Lee A. Tonouchi, "Da Pidgin Guerrilla", is da writer of da award-winning book of Pidgin short stories *Da Word*

(Bamboo Ridge, 2001), author of da Pidgin essay collection *Living Pidgin: Contemplations on Pidgin Culture* (Tinfoil, 2002), compiler of *Da Kina Dictionary: Da Hawai'i Community Pidgin Dictionary Project* (Bess, 2005), and editor of *Buss Laugh: Stand Up Poetry from Hawai'i* (Bess, 2009).

David Wagoner has published 18 books of poems, most recently *A Map of the Night* (U. of Illinois Press, 2008) and ten novels, one of which, *The Escape Artist*, was made into a movie by Francis Ford Coppola. He won the Lilly Prize in 1991 and has won six yearly prizes from Poetry (Chicago). He was chancellor of the Academy of American Poets for 23 years. He has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and twice for the National Book Award. He edited *Poetry Northwest* from 1966 to its end in 2002. He is professor emeritus of English at the U. of Washington and teaches in the low-residency MFA Program of the Whidbey Island Writers Workshop.

Front Cover: The Hubble Space Telescope's most detailed image, the Orion Nebula, which makes up more than 3,000 stars of various classes.

Back Cover: Kūkaniloko State Park, Wahiawā, O`ahu. Taken on December 27th, 2009, by Joel Bradshaw.
Both images are in the public domain.

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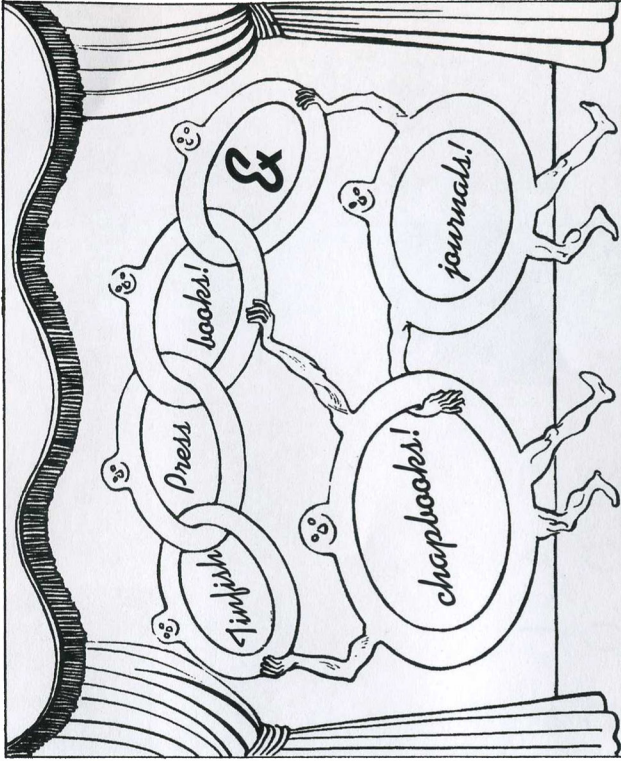
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