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MISSING PONO

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## Haole Boss

Pale pink hydraulic fluid splattered across the inside of Taylor Beck's left wrist, bounced off the bib of his mocha-brown Carhart overalls, and plopped on the toe of his dirty boots. He imagined it looked like haole blood. But it wasn't his or anyone else's. He'd struggled all his life to avoid being labeled a haole. He knew everybody's blood was the same color, though it looked like it could've been spilled from a white man's veins. But the machine didn't bleed, it leaked.

Taylor squinted up at the greasy stainless-steel mast of the stand-up fork lift. His forearm shielded his eyes from the drips but blocked his vision, and he brushed the graying blonde strands off his forehead. A tightly banded braid kept his shoulder-length hair from sticking in his moustache and beard like velcro. He rolled his tight neck muscles, shrugged his husky shoulders and stepped out of the machine to get away from the harsh glare of the big halogen light. He figured it must be that hose clamp again. All the other machines were falling apart, too. A dry hinge cried out in agonized agreement from the far end of the section.

Taylor climbed back into the cockpit of the stand-up scissor lift and retracted the forks. As he backed the Yale out of the fifth level storage slot, the reverse gear grumbled. He wondered what the hell that guy in the shop was doing anyway. He certainly wasn't maintaining the equipment. Was there something else going on? Would the mechanic tell him if there was? But Taylor had been running the K. Yamashita and Company warehouse for

only three days. A minor degree of rapport might've been established, but acceptance and respect would take time.

He stepped down off the lift and spotted his boss coming toward him from the Operations office. Jarret Wakabayashi wore long-sleeved white shirts, dark grey polyester slacks and tasseled vinyl loafers. The few wisps of hair on the top of his head contrasted sharply with the thick black thatch that still grew around the rim of an otherwise smooth dome. When Taylor first met him, he'd thought Jarret was a junior member of the accounting department instead of a fifteen-year veteran of Operations. And Jarret had done it all. He'd started off in maintenance and risen through the ranks in a few short years to run the division with an iron hand. He knew every product location, every procedure, and every piece of equipment.

But that hand was beginning to rust. Details were slipping through the cracks. The racking needed to be reorganized to maximize the flow of product from the primary pick slots. Vehicle maintenance needed to be evaluated and streamlined. Workers were leaving in clumps. Taylor had to get these things under control despite the company's general resistance to change.

One move he'd made his first day on the job was to convert the warehouse radio from a rock station to one that played Hawaiian music. He would much rather sing harmony to "Kaulana Nā Pua" than to have to put up with listening to "wrapped up like a douche"—whatever that meant. Taylor was surprised Jarret didn't prohibit the radio, but neither was he in favor of it. It was one of those necessary evils, Jarret told him, that a committed management had to endure; another was holidays. A persistent hair tickled his neck as his boss got within hand-shake range.

“Good morning, Taylor. Didn’t human resources get you those extra-large collared shirts yet? I’ll have to speak to them about that. We can’t have you wearing the same shirts as the workers, now can we?” Jarret stepped up into the cab of the lift and looked down at Taylor. “We wouldn’t want anybody to mistake you for a receiver or a stocker.” A rusted muffler belched in the next aisle.

“I don’t think that’s a major concern, Jarret. The men don’t seem to be having any trouble making that distinction.” Taylor leaned back against the rack, just outside of the halogen’s glare.

“Having any trouble with the crew? Don’t be afraid to put these guys in their place. They give me any crap, I’ll fire them on the spot.” Taylor knew that he would, too. But he wasn’t sure if that was practical advice or a thinly veiled threat.

“It’s all right, Jarret. I’m sure I’ll get the handle on these guys. It just takes a little time.” Metal screeched on metal somewhere in the adjacent section.

“Of course, I understand, but don’t be afraid to get in their faces if you need to. That’s how to get their respect. Show ’em who’s boss. It’s a lot easier to promote a man who’s not afraid to make tough decisions. If a worker can’t follow the company policies, can’t perform up to company standards, or even violates the dress code, he can look for another job.” Jarret’s eyes glittered cold in the overhead lamp light. “That stocker, Keith, seems to have a bit of an attitude problem. He won’t even answer to his proper name. Insists that I call him Sue-gy instead. He’s been with us over a year but he might not last much longer. And that Hawaiian-Chinese, Daniel. I thought I saw him working the back sections with his shirt off. That’s

grounds for dismissal." The Operations Director seemed to rise up higher in the cab with every remark.

"Thanks, Jarret, I'll be sure to keep that in mind." But that was definitely not Taylor's style. He stepped forward into the light and discovered that his hands and forearms were stained with the grimy black residue that seemed to cover every surface in the warehouse like volcanic ash.

"You know Taylor, you're the first haole supervisor we've had at Yamashita and Company. In fact, you're the only white guy in the whole warehouse. But you're a local haole, right?"

"Born and raised." He shifted his weight back and forth to relieve the dull ache in his feet. The size twelve triple-E Red Wings were the most comfortable boots he'd ever been forced to wear but the state safety law was the only thing keeping him from flinging them into the dumpster. When he danced Kahiko he went barefoot. He wished he was doing that right now instead of having to suffer through Jarret's marginally racist rhetoric.

"Even so, you don't feel a little uncomfortable?" Jarret leaned slightly forward as the garbled warehouse speaker system droned overhead. "One white guy and all the rest locals?"

"I've lived here all my life." The irritating hair begged to be dealt with. "It's not an issue for me, Jarret."

"Not even working for a Japanese supervisor?" His boss smiled slowly and cocked an eyebrow.

Taylor had figured the younger man was Okinawan, but if the Director wanted to claim he was Japanese instead, Taylor wasn't going to mess with it. "No problem," he said, returning a forced smile.

"Glad to hear it. By the way, Mr. Yamashita ran into your former boss

from Hawaiian Art the other night at the opera. She spoke very highly of you." Jarret's eyes probed into him.

"That was nice of her; she was great to work for." He wasn't really sure where this was going.

"She said you'd been with them for twelve years before coming on with us. I read your resume, 'new ownership'. . . you sure there wasn't more to it than that?"

The big man didn't want Jarret to see him wiping his palms. He didn't want to tell Jarret how the new mainland haole g.m. had ordered him to lay off the entire crew and hire part-timers to "shore up the bottom line." He had apologized to his men and left his resignation on the insensitive prick's desk the next morning. He couldn't afford to put himself in that position again. "Nahh, that's all there was to it." The shadows hid his clenched jaw.

"If you say so. Remember, my door is always open."

"Thanks again, I'll be sure to keep that in mind."

Jarret hopped off the lift and strutted back towards the Operations office. Taylor watched the little man go. He grinned and shook his head. Something moved restlessly in a dark corner of his mind, but Taylor didn't want to turn on the light in that room. He wished he didn't need this job, but with two kids getting ready for college and the economy he really didn't have much choice. He hoped he wouldn't have to choose between Jarret's version of job security and his own managerial style. He reached back and rubbed at the tickling curl that wouldn't go away, adding another layer of grime to the back of his neck.

He climbed back into the cab and swung the three ton dinosaur out of the five thousand aisle, back past the six/ten cases of Allen's Baked Beans, the

sixteen ounce Fairland bean thread, the twenty-four /twenty Maria quartered artichoke hearts, and the bulk stacked USDA bread flour bales. His stomach rumbled as he passed by all that food. If the lunch wagon didn't have lū'au plate today maybe there was still some poi and sardines left in the employee ice box.

Taylor didn't feel like he could last till lunch so he reached into his bib, pulled out a small piece of sweet lemon peel, and popped the tangy morsel into his mouth. He braked hard and throttled forward and the transmission groaned as the rig picked up speed. He pointed the forks up the main aisle towards the ever widening exit and accelerated in and out of the pools of artificial light.

He rolled by the arrowroot, bay leaves, cardamom, coriander, five different kinds of ginger, minced Gilroy garlic, juniper berries, some spices he didn't even know the names of yet, on past saffron ( eighty-five dollars an ounce! ) and finally thyme leaves and turmeric. The exotic aromas carried him off to a Bombay bazaar. He could see a snake charmer sitting cross-legged on the cinnamon barrel. Frantic drumming and cymbals kept pace with the flight of a sitar. He could languish here all day, but the sour blast of propane exhaust brought Taylor back to the task at hand. He piloted the metal hunk, squealing and squawking, towards the warehouse opening.

A fresh supply of oxygen filled his lungs as he escaped from the stuffy dimly lit cave. He hoped Jarret would hurry up and get approval for his new lighting proposal. Another week in that tomb and they'd all be wearing miners' hats. The eight o'clock July sunlight cast long morning shadows across the pavement. He'd only been at work for two hours, but it already felt like it was going to be a long day.



He eased the old lift over the door channels and angled it to the left down the receiving dock where he negotiated an obstacle course of cracked black top and potholes. He swerved and juked past the four crumbling container bays. The five-man receiving crew was unloading a twenty-four-foot reefer container of frozen vegetables and a forty-foot dry container of mixed Del Monte product. Liugalua ran the crew, but everyone called him Big Liu. He couldn't have been taller than five feet eight inches tall and probably only weighed about a hundred and fifty-five pounds. Taylor wondered why he was called Big Liu and made a mental note to ask the hard working Samoan with the quick smile when they were better acquainted. He was also known to be a ladies man; maybe that had something to do with it.

The dock boss gave him a grin as he went by with the crippled machine. The other four nodded in deference to his position. The crew was made up of two short wiry Filipinos, Remigio and Catalino; Sherman, a tall skinny black with drooping lids; and Marcus, a thick feisty Portagee who had an opinion about everything and felt obligated to share it with everybody. Exploding out of the doorway, the four stockers roared back and forth on sit-down lifts, running the received pallets into the staging area. A couple of Puerto Ricans, Lorenzo and Ramon, along with Daniel and Sugi, the Japanese Viet Nam vet, made up the team.

The mechanic's shop was makai of the main warehouse building. He parked the leaky lift inside the chain link gate from where he could almost see the crests of the brilliant blue swells lining up outside Kewalo Basin, half-way between Honolulu Harbor and Waikiki and light-years away from that dungeon of a warehouse. When Taylor climbed onto the rusted black hood of the Peterbilt tractor cab he could smell the fresh fragrance of limu mixed with

the ahi from the nearby packing plant. The aroma of the big yellowfin tuna was strong but invigorating.

When he got this job flowing the way it needed to be, he would definitely make time for the surf. Point Panic was breaking less than three hundred yards from where he stood. His Voit Duck Feet were in the back of his van, along with shorts and a towel. He could be sliding across one of those glassy four-foot rights in ten minutes. Some days he wished he could spend all of his time in the surf where his only real concerns reflected the angle of the swell.

The stink of Pauly's toscani snapped Taylor out of his daydream. Those crooked little cigars smelled like they were rolled from oregano and old tires. Paulino Cabacungan could easily have passed for a squat Filipino uncle of the Pigpen character in the Peanuts comic strip. The brown of his forearms was mottled with layers of dull grey axle grease. His wrinkled navy-blue coveralls shared the same oily patterns and the pant cuffs, frayed through on the back side, were complemented by a torn rear pocket. The old brass zipper in the front barely navigated the bulge of his pot belly. He scratched his right ear with a long-shafted Phillips screwdriver, hawked, and spat against the fender of the Peterbilt.

"What, Haole boss," he cackled through his nose, "you wen broke 'em again?"

"Looks like the hydraulic hose clamp let go, Pauly - again."

"Ai sus! Lose money, Haole boss." He waddled under the ragged amber fiberglass awning and pulled out a tray of nuts, bolts, and washers from a sagging utility closet.

Taylor almost snapped at the greasy little man. He wasn't sure if he'd

reacted to the crack about him busting the lift or Pauly's repeated "haole" references. Although he didn't have a drop of Hawaiian blood, Taylor had lived in the islands all of his thirty-eight years. His skin was brown as most of the locals from years of body-surfing. He walked, talked, ate, and breathed the local style. But he was still considered a haole, a haole boss by the locals at K. Yamashita.

"Eh, Haole Boss," Pauly whined, "how long you going stay up dea? Bum-bye, you fall off and da company blame me."

"Yeah, yeah, you just worry about that hose clamp. Maybe you need some more band aids and coat-hanger wire?"

Pauly didn't respond to Taylor's crack. "How many times I tell Jarret fo' buy new kine but he only like blame me. Da liffs is too dam old. I try fo tell him but he no lissen. Lose money, Haole Boss." Pauly rattled through another drawer in the cabinet looking for temporary solutions. Three tins of Spam lay on top of the storage unit not quite concealed with an oily rag.

Taylor hopped down from the truck hood and trudged back to the warehouse, heading out of the sunlight and into the gloom. His mind buzzed with questions. How would he get these workers' cooperation if they didn't respect his authority? How could he get their respect if they didn't accept him? And what were those cans of Spam doing in the mechanic shop?

He bent over to pick up a torn scrap of shrink wrap and saw the receivers out of the corner of his eye. They were checking him out, judging him, the haole boss-man. How did that song go? "Here comes that haole pupuka. He rides on a big white horse." He knew how the other ethnic groups felt about the whites who came and ruined the Islands forever. White captains in their big white-sailed clippers, the white lunas in the fields on

their big white horses, and now the white CEOs in their big white limousines. Even though he couldn't change the barricades of history into bridges across the Island chain, he still needed to find a way to connect with the workers on Yamashita's four acres of warehouse.

But right now, he had a more immediate problem. He needed to find a working high-lift and finish re-slotting that section of Del Monte six/ten sliced beets. The sliced beet cases were mixed up with the whole beet cases and some blind-bat picker had pulled the wrong cases last night. He made a note to check with Fetu, the night crew supervisor. Fetu was Tongan but pretended he was Samoan, because four Solis worked on his crew and Samoans didn't usually get along with Tongans.

With the lift down for repairs, he was jammed. He'd have to ask one of the stockers to help because he couldn't move those cases without another stand-up lift. He tried to remember who worked in the six thousand section. He stopped in the main artery and slowly turned three hundred and sixty degrees. The stockers were each assigned roughly a quarter of the warehouse to maintain, stocking and replenishing the cases on a daily basis. His view passed the open door just as Big Liu was slipping a can of abalone between two stacks of empty pallets. Now he had one more problem.

As Taylor looked back up the artery he saw Sugi pivot his rig around the far end of the sixty-two thousand aisle. It groaned with a load of twelve/thirty-two ounce Oceanspray Cranberry Juice Cocktail. The stand-up's left side roller wheel hit a puka in the concrete floor and the ten-inch divot caused the rising load to rock precariously. Because the low level pick slot was already filled, Sugi had to maneuver the pallet all the way to the top of the rack and place it between two other pallets of similar product. There was

only a small gap available on either side. If he missed by a degree or a few inches, four hundred and eighty glass quart bottles filled with cranberry juice would explode onto the aisle floor.

But Sugi didn't hesitate. He yanked his faded green camouflage cap on backwards and hunkered down into his crusty biker boots. He swung the load into the gap, braked, backed out, adjusted the angle, and slipped it into place. A confident smirk appeared in the left corner of his mouth. Taylor knew that Sugi was performing for him, to show him who "the man" was. He waited until the stocker had retracted the forks and lowered the mast back to ground level before he interrupted.

"Sugi, nice work, Bruddah. Go break. I goin' borrow da liff liddibit." He had shifted into pidgin without even noticing it.

"Thanks, Haole Boss. You want me to take care of it for you? "

"Nah, I tink I can handle."

"You ever driven one of these before?"

"Some." A sit-down with a loose fan-belt housing rattled around the far corner.

"Well, okay. But watch the forward creep. It can get a little jumpy."

"Tanks, I get 'em."

Sugi dismounted the yellow Yale. He sauntered a few strides down the aisle and turned back. "You sure you can handle it?"

"No worry."

Taylor stepped up to the controls and accelerated down the row to the five thousand aisle. He slowed as he approached slot fifty twenty-three and pulled the lever that lifted the mast. When it reached the height of the fifth level pallet, he slowly advanced the load forward into the storage slot. So far,

so good; but he could still feel Sugi's eyes watching him.

Just as he was preparing to release the throttle, the machine leaped forward and slammed into the rack. The front edge of the beets pallet angled down and the cases slid back into the safety grill just behind the forks. Taylor yanked the lift lever even higher and tilted the forks back to counteract the wobbling load. He reversed the machine and side-shifted to center the balance point. As soon as the pallet cleared the edge of the rack, he lowered it as fast as the hissing hydraulics would allow and set it down in the center of the aisle.

He leaped out of the cab and quickly re-sorted the cases of beets, eight per tier. Taylor was lucky; none of them were damaged. He turned back to the cab and saw the stocker still standing by the end of the aisle. The smirk had disappeared. "Good thing I warned you about that forward creep." Sugi turned and strutted for the break room. Taylor wasn't sure if he'd gained face or lost it.

Another lift rumbled to a stop in the next aisle over. Daniel stepped out of the dusty shadows and into a lighted area, his company t-shirt wrapped around his head and his back shiny with sweat. He was taller than Sugi and his warm brown skin and handsome features were a testament to his Polynesian heritage. He had a hint of oriental influence around his eyes.

"You need some help with that, Haole Boss?"

"Thanks, but I think I've got this one taken care of. What's with the shirt?" He quickly scanned the horizon for Jarret while he tried to figure out how he was going to handle the dress code issue.

"Aw, c'mon. You're not gonna pull this 'rules is the rules' crap on me are you? I'm back in the two thousand section, the far corner. There isn't any

breeze– nothin'. Who's side are you on, anyway? "

" I'm on my side, Mr. Tai-Hook. Now put that shirt on before you get us both fired." He took a step closer to the stocker. "Look, Daniel, I know we've got a circulation problem in your section. I'm working on it. If we can't budget for some ceiling vents, maybe I can get you guys tank tops, okay?"

Daniel's sullen look eased slightly. "Better than nothing," he said. "Who was that 'ono -looking Hawaiian chick you were talking to in the parking lot after work yesterday? Bet you wish you were related to us Hawaiians, yeh?"

"That tasty number happens to be my wife and I'll be related to 'us Hawaiians' twenty years come next January."

"Nahhh . . . for real? Guess you lucked out, yeh?"

"Guess so." The surprised stocker turned and disappeared through the half-light and Taylor climbed back into the cab.

He returned to the job, deftly operating the lift as he sorted and restacked the cases. His mind groaned in concert with the machine. He needed to finish up and move on to the next task. After fifteen minutes of brisk work, he parked the lift at the end of the aisle and stepped down to the floor. Sugi sauntered in from the far end.

"All pau already, Haole Boss? You cool with that throttle now?"

"Yeah, I'm done. Mahalo for da use of da liff. When you pau stocking dat incoming Del Monte, I need you, Daniel, and Ramone to finish up wit da new slotting plan for da ress of da six/ten vechtables. You need one naddah copy of da layout?"

"Nah, I still got the one you gave me yesterday. I'll let the guys know."

Taylor was turning to leave when the approaching clack of street shoe heels stopped him. Jarret marched down the aisle under a full head of steam and came to an abrupt halt directly between the two men. All he needed was the hat cradled in his arm and he could pass for Napoleon.

"I'm glad you're here, Taylor. This is a problem I've had to address constantly over the years and it seems it needs to be brought up again." Sugi had assumed a samurai stance, coiled yet relaxed. The smirk was definitely gone and the bill of his cap was pulled low over his eyes.

"Pilferage will not be tolerated at Yamashita and Company. Keith, open the storage bin on your stand-up, please."

"I asked you not to call me that. The name's Sugi."

"Taylor," Jarret said, eyes flashing, "if your worker won't open that bin, I will." Taylor stepped towards the machine and reached for the bin himself.

"I'm sure we can work this out, Jarret. What is it you're looking for?" He released the latch and the door fell forward, revealing a sixteen ounce can of *Planter's Deluxe Cashews*.

"That's what I'm looking for!" Jarret pointed at the cashews. Sugi's lips pressed together. Taylor tried not to wince. He searched frantically for some kind of response. Visions of his children's college education began to blow away in the trade winds. Job security was quickly becoming an archaic term, as old as the antiquated equipment that Jarret had refused to upgrade. Self respect was now a negotiable item. Would he be able to look his family in the eye or would he have to avoid looking at himself in the mirror? He'd sworn he wouldn't let this happen but he was stuck in the middle again. He needed time to sort this thing out but there wasn't any of that precious commodity available. He took a deep breath and stepped towards the stocker.



"Oh, that reminds me," said Taylor to Sugi, " here's the change for the cashews I bought you on break. With the employee discount, your balance comes out to *six fifty-five less forty-five cents* for my Mountain Dew. Thanks again." Sugi held out his hand to receive the change and nodded to conceal his surprise. Jarret's head pivoted like a mynah bird.

"What! You mean to tell me you bought those cashews from the discount store? What about the case in slot forty-three eighty-two-B that's missing a can? What about that!" His neck muscles stood out like braided cables.

Taylor focused all his attention on Jarret. "Yes, I did pick that up for him on break, and I'm afraid I don't know what happened in the pick slot, but I will look into it personally."

"Well . . . I . . . see me in my office in ten minutes, Taylor. Someone seems to be having trouble deciding which side they're on." He spun on his heel and clacked back up the aisle and around the corner.

When he was safely out of range, Sugi turned to Taylor with a grin and shrugged. "I don't know what to say Boss, but . . ."

"Save it." Taylor looked hard at the surprised vet. "You owe me a favor. I'm not a hard ass, but I can't afford to have this kind of crap going on in my warehouse - in our warehouse. Spread the word, I want this shit to stop. I want those 'missing' items returned to their pick slots, specifically: the twenty ounce can of abalone, the three tins of Spam, and those cashews . . . before lunch. Are we clear on this?"

Sugi's eyes widened and his dropped jaw twitched. "Yeah, yeah, we're clear."

"Good." Taylor turned away from him and strode up the aisle toward

Jarret's office.

"Yo... Boss." Taylor stopped and turned back to face the stocker. "You know, in the 'Nam, pricks like Jarret got fragged."

The chaos of warehouse noise dimmed into the background as Taylor digested Sugi's remark. He replied in a softer tone. "That must have been one tough hell to live through."

"Some didn't live through it." The vet put his head down for a second, but raised it with a gap-toothed grin. "But some did. And Boss, what happened to all that pidgin I was hearing earlier," he said, hands on his hips.

"Oh, I'm sure it'll surface now and then. But I guess I'm just a haole boss after all." He turned away and continued walking once again.

"I think we can handle it," Sugi called after him.

### Missing Pono

Kelly was zapped by the stink eye she gave him from the edge of the shadow. It cut across the dining room table and forced him to look away.

"Daddy, why won't you help us out? It's only for one day."

The last bite of banana pie soured as it slid down his throat. "I'm sorry," Kelly said. "I'm playing at the Moana for the lunch buffet."

"Well, how about earlier? We're opening up the UH voter registration drive at the Campus Center at seven." His son-in-law, Peter, silently excused himself and backed down the hallway to check the twins' homework. The junior boys were more interested in surfing the Net than in keeping up with their algebra.

"I can't go earlier."

"Why not?" Lehua's voice crescendoed up half an octave.

"Masa called. Surf's up."

"Always some excuse . . . 'I'm playing piano' or 'I'm dawn-patrolling'," she mocked. "Are they more important than your family?"

He combed big brown fingers through his salt and pepper locks. "You know how I feel about my 'ohana," he mumbled. He stared under the table at the cracks on his crusty brown heels.

"And how about your larger 'ohana, Ellington Keli'ikamoeau Bridges? We only need a few hours to help register students to vote."

He recoiled from the sound of his name as if he'd been slapped in the

face. His wife had done that to him. "Why get involved with politics and that damn sovereignty crap?"

"Mama dedicated the last years of her life to Hawaiian rights and sovereignty . . ."

"And it killed her!" He pounded his fist on the koa table top.

"Maybe if you'd been with her that night she fell asleep at the wheel- "

"Pau!"

Lehua slowly rose to her full height. The glare of her large brown eyes bore into him. "Fine," she snapped. "But you're going to have to let this go someday or you'll never find your missing pono. I just hope you don't wait too long." She whirled, stomped down the hall, and slammed the door shut behind her.

The smack of the hollow mahogany frame echoed in his head long after he'd turned off the lights and gone to bed. He lay in the dark and tried to remember what pono felt like, that oneness, the balance that had been missing from their lives.

Kelly awoke the next morning before the Ah Fooks' rooster did, pulled on his trunks, and tiptoed out the front door. He clicked it shut and padded down the smooth stone walkway through the heavy scent of white ginger. He entered the carport, unlocked the rear doors of his vintage black van, and tossed his sports bag forward between the seats.

Kelly reached up into the ancient rafters for his white ten-six Aipa tri-fin and slid it out from between the padded beams. He laid it gently upside down in the Ford, the nose resting on the carpeted dash. He quietly shut the rear doors and climbed in behind the wheel. When the parking break

released, the van rolled down the blacktop and out on to 'Auwaiolimu Drive. A block away he kicked it to life as the rest of Papakolea slept. The Hawaiian Homestead district stretched up the hillside behind Punchbowl. Because he was half Hawaiian, the land he'd inherited from his mother didn't really cost him anything and afforded him the luxury of pursuing his music career.

His father had played bass with the Dorsey and Kenton bands of the late forties and early fifties. Kelly hardly knew the man, but the haole had done two things for him. He'd formally named his son Ellington and instilled in his heart a love for the music of the times. Kelly had steeped himself in the piano traditions of Tatum, Wilson, Evans, and Powell.

As a young boy, he'd spent many a night curled in front of the big Kapehart console soaking up the vocal mastery of Billie, Ella, Nat Cole, Johnny Hartman, and Sinatra. The broad sweeping textures of his father's bands along with Basie and Duke completed his first music ed course. His current midday gig at the Moana kept the bills paid and, along with surfing, helped him make it through the day.

The National Cemetery of the Pacific lay just downhill and all of Honolulu twinkled below. But even the velvet stillness couldn't calm the anger in his daughter's voice. They'd both felt that loss, that pain, but neither of them had ever been so blunt. "Maybe if you had been with her that night . . ." Those words crashed in Kelly's head as if all eighty-eight hammers had been slammed down at once.

He'd only tried to earn a decent living to support his family; he hadn't meant to hurt anyone. Playing in lounges, an extra drink or two and the occasional company of a lonely woman . . . it had all seemed harmless. But

his liquored breath and the stench of strange, smoky perfume had finally driven his wife away. When he'd seen what had happened, Kelly quit horsing around and dried out. Pua had forgiven him, but he'd sensed the hurt in her dark brown eyes. He could still feel it now in the predawn darkness as the van glided around the dormant crater.

By the early eighties, she had committed herself to Hawaiian activism. When Kelly had told her it was just politics, that it would never amount to anything, she'd only become more determined. She had plunged into a whirlpool of meetings, hearings, rallies, and time spent away from him. Now it had been five years since that night she'd wrapped her Nissan around the gnarled kiawe tree below the Papakolea buttress. He'd scattered her ashes outside the reef at Queen's but the dull ache persisted.

He only had Lehua and her family now and she, too, was slipping away. She was so much like her mother, the same hips and shoulders—and the same tenacious will. Every time Kelly looked at her, he was reminded of Pua and how much he missed his wife. His daughter had followed in her mother's footsteps and carried the torch of native Hawaiian rights. But how could he support something that had taken his loved ones from him? It hadn't been his fault but Kelly wondered if he could ever forgive himself for not protecting her somehow.

Relief had come from the keyboard and the gently unfurling combers at Waikiki's South Shore. He could almost feel her at the edge of the piano bench or riding with him as he surfed the smooth swells at Queen's. Kelly felt her smile there, soaring with him along the gently rolling waves.

The indigo sky loomed over the eastbound freeway. Traffic flowed sparsely as he merged from the on-ramp and accelerated towards Diamond

Head. Five minutes later he veered off at Kaimuki above the zoo and entered Waikīkī from the eastern end. Kelly pulled the Ford into a stall next to St. Augustine's on Ohua Avenue within one hundred yards of the beach. His tension gradually eased the closer he came to the water.

Stepping out onto the quiet street, he locked the driver's door, opened the back, and removed the big tri-fin. He secured the rear door and clipped the key to his black diver's watch band. The board rail wedged tightly into his left arm pit, he groped for the chunk of surf wax in his velcroed right rear pocket. His knotted forearm hugged the tri-fin close to his body. He scampered for the cross walk as the light turned green.

He plodded into the sand and trudged down to the water's edge. He waded in waist-deep and slid the ten-six out onto the glassy surface. When he dived in after it, the cool saltwater soothed his body like his wife's gentle breath. Kelly caught up to the drifting board and pulled himself up. Gliding out through the whispering ripples, he let last night's pain seep into the ocean balm.

The bracing scent of limu filled his wide nostrils and that salty freshness cleared his muddled mind. The cool sea water soothed his light brown skin as he aimed the nose towards Queen's. His big paws gave him extra pull while he paddled; they also helped reach the octaves, especially when he played Erroll Garner tunes. The luminous turquoise hands on his black and silver Seiko glowed only five-fifteen, but he could still make out the familiar silhouettes of Masa, Blackie, and Tom already sitting in the line-up. He coasted in a few yards to the left of the group, sat up, and turned the tri-fin parallel to the beach.

A wall of hotels lit the dark shoreline from the Prince near Ala Moana

Center all the way down to the Moana Surfrider at Kuhio Beach. On the other side of the street, they extended six more blocks to the Parkshore by the zoo. The activists had a point. Every inch of Waikīkī had been taken away from the native people, as had a lot of land everywhere else. Lehua had good reason for being so committed to Hawaiian rights.

A splash of salt water slapped his cheek. Masa's laughter floated softly across the distance between their boards. "Hey bruddah, you still sleeping or what? If you keep staring at the beach like that, you're gonna miss everything."

"Sorry about that, bull," said Kelly. "Just thinking."

"Well, tell me about it after this set, okay?" They swung their boards around and paddled in unison as the glassy three-footers approached. Blackie and Tom took off first, while Masa and Kelly waited for the second wave. Fifteen seconds passed before it loomed into view. Masa surged forward and called back over his shoulder, "You get the next one, bruddah."

Kelly spun his big stick and stroked quickly back out to the take-off point. The eastern sky had lightened from dark blue-purple to pale violet. The jagged Ko'olau ridgeline glowed magenta and pink. He rotated towards the beach and adjusted his position. When the glossy three-footer lifted his board, tail first, he dug deeply into the water and vaulted forward down the face. Kelly raised himself into a crouch slower than he used to, but the body still remembered the moves.

He stood facing into the awakening day and sped across the right slide with a delight that he'd only been able to feel when his fingers glided over the white and black keys. He waltzed the longboard lightly along the developing wall of mirrored dark glass all the way in to Baby Queen's. Kelly stalled the



tri-fin and let the dying ripple continue on without him. He gently collapsed down on to the deck and headed back out towards the break.

A few minutes later he pulled in along side Masa and sat up. "Nice one, bull. I hope I can still surf like you when I get to be sixty."

"No act." Masa chuckled. "You've only got two years to go." A contagious smile dimpled his dark leathery face and closed his almond eyes under bushy grey brows. Kelly outweighed him by at least fifty pounds but both possessed the lean athletic bodies of men much younger than themselves. When their laughter faded into light sighs, he saw Masa gazing patiently at him. White-gold beacons beamed from behind the peaks and glanced off the underside of the scattered mauve clouds.

"You got that look, bruddah," said Masa. "What's up?"

"Ah, you know me, man. I'm cool."

"You think you can shit me, Kelly?" Masa smiled and gently shook his head. Water droplets from his slick grey ponytail birthed tiny circles on the dark mirrored surface. "We've known each other since Roosevelt. There's something rattling around inside that coconut head of yours."

Kelly looked down at the Aipa logo on his board. "It's my daughter. She's pretty pissed off at me." The rays began to creep between the hotel towers.

"Lehua? What you did, lōlō?" A silver 'aholehole exploded into the air and splashed back into the depths.

"She wants me to help her with some activist stuff. You know how I feel about that crap."

"But they do good work. . ."

"Yeah, that's what Pua used to tell me." He stared down into the

midnight depths and wished he'd never brought it up.

"You ladies keep on yakkin'," Blackie said, "more waves for me." He chased after a rising swell. The wave gently rocked them up and back down again.

Masa's voice took on a softer tone. "I miss her too, bruddah. Sometimes we just need to let the pain go. We all drank and ran around when we were young. That doesn't make it your fault." Kelly turned away and shielded his eyes from the first direct rays. "Maybe you can kōkua with your daughter, too. Remember, she asked you for help. Five years is a long time, Kelly. Sounds like she's trying to reach out to you."

An olive green sea turtle surfaced between them and stared with questioning eyes before it slowly submerged. A calm, peaceful glow spread throughout the bigger man's body. He wondered where it came from.

"Huuiiii!" Tom's joyous yell jerked their heads towards the horizon where a bigger set was lining up. Kelly's shoulders strained to propel the tri-fin to the new takeoff point. Tom hissed shoreward as Kelly struggled up the face. His board slapped down the back of the wave. Blackie and Masa were digging deep for the next swell and Kelly's elbow tendons twinged as the pair raced past him towards the beach. He finally sat back on the deck patch, spun around, and tried to catch his second wind. He let the third wave go, took a deep breath, and launched forward. The sun turned the water aqua gold.

Once on his feet, he stalled the board almost out of the wave and swiftly moved to the nose where he delicately balanced the racing longboard for a few blissful seconds before scampering back. His friends hooted as he glided by and then he proned out as the wave slowed to a ripple. After he paddled through a gap in the rock-rimmed lagoon, he slipped off his board

and rolled over on to his back. Kelly floated lazily, one leg on the board, basking in the harmony of the cool sea and the rising morning sunlight and sighed. "Lucky we live Hawai'i."

The vision of his daughter's hurt, angry face snapped him out of his reverie. His feet found the shallow, sandy bottom. Tugging on the waistband of his shorts, he stood up and lifted his board out of the water. He trudged up the gently sloping beach to the outdoor showers, rinsed off his ten-six, and leaned it against the moss rock wall.

The cold water blasted into his face and tingled over his body. Fresh water mixed with the salty remnant on his taste buds and reminded him of Chinese seed candies, li hing peach and sweet sour lemon. His daughter liked them, too, but her favorite was seedless li hing mango. His wife had loved the same one. The rejuvenating spray washed away the salt water and the tears.

He turned once more to the surf and saw the honu again. The turtle had surfaced close to shore and seemed to be looking in his direction. That same feeling vibrated softly inside of him. He wondered if it was more than a coincidence.

The longboard tucked safely under his left arm, he walked to the curb at Kalākaua Avenue. When the light changed, Kelly crossed over and weaved his way through the early morning pedestrian traffic a block diamondhead to St. Augustine's. He slipped quietly through the gate into the church courtyard and exited on the Ohua Avenue side. Although he had never considered himself a religious man, those few quiet moments always left him with an inner peace, a spiritual balance. He wondered if his daughter would call it pono.

Kelly padded down the side street steps and over to the van. He unlocked the rear door and carefully laid the big board in place. He opened the driver's door, brushed off his feet, and wrapped a big towel around his waist. Then he slipped the wet shorts off under the towel and carefully worked himself into a pair of gray gym shorts. He squeezed his big frame into the driver's seat and started the Ford. Kelly pulled on a white T-shirt that was boldly lettered "Keep Hawaiian Lands in Hawaiian Hands," one that his daughter had given him, and veered into the traffic.

He drove mauka out of Waikiki, past the zoo, up through Kapahulu, bound for Mānoa. He struggled through the rising flood of commuters for twenty-five minutes and finally stopped at a Texaco convenience store where he grabbed a morning paper and a big cup of Kona coffee. Kelly circled back to the Mānoa Shopping Center and parked in front of Kay's Crackseed. The coffee and newspaper would keep him company until the nook opened at eight-thirty. Other stores were closer—and opened earlier—but his mother had brought him here for treats when Mānoa was still populated with dairy cows. And it was still worth the extra drive.

An hour later, he folded the entertainment section back into shape just as a short, white-haired woman wearing a bright red cheongsam unlocked the front door. He drained his cup, got out of the van, and entered the dusky little shop. Big glass jars filled with mouth-watering delights lined the shelves and sweet spicy aromas wafted down the aisle. He nodded at the owner and pointed out his selections. "One pound seedless li hing mango and a half pound sweet sour lemon, please." She smiled, filled his orders, and rang him up.

"Tirteen twenny chree," she sang, her left hand extended, palm up.

He handed her two tens and received the bagged candy and change.

"Missa Kelly?" He turned back as he was reaching for the door. "Dat you, Missa Kelly? Long time no see." The old woman came out from behind the register with mincing steps. "You no come around long time. How yo famly? Yo girl all grown up now, yah? Good you pau drink an run aroun."

"Hah?" Kelly flinched. His crimson ears threatened to turn his wet hair to steam.

"Oh, Missa Kelly, Honolulu small town. I get plenny relative work hotel . . . but you good man, you take kea yo famly. So sorry to hea bout yo wife."

"Ah. . . mahalo, Mrs. Lee." He didn't know what else to say so he waved and pushed out the door. Head burning with the third painful reminder in two days, he drove out of the valley and turned west, headed for 'Auwaiolimu.

After stowing the board, he followed the ginger-lined walkway to the front door. He let himself in and ambled down the hallway to the master bedroom. He left the sweet-sour treat on Lehua's dresser next to the koa-framed picture of her mother. His daughter probably knew about his loose, younger days . . . maybe more than he'd been willing to accept. He backed out of his old room, a room he could no longer live in and walked slowly up the hall.

He draped his damp trunks over the shower curtain rod in the bathroom and returned to his bedroom at the other end of the corridor. He laid out his clothes, a brown and gold print aloha shirt, beige slacks, and a pair of tan loafers that he refused to put on until he reached the hotel lobby. He hated shoes.

His mother had made him wear them every day to Lincoln Elementary but he would take them off the moment he was out of her sight and stash them in his cubby hole. She'd never been able to understand why his stiff brown brogans hadn't worn out. He'd finally told her the truth when he was ten and she'd reluctantly abandoned the Americanization of his hapa-haole feet.

The front door slammed when Kelly was shaving. Lehua breezed by the bathroom on the way to her bedroom. He paused in mid-stroke and poked his head out the door. "What's up?"

"Oh, . . . I . . . uh . . . forgot some paperwork for school. The Hawaiian Studies department is participating in this function today and I forgot the flyers we'd printed up." She shifted her feet with her head down. "It might run late. Can you pick up the twins from paddling, say . . . around five?"

"Up campus at Kamehameha?"

"No, they keep the canoes at the boat ramp by Magic Island. You know, next to Ala Moana Beach Park?" She pulled at the strand of raffia dangling out of her bag.

"No problem. About last night . . ."

"Sorry . . . I've gotta run. Give my aloha to Keoki and Kainoa," she called back over her shoulder. She hustled up the hallway and out the front door.

He had wanted to talk, to tell her he was sorry for last night, for other things, too, things he would never be able to change . . . but maybe it was too late. Kelly shook his head, wiped up, and went to his room to dress. Shoes in hand, he left for the Moana around ten-fifteen allowing a little extra time for the congested Waikiki traffic.

Halfway down the street, he flipped on the stereo. He was tuned to KTUH, the University station. "...and that was Old Blue Eyes' *September Song*. Coming up next, Duke Ellington's rendition of *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*, featuring the vocal stylings of Al Hibler." Kelly sang along, "Missed the Saturday dance, could've gone but what for. I'd never make it without you, don't get around much anymore." He loved that arrangement but lately it had begun to take on a whole new meaning.

Twenty-five minutes later he entered the parking garage elevator and pulled his loafers on before the doors opened in the lobby. He strolled to the bar and picked up his regular, Schweppes' Ginger Ale on the rocks before he entered the Sunset Pavilion. The piano was a beautiful ebony baby grand Steinway set up on a low platform. Because of the salt air they tuned it every month, the pitch and the action were perfect. He sipped his soft drink and set it down on the music stand, protected by a felt-lined koa coaster.

The doors opened to the lunch buffet crowd at eleven sharp. Kelly stretched and flexed his fingers and started with an instrumental favorite of his, *Wave* by Jobim. The subtle bossa nova rhythm in the left hand complemented the lightly-dancing melody. The room had started out about half full but increased steadily. He nodded at the regulars and gratefully acknowledged their polite applause while he interpreted a series of Ellington standards, *In My Solitude*, *Mood Indigo*, and *Chelsea Bridge*. He segued into a couple of Sinatra ballads, *It Was a Very Good Year* and *Last Night When We Were Young*.

He'd decided to end the first set with an instrumental, Bill Evans' *Haunted Heart*, but his fingers seemed to have other ideas. They chorded the intro from *Hello, Young Lovers*, the Sinatra arrangement he'd

sung at his daughter's wedding. He hadn't played it in years, but his fingers remembered. By the time he reached the final stanza "I've had a love of . . . my . . . own," he felt a peaceful warmth again, the same glow he'd experienced earlier that morning in the surf.

Kelly struggled with his emotions over the last two sets but hung on until the light applause died out at one-thirty. He hastily said his goodbyes and hurried to the basement parking garage, taking the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator. When he reached the van he realized he'd forgotten to take off his shoes. He fumbled with the key in the side door lock, climbed in, and lay down on the plush cobalt carpet.

What was happening to him? The scene with his daughter had ripped open an old wound and had seemed to set off a series of . . . he wasn't sure what to call them. . . symbols? signs? . . . messages? He'd never felt the need to relate to a traditional Hawaiian family spirit, but he hadn't denied their existence either. Was the honu their 'aumakua, or were his guilt and grief playing tricks on him? And how about Mrs. Lee at the crack seed store or that definite presence he'd encountered at the piano? He'd been drinking Schweppes', not Chivas Regal. And those feelings that touched him today, that touched him in a deeper place, like in the courtyard at St. Augustine's, that special pono . . . chickenskin.

Kelly struggled forward into the driver's seat, kicked off his loafers, and started the van. He squealed out of the stall and headed for the exit, but he still didn't know what it all meant. When he reached the Ala Wai he followed the road along the canal, crossed the bridge, and merged left into Kapi'olani Boulevard. At the town side boundary of the Ala Moana Shopping Center he turned right and headed mauka for Papakolea.



He stopped for the light under the freeway and saw a familiar group of people walking away from him on the far side of the intersection. He rubbed his eyes in disbelief. A Polynesian woman with familiar hips held hands with a dark-skinned local man sporting a grey pony tail and a short, white-haired grandma in a long red dress. It couldn't be. He knew it wasn't possible. The bright early afternoon sun must've affected his vision, or his brain, or both.

The light took hours to turn green. He roared forward and screeched to a ragged stop twenty feet past the trio. He lunged halfway out the open passenger window. The startled folks stepped back warily. "What pallie," an unfamiliar voice growled, "you gotta problem?" Kelly focused on their faces and realized he'd never seen any of them before.

"Sorry . . . I'm sorry. I thought you were . . . never mind. I'm sorry I bothered you." He settled back on the driver's side and pulled out into the street. He'd been so sure. He couldn't believe they'd turned out to be strangers. He began to wonder about what was real and what wasn't. He wiped his sweaty palms on his shorts and concentrated on the cars in front of him. He'd somehow taken a wrong turn. He'd driven towards the University, not his hilltop home.

But then, that peace once again warmed his insides, better than any shot of Chivas. Maybe he'd made the right turn after all.

The traffic was light and he entered the guard gate at one-fifty. Security told him where to park and from there it was a short walk to the Campus Center. A big awning had been set up with a stage, tables, and chairs. He spotted his daughter instructing a group of local students on how to fill out the voter forms. He waited for her to finish, approached her from behind,

and tapped her lightly on the shoulder. She spun around and her jaw dropped open in shock.

“I just thought I’d see how you were doing.” The words tangled up with his tongue.

“What?”

“You’ve got it all under control. You probably don’t need me.” He slowly backed out from underneath the awning.

“You don’t have to stay if you don’t want to.” The taut cords in her neck relaxed.

“I guess I could hang around for a while. Maybe you should page Peter to pick up the twins.”

“I think I can do that. Oh, Daddy . . . want some li hing mango?”

### The Clearing

A wolf spider scampered up his bare left calf and Angus jumped and swatted the bug back into the path of the hissing flames. The angry orange blaze reared up against the serene background of Kāne'ōhe Bay on O'ahu's windward coast. If he'd only worn grunt pants, he could have tucked the cuffs into his Red Wing bush boots. The burning californian grass sent a choking blast of smoke into his face and he rubbed his wide brown 'upepe nose, hacked and spat the bitter grit into the fire.

"Hey, sonny-boy," Lana snarled, "watch where you're spraying your fuckin' hose!" She leaned on the chain-link fence frame, a Pall Mall and a Bloody Mary in the same hand. Angus wanted to respond, but he had more important things to worry about as he tried to keep focused on the advancing flames.

A hoard of little critters stampeded out of the withered haole koa bushes as the blaze crackled closer. Angus pulled his soggy t-shirt up around his face and yanked the big lauhala hat down low over his shoulder-length, sun-streaked hair. He'd learned to depend on a body built by a decade of canoe racing and long-boarding, but nothing he'd encountered in his nineteen years had prepared him for the possibility of hairy brown creatures cuddling up inside his gym shorts. Just the thought of it made him shiver in the late-morning heat.

From the top of the hill near the road he saw through the broiling air, down the slope to where Uncle Henry worked the blackening bottom edge. With the cracked garden hose Angus shot another stream of water, saturating

the low branches of the ironwoods. He tried to convince himself he could handle the burn from above. His father had always told him to face his fears, but bile was creeping into the back of his throat. He didn't want to lose control of the fire or his breakfast.

He glanced over to see what that mealy-mouthed bitch was up to. She wore big burgundy sunglasses and not much else. The over-sized tank top hung down below her hips and barely concealed a cheap buxom frame. The remains of a hacked hairdo sprouted on top of her head like a shock of rotted swollen-thumb grass. Her sour pout seemed poised to spew more sewage, words his father had insisted Angus never use in polite company.

"Lana!" he called over the popping tinder. "Maybe you should go back inside! I've got to keep those limbs wet in case the wind shifts."

"Yeah, right! If any fuckin' thing happens to our place," she slurred, "you'll have a lot more to worry about than this fuckin' weenie roast!" She staggered back downhill through the boughs towards the house on the Point. How could his father even associate himself with such trash? His mother had been cremated only eight months ago. Ashes to ashes—damn Lana for stealing his father from him! A fresh gust of smoke blew ahead of the rising heat. His eyes teared.

The sooty clouds burned under his lids but he'd stopped trying to wipe away the tears. He fanned a mist onto the front end of the closely cropped buffalo grass lining the driveway where its viridian edge nearest the brambles had yellowed. When the smoke paused, he saw Henry only twenty feet below, creeping up over the charred, sighing ashes. In a few minutes, all that remained of the hissing red beast—and his mood—would lie flat, black, and smoldering.

The older man crunched through the fringe and rubbed his face on a grimy sleeve. "Hooooey—what a burn, eh boy? Gimme that hose." He pinched it, let the pressure build, then blasted it all over his wide, solid face. He yanked off his red bandana and sprayed the cool stream down onto his once inky black hair, which now suffered the intrusion of numerous wiry, silver strands. The water cascaded over his big, knotted body. He clamped the cleansing spout into the waistband of his shorts and giggled. "Good, eh?"

His smile spread over his face like a toothy Hawaiian jack-o-lantern. The big stevedore had been a better uncle and a better friend than any other blood relative, especially since the death of his mom.

"Eh, boy, we sure did it this time, didn't we? Flattened that friggin' *haole koa* and *california grass*." He rubbed his dripping face. For years Henry had talked about replanting the overgrown hillside with endemic species, *pili* grass and *naupaka*, maybe even some *maile* and *'ōhi'a*. Angus squatted, stared into the ironwoods and nodded.

"What, boy—something wrong?" He reached out and lightly pulled on Angus' shoulder, where his hand left a smudged black glyph.

Angus turned to face the big man. "Awww, Uncle. I just can't believe he married that. . . that. . ."

"That what, boy?" Henry's dark face glowered. Angus read the danger signal and quickly stood up, even in height with the older man, but not nearly as wide. "That what, boy? You mean your father's wife, right?"

The young man's shoulders slumped. He kicked the crumbled ash next to Henry's ancient cracked work boots. "Yeah, okay. I'm sorry, Uncle. I guess we've already had this conversation." He stared down at the flat rock under his boot and spat.

His mind flashed through the events of the last few months like a bad music video. Lana had been a business acquaintance of his father's for several years, a labor negotiator Matson had occasionally brought in from San Diego when contract talks with his father's Pier Fifty-One longshoremen had stalled. After Angus' mother passed away, they'd only dated a few months before wedding plans had been announced.

Angus had refused to believe it. Henry had been gracious but Angus didn't know how he handled it. The three of them had been tighter than musketeers, and the youngster reveled in their company because they treated him as a companion, not just a boy. But that had all been ruined now—by her. His father had become a stranger, with little time for anyone but Lana.

At the wedding last week Friday he and his father were barely talking to each other. He squeezed out of the chapel and almost got away before the newlyweds called out his name. He turned to see the two of them floating down the steps with sappy smiles pasted on their faces. Guests were showering them with rice. He'd reached into his coat pocket and found the small bag of white grain, twisted the top tight and fired a perfect strike which exploded against his father's boutonniere and knocked him back a step. Angus, no longer able to be around the two of them, moved across the property line that same night and he hadn't spoken to his father since.

Now Henry was grabbing him by the biceps. "Look, Angus, sometimes we have to accept the things we can't change even when we don't like them."

"But he deserves better. She's just a big-mouth haole. I've never heard you guys talk like that." Angus kicked the crumbled haole koa twigs and the heel of his boot jarred against the edge of another stone. He'd seen the same

dark flat rocks on his father's side of the boundary, under the moldy carpet of ironwood needles that he'd played in when he was younger. He'd defended his family against the onslaught of plastic prehistoric monsters: pink saber-tooths, lime green cave bears, and fluorescent orange woolly mammoths, always triumphant against overwhelming odds. But that was a make-believe enemy attacking his family. Now the enemy was family.

His daydreaming ended when his uncle's grip tightened. "Hey, boy, give her a break."

Angus tried not to let the surge of resentment flush into his face and provoke Henry.

"I know she's a little rough around the edges, but she's got a tough job dealing with us stevedores. Besides, you weren't the only one who lost a loved one." He released his grip. "When your dad was really hurting, she was there for him. She helped him find a reason to get on with his life."

This time Angus could not suppress a scowl. Lana had been there for his father? Lana had helped him? Lana was the problem, not the solution. And, he promised himself, she would get what she had coming to her.

"C'mon, you're gonna find a way to get through this." Henry grabbed him by the scruff of the neck. "Time for lunch. Take a load off while I go grab the grinds."

Angus plodded towards the weathered picnic table that stood in the shade of the banana grove at the driveway's bottom. His uncle followed him but turned when he reached the stairway and bounded up the steps. A few moments later, Henry thumped back downstairs loaded with a big bowl of poi, a tupperware container of raw fish, and four steaming laulaus.

"Boy, go grab us some ice water."

Angus nodded and stepped into the garage, avoiding a big Chevy pickup on blocks, and waded through a pile of old swim fins, Voit Vikings and Churchills. The rusty Westinghouse yielded three frosted, water-filled Jamaican Rum bottles. Angus skirted the frame of a Harley Electroglide, a well-worn rototiller, and a hanging assortment of drying ipu gourds.

Henry had spread out the feast and Angus dug into the laulau without being asked. The smoky pork and butterfish blend complemented the 'ono lu'au leaf wrap.

"How did you warm this up so fast, Uncle?" Angus shoveled a spoonful of day-old poi in on top of his first bite of laulau.

"I kept 'em in the crock pot. Haole engineering's gotta be good for something. Eat up that poi. It's a helluva lot better for you than Fritos and Bud Lite." After a few quick bites, Henry paused and looked up at Angus. "Listen, why don't you come with us this afternoon to the lū'au in Hale'iwa? We'll party late and then crash on the futons in the garage, be back for breakfast tomorrow. The folks would love to see you."

"What about her?"

"Lana? She's not too ma'a with local food." He looked out at the bright blue bay. "Maybe she's trying to give you and your dad some time to get reacquainted."

"Maybe some other time." He looked away, hiding the tremor in his lip.

"You sure? It's gonna be a new moon tonight. Mahina hou. Might have some Night Marchers looking for that ancient path to the leina a ka 'uhane. Auntie Hiwa insisted there was one around here somewhere." His teasing laugh almost made Angus smile.



“Oh, Uncle. Save that one about the spirits looking for their ‘jumping-off’ place for the little kids.”

He had heard these stories from the time he had waddled out of diapers. Aunty Hiwa had kept the keiki spellbound at family gatherings with tales of Night Marchers, giant lizards, and the pig god Kamapua‘a. She’d always called Angus by his Hawaiian name, Kamakanalani, insisting he sit in her lap, smelling sweet and warm like fresh-baked Moloka‘i bread. She’d passed away before he entered the fifth grade, and he missed her lively black-brown eyes that shone like polished kukui nuts.

Henry shrugged and smiled apologetically. “I guess I never really went in for that stuff. But it’s a great story.”

Angus nodded. It would definitely be more than a great story.

Henry reached across the table and gently massaged Angus’ cheek. “I probably don’t need to tell you how much your dad would. . .”

“I have to patch my board before I go dawn-patroling tomorrow at Queens.”

“Oh. . . okay.” His eyes looked moist. “Catch one for me—and remember to feed the labs before you sack out?”

He didn’t mind feeding the dogs, but Angus had more important things on his mind.

When they’d swiped the last sticky dabs of poi into their mouths, Henry stretched, belched, and gathered up the remains. While he mounted the stairs to get ready for the party, Angus wandered over to check on the burn. At least that was what he told his uncle before he walked over to the side of driveway where he’d uncovered the first two volcanic stones. The knotted, twisted mass of haole koa and wedelia had been reduced to a sighing

pile of grey ashes. There was no way anybody would have found them before the fire had performed its cleansing purification, but now the big slabs of pahoehoe were clearly visible. He kicked some debris back over the stones, then casually returned to the haven under the bananas to bide his time.

He stretched out on the shaded bench and thought back to what Auntie Hiwa had said about The Night Marchers. He knew all that stuff about taking your clothes off and lying face down with your eyes shut, that if they saw you or if you looked at them, they'd be forced to kill you. But what was it she had said about the mahina hou and the leina a ka 'uhane?

At the lū'au and other family functions, her soft ample figure could always be found in an overstuffed chair. Angus was never sure whose auntie she actually was—she'd belonged to everybody. With a giggling keiki or two in the lap of her bright mu'umu'u, she'd kept all the children entertained for hours at a time with her stories of old Hawai'i.

"An you know bout da Night Machas, yeh? Dey come wit da pahu and da torches. You can heah da jrum beeten slow, ja like one funero." All the youngsters' eyes widened to the size of 'opihī shells and riveted on Auntie's face. "Das da evry-day kine. But get one, mo werse. Dey cum wen get da new moon and dey no mo da pahu, dey no mo even one torch."

"But Auntie," one of the little ones asked, "how we goin know wen dey comin?"

"Das right. How we goin' know?" The adults' muted laughter wafting in from the car port was the only sound in the room. She looked around at the spell-bound children and bent forward. "Me kea wifa—ho, da stink. Wen doze buggahs get close, smell ja like rotten meat. An you know what else?" The little frozen faces wiggled side-to-side. "Dey stay lookin fo da leina a ka

'uhane so dey can jump off into da nex worl." The room's collective sigh would be forever etched in Angus' memory.

The crunch of tires on gravel brought him out of his day-dream and announced the arrival of the black Jeep Cherokee as it ground to a halt past the ironwood boughs. His father got out, came around the car, and scanned across the property line. Angus was virtually invisible under the cover of hanging banana fronds, but he could see the thick figure clearly, clad in beige corduroy shorts and a citrus green aloha shirt. The sun glinted off his Ray-Ban Aviators and chrome Seiko. It also glared off the new gold hoop on his left-hand ring finger, the finger that used to be adorned with a delicate silver band like the one Angus' mother had worn.

"Huuiiii!" he yelled. "We don't want to be late!"

"Yeah, yeah!" Henry appeared on the deck in a pair of white terry cloth shorts with a diamond blue aloha shirt draped over one shoulder.

"Where's Angus?"

Henry bounced down the steps, two-at-a-time. "Couldn't make it." He scampered past the bananas as if Angus wasn't there and hurried up the driveway.

"Damn." His father took off his glasses and rubbed his face with both hands.

A pain of regret stabbed Angus in the center of his chest. Why couldn't this mess be cleaned up? Why did it have to be this way?

Uncle Henry had reached the car and grabbed the other man by the shoulders. "Hey, it's going to be okay. He'll come around—you'll see. C'mon, we don't want to be late."

Angus' father took one last look down the driveway, shook his head,

and walked back around the Jeep. The two men got inside and drove away. Maybe he should have gone with them and patched things up and then it would have been like old times, just the three of them. Maybe he could put his hurt behind him and try to get along with her. How happy they'd looked at the wedding—he wiped the corners of his eyes—and how disgusting she'd behaved this morning.

Maybe not.

He glanced at his watch. Two-fifteen. He should have enough time to find the rest of the pathway and clear off the stones before sunset. He got up and walked into the garage to get the tools. After a minute of rummaging around, he came out with a hoe, a steel rake, and an old belligerent broom.

Angus returned to his original place of discovery, where the stones—big, smooth pahoehoe—were randomly shaped but placed together precisely, like a giant mosaic. He worked the short end of the pathway first, twenty feet alongside the driveway up to the street. Ten pieces surfaced after a few firm strokes of the rake, but the last one nearest the road had been partially covered by the City and County's blacktop.

The path appeared to be fairly straight, about three feet wide, heading for his father's property line thirty feet away. For over an hour, he hacked, scraped, and broomed, then paused for a breather under the shade of the ironwoods. He still needed to uncover another one hundred feet before he reached the house, and the sun had already begun to angle towards the dark Ko'olau ridgeline.

He began again, racing against the waning afternoon light and the hands on his watch, which had already passed four-fifteen. It wouldn't do to alert Lana and he definitely did not want to out here after dark. He wasn't

sure how much of Auntie Hiwa's story he believed, but he was sure he did not want to risk an encounter on a moonless night with supernatural killers.

The slabs crossed under his father's driveway and seemed to make a bee-line for the front porch. Although the gravel needed the encouragement of the hoe, the moldy needles offered little resistance to the tines of the steel rake and cleared more quickly than the debris on Henry's side. After another hour's effort, he was within thirty feet of the house. He stopped to plan his final approach.

The rows of wooden jalousies had been closed and the door was solid mahogany. A peephole—something Lana had undoubtedly insisted upon—had been inserted in its upper center to afford a limited view of the outside world. Fortunately for Angus, the big glass panes were on the opposite side of the house, in the living room, overlooking the Point and the bay beyond.

The TV blared with a talk show's stilted laughter, and he hoped she'd remain entertained by the prattle until he finished the job. While the masses of fallen brown needles had proven no real obstacle, the knobby tree roots gave him fits. He hoped he'd hacked out enough of them; he was too near the house now to risk discovery. He grabbed the pickaxe, slippery with sweat, by the neck and flung it back up the path. He'd had enough of foreign intruders for one day.

When he finally reached the door, the last delicate brush of the broom bristles uncovered the rusted wheel of a toy Tonka truck from a less complicated time. A wave of lightheadedness forced him to his knees. He caressed the tiny tire with his fingertips. He didn't want to go through with it. He'd have to find some other way of dealing with the problem.

"Oh, shiiiit!" she yelled from the living room. Her raucous laughter followed to bolster his sagging resolve. Things could never be the same.

Angus looked back up the cleared pathway towards the road and marveled at the ancient engineering. This morning's clearing of introduced plants had rid the land of one kind of foreign intruder. Now he had paved the way for a second cleansing, and by tonight the spirit of his ancestors would hopefully have taken care of the rest.

He stood up, grabbed the tools and hurried back to Henry's, where he stashed them away in the garage. He filled the dogs' food and water bowls and left them on the gravel next to the picnic table. When he squeezed out his T-shirt, now soaked with the cold grimy sweat of heavy labor, anticipation, and fear the droplets glowed in the fading rays like prisms.

From the picnic bench he watched the two hungry animals feed until the sun dropped behind the hemlock green peaks. As the dark glided up from below the eastern horizon, it brought with it the promise of judgment. He crept upstairs and headed for the shower, hoping a higher power would remove from his life what the soap and water would not.

The hot streams poured over his body and he washed it all away, the dirt, the sweat, the anxiety. He didn't know how long he'd basked in the steaming spray, but when he glanced at his watch it was already after seven-thirty. He shut the faucets off. He reached for his towel and stepped out onto the bathroom rug, where he dried off, slipped into a pair of jockeys and shorts, and walked out through the front door onto the deck.

Except for a faint glow in the western sky, the night was completely black. There must have been cloud cover or else the stars were simply refusing to appear. The labs hadn't come up on the deck to lie in their usual

spot near the door. When they didn't respond to his whistle, he decided to go downstairs and investigate.

He descended the steps one at a time until he reached the bottom and tripped over a warm furry body. It growled. "Hey, guy, it's just me." He reached down to scratch behind the dog's ears when he felt the lab freeze. Something must be out there, but he didn't hear a thing, not the distant whine of a jet liner, not a knobby set of tires whirring above on the road—not even an insect. Nothing.

A bead of his sweat hit the bottom step like a tack hammer. He felt like he needed another bath. He smelled like sour milk. When he inhaled a second time it smelled worse, like a rotten egg or an 'uhu left in the net too long. Fear smacked him in the face like a basalt block.

It smelled like rancid meat.

Automatically he threw himself on the ground, yanked off his shorts and bibs, his arms over his head as he lay on the gravel face-down. The pathway ran above him near the road. The smell hadn't become overpowering yet. His drum-rolling heart slowed to single beats. A cold calm settled over him. She wouldn't know what to do, of course. She'd freak and scream and swear and—she wouldn't interfere with their lives anymore. She'd be gone. Forever. She had it coming.

The chalky gravel grit didn't taste half-bad. He could lie like this 'til morning if he had to. By that time, his troubles would long be over. He almost laughed out loud, but then he caught himself. What if he was wrong?

How would his father feel when he found his wife dead? He'd been so sure of this earlier, but now. . . . The sharp points of the little stones stabbed at him in a thousand different places. "Sins of omission." Whose voice

whispered in his ear? His father's? His Uncle's? Auntie Hiwa's? His own?

The loudest sound in the world thundered in his head: the rush of his blood. Maybe he could run down the hill and climb up the cliff at the water's edge. Maybe not. What if he got caught by . . . them? Microseconds ticked away. He didn't know if he could live with the look on his father's face, the look of emptiness in his father's eyes after his big-mouth haole wife had died. Maybe the sappy smiles at the wedding last week had been looks of real happiness. He had to do something.

He rolled over quickly and slipped back into his shorts, then plunged down into the black, hoping to God he'd get there in time. His calloused, bare feet knew the hill better than his eyes, but he fell three times before he reached the bottom.

The stink of death had been replaced by the odors of charcoal and burnt dirt. A slight breath off the water brought the fragrance of fresh seaweed into his nostrils. The limu smelled alive and his spirits rose out of the rot and ashes.

The water licked the smooth wet rocks but his feet clung to their surfaces like gecko toes. He had to reach the far side of the Point before . . . . He didn't want to think about it. He needed to move faster, but the dark and the rocks had reduced his effort to a tentative, stumbling lurch. Maybe he should forge up through the brush and try the driveway. But if he figured wrong, he wouldn't get a second chance.

He lost his balance and plunged forward. His elbow glanced off a boulder, his ribs absorbed a crunching blow. He wanted to lie there and cry out or just close his eyes and forget it. But he couldn't. He pulled himself up and staggered on, driven by the reproving images of the men he loved and



respected. He glanced at the turquoise glow of his Seiko. He'd only been down here five minutes, but it felt like an hour.

The rocks finally gave way to a coarse sandy strip. He knew the Point would be close. Uncle Henry had shown him how to throw net here for manini and halalū. He groped for the narrow rock ledge. Directly above lay the lawn and the house.

When his battered toes found the cold hard surface he reached above his head into the tangled wood rose and lilikoi vines. Then he lunged upwards, pulling hand over hand on his belly through the thick mulch. A faint blue haze flickered down through the scrub while his feet pawed for traction. His cheek bones pushed through a wiry web. Finally he burst forward onto the mowed buffalo grass and sucked the cool night air into his lungs: still fresh and sweet.

Angus pushed up onto his knees and scrambled toward the light. He reached for the window sill and clung to it, sweat pooling in his eye sockets as he squinted through the big plate glass. She lay draped over a black leather recliner, garbed in her familiar tank top, her bust line threatening to explode. But her hair shimmered like mink and the lush colors of her lips, cheeks and eyes halted his ragged breathing. His face flushed with shame. He had to drag his attention back to the real crisis.

He reached the locked door knob and hauled himself to his feet, pounding with an open palm. "Lana, it's me, Angus!" He bent over at the waist trying to catch his wind. The TV babbled back. "C'mon, Lana, open the door!"

"Your father's not home. Come back tomorrow."

He slammed on the panel with his forearm. "Lana, this is important!"

"Nothin' that can't wait 'til the morning."

Fear catalyzed his rage. He snorted and slammed his dimpled left shoulder into the weathered plywood. The hinges gave and sent Angus sprawling onto the carpet.

"What the fuck?" Lana creaked up out of the barcalounger. "Why the hell did you break the goddamn door, asshole? Your father's gonna be pissed!"

"Sorry." He stood up, panting.

"What the shit happened to you? You've been doin' the nasty with barbed wire, or what?"

He glanced down his battered body. "Long story."

She sat back in the chair, yawned, and stubbed out an old Pall Mall.

"We've got to leave now," he said.

"Yeah, sure."

"Right now. I can't explain." He reached for her arm but she pulled away.

"Fuck off, Angus." She pointed the remote and clicked the channel to the CNN News. "I'm not going anywhere."

He snatched the remote, shut it off, and flung it across the room.

"Look, I told you, I can't explain—you've got to believe me! We can't stay here!"

"What the hell is wrong with you? I told you, I'm not going anywhere!" She stopped shouting and sniffed. "Gawd, boy, when's the last time you took a bath? Yuck!" She pinched her nostrils. "You smell like rotten eggs."

They were coming.

He jerked her up out of the chair and dragged her across the room.

"What the fuck do you think you are doing!" She dug her heels into the carpet but his whole body pulsed with adrenaline. He got her halfway through the entrance before she managed to wedge her foot outside the frame.

"C'mon Lana, we've got no time!" He yanked harder against her leverage.

"Angus, you prick! I don't know what kind of game . . . ugh!" The stink flooded the room. Rancid meat.

"Too late." He shoved her back into the room, catching her off balance. "Get your clothes off—now!"

"What? Oh, I get it! So this is what it's come to!"

Angus grabbed the quilt off the sofa and threw it over her. He knocked her down onto the floor cushions, reached under the quilt, and ripped off her top.

"Fuckin' great, Angus. You really dig this macho shit, huh? Maybe if you'd asked nicely . . ."

He pushed her covered head into the pillow pile and held her down with his legs. He popped the clasp and tore off her bra and panties with his free hand. Once he'd kicked off his shorts and flung himself on top of her quilt, her muffled screams weakened. He turned her head to the side so she could breathe and pulled the cord on the floor lamp. He shut his eyes.

The Night Marchers were here.

He almost gagged. A putrid fog blanketed the room with the stench of week-old butcher scraps. The feet of The Night Marchers rasped like files as they plodded along in their spirit world. Every fiber in his body struggled to

control her squirming. Then the scraping sounds stopped.

Waves of nausea and fear pounded over him. He knew they'd seen him. He hadn't been any help after all. He wept silently. They were going to kill him here while he lay naked on top of his father's wife. But then, in his despair, he remembered he'd always been told to face his fears. Angus opened his eyes.

He had trouble adjusting to their shades of black and gray but he saw them, their faces glowing with an unearthly light. Scores of darkly muscled warriors, their torsos wrapped in fine kapa, stood poised and ready for action a foot above the floor, frozen on the air. Armed with clubs and spears, they waited for some predetermined signal, the silhouettes of hell. They stared soundlessly, mouths thrown open in silent screams. He had looked into the face of death and he shut his eyes again, petrified.

Lana had stopped resisting, although her back still rose and fell. Maybe she'd finally understood something—but it had been too late. He hoped their deaths would be quick as he waited in the dark, body arched in anticipation. A club to the head? A spear through the back?

And then a different smell crept in under the rotted flesh, the warm tender fragrance of fresh Moloka'i bread. "Kamakanalani, keep doze eyes shut ." Aunty Hiwa's voice called to him from across the years.

He tightly scrunched his lids. Fresh tears ran down his cheeks.

"You arright now, keiki. Jus be still." Softly wrinkled fingertips wiped his face and were swiftly gone. The scraping sounds began again, slowly fading into the night.

He didn't know how long he'd lain there when the first puff of sweet

sea breeze blew through the blackness. Gently lifting himself off the lumpy cover, he slipped his shorts on and plugged in the lamp. The room appeared intact, except for the door. He found the channel changer and helped the bundled-up woman back onto the sofa.

“What happened?” she whispered. Her bottom lip quivered.

He handed her the remote. “It’s a long story. Tell Dad to call me in the morning.”

“Look . . . Angus . . .” She caught a tear running down her cheek with the tip of her pinkie nail. “I think you and I got off on the wrong foot.” Her smudged mascara left her looking like a sad clown. “I really do love him, you know.”

He righted the broken door and took one last look around the room.

“And I need a fuckin’ drink.” She’d wrapped herself in the quilt and tucked the loose end into her bosom. “Care to join me?”

“I don’t think so.” He propped the door shut and backed out into the night. She was his father’s wife, whether he liked it or not.

Rock of Ages

Darkness covered Eli's world and the light had yet to be divided from the darkness. He glanced at the alarm clock he hadn't set in months. The rock in his living room had kept him awake again. Pajamas, a sweat suit, and double wool socks couldn't prevent him from remaining chilled to the bone, cold-blooded as a mo'o, the four-legged cousin of the serpent. Was it a test from God or a curse from pagan Hawaiian spirits? Eli could no longer tell the difference.

His wife Myrna gurgled softly, undisturbed by the scissoring of the bamboo thicket outside their mauka window. Although it was only ten minutes to the southwest as the mynah bird flies, the bustle of downtown Honolulu seemed light-years away. He used to love looking out on that peaceful mountain view, up through the lush rain forest to the Tantalus ridgeline above Manoa valley. He hadn't felt that peace in weeks.

He rolled to his left, swung his icy shins over the side of the mattress, and perched precariously on the edge. Eli rubbed his numb legs like sticks of frozen firewood but failed to create a spark. He creaked to his feet and lurched out of the room, no longer needing to duck under the doorway that used to brush against his silver crew-cut.

He hobbled into the black hallway and trekked across moldy floor boards, the varnish worn down as his sagging faith. He shuffled through the tattered gray shag of the living room carpet until his kneecap nudged his Lazy-Boy's cracked vinyl. He sagged down into the bosom of the familiar old chair. Eli groped in the elasticized pocket for the remote and switched on

CNN. He searched for answers in the muted, flickering gray images but found none.

The room was dominated by the rock. It lay there next to the dusty spinet near the front door like a small meteor, the size of a flattened softball. Pahoehoe, his grandson had called it, in a language Eli had allowed to seep out of his life like tiny fish escaping through an empty net.

Growing up around the eroding fishponds of He'eia on O'ahu's windward coast, Elika Kealahou Keali'i enlisted in the army before the end of the Korean War determined to make a new life for himself and his pregnant bride, Myrna. He returned to the Territory of Hawai'i with a new haircut, a new name—his company chaplain had shortened it to Eli because it sounded "more Christian"—and a brand new Bible. He'd pledged to keep Jesus in the center of his life and had become equally determined to abandon everything that interfered, especially the beliefs of his ancestors and the reverence for the culture of his birth.

"Eli," mumbled his wife, "come back to bed." He'd heard this plea so often its emotional value had shrunk to the size of a mustard seed. He'd tried to be the kind of husband and father that he knew he should have been, but priorities got in the way.

He'd dedicated his life to God, the fire department, and his family, in that order, but walking in the light of the Lord and fighting fires took up most of his time. He was a pillar of righteousness and service among the Baptist faithful. Before his retirement last year he'd risen to the rank of deputy chief and had served a ten-year stint as head of the rescue squad. His four children

had all grown in various directions and his wife had her own life, filled with shopping, luncheons, and weekly appointments at the hairdresser. And now he was left alone with that cursed stone.

He strained towards the malevolent lump in the predawn darkness. He squinted, struggling to pick up an aura or glow. There was nothing he could see but he felt it pulsing, emanating some kind of ancient message he'd refused to accept.

Three months ago it had lain along the pathway to Halema'uma'u crater in Volcano National Park. On that balmy Saturday morning in February, Eli had served as the tour guide for a handful of out-of-state Baptists. They'd enjoyed his stories of Hawaiian Christianity: Opukaha'ia's hunger for the Word, Queen Kapi'olani's denunciation of the kapu system, and the work of Binamu, one of the first missionaries to come to the islands. He regaled them with a religious fervor and a slight disdain for what he'd constantly referred to as his ancestors' pagan rites.

"Praise the Lord," exclaimed Mrs. Angela Goodhew, "for your Godly example, Eli." She flipped up her hinged sunglasses and displayed a set of teeth capable of efficient grazing.

"Thank you, Ma'am," he said. He warmed to her praise and the touch of her pudgy, white hand.

"One of our friends back at the office told us something about not removing any stones from the park." A sudden gust jerked up the brim of her chartreuse bonnet.

"Oh, you know how these folk tales are perpetuated by the pagan unchurched, Ma'am." He silently thanked Jesus for providing him with



another golden opportunity to be more vigilant in the eyes of God or, at the very least, to continue to impress Mrs. Goodhew. "I'm sure these silly superstitions have no effect on one who walks in the light of the Lord." He gave her a big ingratiating grin.

"Amen, brother." She patted the back of his hand, her carefully manicured fingernails lacquered with a delicate shade of cherub pink.

"Unbelievers insist that it's a violation of cultural law, an offense to Pele, the goddess of the volcano. But as the Good Book says, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me,' and I'll gladly prove my faith." He reached down and picked up a softball-sized stone and plopped into his backpack. "I'm not afraid of any pagan idolatry." She beamed at him.

Mrs. Goodhew squealed as a brisk island breeze blew down off Mauna Loa and sent the floppy hat sailing. Before Eli could catch the bonnet it had blown back up the pathway and into the cauldron. His flood of apologies were politely accepted, but something in her mood had changed. The ill wind blew harder.

When the group returned to the rental car a few minutes later, they found the trunk jimmied and their belongings ripped-off. No amount of fervent prayer could make them miraculously reappear. Mrs. Goodhew's shopping bags, filled with gifts for the folks back home, were among the missing items.

Despite Eli's stumbling apologies, she didn't utter an encouraging word all the way back down the mountain. Halfway to the Hilo airport, the right rear tire picked up a kiawe thorn. When Eli went to change it, he discovered the spare was as flat as Mrs. Goodhew's mood.

While they were waiting for the Avis airport shuttle, she waddled back

and forth, jiggling in the rising heat. "Maybe you shouldn't have taken that goddam rock, Mr. Know-it-all," she snapped.

Eli couldn't think of a single scriptural response. He sagged against the side of the white Ford Taurus, his brown ears burned bright red.

He was saddened but relieved to finally get the group on to their Delta flight at Honolulu International, secretly praying nothing else would happen, but it did. His new Saturn four-door wouldn't start in the airport parking lot and he had to have it towed. When he finally got home, he found the fridge on the blink and a note from the repairman, "Compressor dead—better buy a new one."

He took the rock out of his pack and put it down. It reminded him of his pledge and his denial. He wasn't going to let a few random coincidences challenge his faith. Once a part of a living, breathing, creative force, it had now become Eli's front doorstep.

Myrna's Toyota roared up the driveway and squealed to a stop on the smooth garage concrete. When the downstairs door opened, he retreated to the safety of the kitchen. Footsteps reached the top of the stairs and paused. *He smelled her hairspray before he heard her question.*

"What's that rock doing by our front door?" his wife asked.

"Uh, it's just a door stop."

Myrna put down her shopping bags and straightened her mauve pantsuit. "A door stop?" Her incredulous tone shredded his flimsy cover-up. "It looks like a lava rock to me. You didn't bring that back from the Big Island, did you?" Her hands had locked on to her hips.

He knew what was coming next and he tried to get off the defensive. He stuck his head out of the kitchen and raised it defiantly. "I don't believe in

that pagan mumbo-jumbo.”

“I don’t care what you believe, old man. You’ve been hanging around those dumb haoles too long. Nobody in their right mind takes a rock from the volcano. Nobody.” She stomped off down the hallway and yelled over her shoulder, “And you’d better do something about it!” She slammed the door behind her.

He knew he was in for the silent treatment. He’d weathered it before, but this time it took on a whole different dimension. The shama thrush’s tremolo lost its rapture. The gardenias bloomed but they might as well have been plastic. Poi and sardines became as tasteless as cold McDonald’s fries. He wanted to feel the warmth of his wife’s ‘ūhā, the skin of her upper thigh still soft and supple after forty-two years of marriage, but his finger tips only irritated her—or maybe she irritated him. He wanted to care about life around him but some part of him wouldn’t cooperate. He lived in Paradise but it felt like Purgatory.

It was hard for him to believe that a two-pound chunk of hardened basalt could disrupt his whole world. He cried out like Job to the Rock that he’d known all of his adult life. He prayed louder and longer, calling out to his Blessed Redeemer to give him the strength to endure, rocking back and forth on ancient knees, wrapped in blankets that refused to give him warmth or comfort.

He recited every Psalm he knew, every prayer he remembered. He read from The Beatitudes, from Revelations—even the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments but to no avail. Nobody answered.

But the rock wasn’t finished yet. After all that had happened the lava had suddenly picked up weight. He couldn’t lift it, he couldn’t even budge it.

And he didn't tell anyone else about it. He knew this had become some kind of test from God. It had gone far beyond the outer-most reaches of vanity, of pride, of self-righteousness. He knew the Lord would deliver him from this affliction in His time and in His way.

"...in Jesus' blessed name, Amen." He took a deep breath and exhaled. He hoped the troubles in his life would be released along with it, but he knew it wasn't so. The black living room curtains had turned to charcoal gray but his mood had failed to improve with the the approaching day.

He rubbed his freezing arms and covered his sweatshirt with an old robe. A duet of mountain doves warbled from the Apple of Sodom bush but their once melodious voices fell on his numb auditory nerves. It had become only noise to him now, better to not have any sounds at all. And the silence had a deadly hum of its own, like death. It all emanated from the rock.

"God give me the strength to endure this," he muttered. Drawers slid open and shut in the back bedroom as his wife thumped and creaked around. He reached for the remote again and flipped through "B" movies, televangelists, seventies reruns and analyses of the analysis of the news. He lulled himself into a trance again, only to be yanked out of it by the cutting edge of Myrna's scolding.

"Eli! Pay attention when I'm talking to you. I'm going out. There's left over stew in the fridge and yesterday's rice on the stove. I won't be home 'til later." She clacked down the steps to the garage, opened the door, but stuck her head back through the opening. "Do you remember what day it is? Your grandson and his instructor should be here any minute." She pulled the door shut, got in her car, and roared off.

He struck his forehead with the butt of his hand. He'd completely forgotten that the boy and his kumu were coming to help with the rock. Eli didn't need any college professor butting in where he didn't belong. This was personal. He wished 'Ikaika hadn't worn him down when they'd argued about it last week Thursday.

"Grandpa," 'Ikaika had said, "I'm really worried about you." His bear-like frame engulfed Eli's recliner. "You don't look so good. I don't think it's physical—I think we need something else."

"I have all the help I'll ever need." Eli patted the weathered black cover of his ancient King James version lying in his lap.

"I understand." 'Ikaika put his big paw on Eli's shoulder. His voice took on a quiet intensity. "But I think we need to take the next step."

"Eh? What's that?"

"I'm bringing my Hawaiian Studies kumu to help you with the stone."

"I won't have any pagan idolatry in my house!" He struggled to lurch upright out of the recliner, but his grandson blocked out the room. "Let me up!"

'Ikaika lowered his face down next to Eli's. "Relax, Grandpa. Kumu Ho'omanawanui isn't some kind of evil sorcerer. There are many paths to the mountain top. He's a spiritual man, more experienced in these matters than anyone I know." He lifted his thick koa-colored braid off of Eli's grey crew-cut and flipped it back over his massive shoulders. "Besides, he's gonna visit his family in Pāhoa this weekend. The crater's less than a half hour's drive from their house." He sat back on his haunches like some gigantic Buddha. Eli snorted.

The boy gently massaged the old man's stubbled cheek. "Don't worry. I know how hard this is for you. It'll be okay—really."

Eli managed a weak smile. But how could even his beloved keiki 'o ka 'āina really understand? "We'll see."

"We'll be along early. Kumu wants to take advantage of the first light." 'Ikaika kissed him on the forehead before rumbling down the steps and out the door. The old man nodded after the fact. The boy's battered VW van sputtered away and silence crept back over Eli's world. He didn't know how he'd be able to tolerate any native ceremonies in his God-fearing home. He hoped they wouldn't bring any bare-breasted strumpets.

The top edge of the curtain rod had barely begun to lighten when a soft knock sounded at the front door. "Grandpa, come out onto the porch."

"Eh?" Eli lurched to his feet. "But—"

"Hurry, Grandpa. We must begin before the sun rises."

"But I'm not dressed." He shuffled towards the door, trying to make sense out of the tie on his faded terry-cloth robe.

"Kumu says it doesn't matter, Grandpa. Please open the door."

It matters to me, Eli wanted to snap back. With shaking hands he reached for the worn brass knob and the new dead bolt, but he forgot to remove the chain. When he tried to swing the door inward it almost jerked the anchor bracket off the wall. He recovered and fumbled with the slot until the chain finally slipped free. He opened the door embarrassed and more than a little afraid.

His grandson's humungous frame loomed in the door way. Eli had never understood why the three-time, all-state offensive tackle had turned

down those football scholarships—not only to the University of Hawai‘i, but to such powerhouse schools as Michigan State, Arizona, and Southern Cal. ‘Tkaika had admitted he’d missed it, but that some things had become more important than football. He’d registered at UH, double-majoring in Hawaiian Studies and music. It still didn’t make sense to Eli.

‘Tkaika pulled open the screen door and held out his big mitt. The older man hesitated and then stepped out into the predawn shadows. The dark peaks at the back of the valley were edged diamond blue. His grandson turned to the rear of the small porch and ushered forward a short solemn Hawaiian with black, shoulder-length hair.

“Grandpa, this is Kumu Ho‘omanawanui. Kumu, this is my Grandpa, ‘Elika Kealahou Keali‘i.”

The sound of his full Hawaiian name shocked him. It had been decades since he’d heard those letters run together so musically. But he couldn’t remember when he’d ever told the boy his middle name. The teacher extended his hand and offered a deep soft greeting.

“Aloha.”

He knew it had been overused, cheapened, diluted, and trivialized. But the way the kumu had spoken it brought renewed meaning to the word. His warm, firm grasp added to Eli’s surprise. He didn’t know what to say. The proper response wouldn’t come and he ended up by simply nodding his head.

“Let’s begin,” said Kumu, “as the day begins.” He reached into a white nylon duffle bag and removed a gallon-sized ziploc that contained three maile leis. He draped one of the leafy strands around ‘Tkaika’s neck and kissed him lightly on the cheek. The boy returned the honor. Eli tensed up

with the discomfort of being kissed by a man outside of his family, but the gesture, the ceremony, and the obvious warmth that came from the kumu's touch left Eli surprisingly at ease.

"Join hands," said Kumu. "Let's have a quick pule to thank the Creator for this new day." They stood together on the concrete porch with heads bowed as the kumu intoned briefly in Hawaiian. Eli caught very little of it, the language of his birth but now as foreign to him as ancient Aramaic.

When they released hands, the teacher reached into the bag again and retrieved two large green ti leaves the size of Eli's ceiling fan blades. He held them by the stems and dipped the tips into a small koa bowl that 'Ikaika had filled with water. Eli would've backed off the edge of the porch if his grandson hadn't grabbed his shoulder.

"It's a blessing ceremony, Grandpa." The kumu began to chant, a rich melodious trumpeting full of swells, dips, and crests. "Open the door, Grandpa. It's time for Kumu to enter."

The teacher dipped the ti leaf tips into the bowl and sprinkled water on the three of them, the door frame and randomly throughout the room. The rich chanting continued, rolling like wind through ancient forests. But to Eli, it looked like some kind of pagan ceremony. He couldn't allow such blasphemy in his own home.

Just before Eli opened his mouth, 'Ikaika hugged him and whispered in his ear, "Please, Grandpa, I need your kokua. It's not what you think. Kumu is here to help."

Eli's trust hung by a thread. He silently thanked God for his grandson's help and fought to keep his indignation under control. The boy bent over to his ear again.



"It's a welcoming chant, Grandpa. Kind of an introduction." He paused and closed his eyes as if searching for a better explanation. "It's a polite way to begin an event, honoring the sanctity of life, the participants, and the world around them."

Eli wasn't convinced. "He's not casting spells, is he?"

"Of course not. Hang in there, Grandpa." He gently wrapped his tree-limb arm around Eli's shoulders and guided him into the house.

When Eli stepped across the threshold, the chanting stopped. The kumu stood motionless, staring at the stone in the half-light. He turned to face Eli.

"Please open the shades," the kumu said. "The pōhaku needs the blessing of the first rays."

But it's just a rock, Eli wanted to shout at the intense little man. 'Ikaika shot him a stern glance as if he could read the old man's mind. Eli shuffled over to the windows. "Of course," he mumbled. He yanked on the drapery chords but the pulley wheels squealed in resistance. He didn't know how long it had been since he'd opened them. He turned to the kumu sheepishly and began to offer an apology but the teacher held up his hand.

"Not to worry. Now is as good a time as any to let some of the outside in. 'Ikaika, can you please help your kupuna?"

Eli returned to tugging at the yellowed nylon chords, while his grandson reached above the rods and gently encouraged the binding plastic clips away from the center. The two of them gradually succeeded in opening the curtains. The first beams had crept over the hemlock green Mānoa peaks and entered the once tomb-like room. One of the beacons fell on the picture of Christ on the wall above the rock. Eli almost jumped in shock and fell back

into his gloomy mindset. He couldn't take it anymore.

"Look, 'Ikaika, I know you folks are trying to—"

" 'Elika Kealahou Keali'i, firstborn of Kainoa and Kawaiho'ano Keali'i of He'eia, please be still. There is still much to be done. We need your kōkua, not your doubts."

Once again, Eli was almost overwhelmed by the musicality of the syllables—but how did the kumu know the names and where he was from? Even 'Ikaika didn't know all of it.

In the meantime, the kumu had unrolled on the living room floor an intricately woven lauhala mat the size of the Lord's Supper tablecloth. He then spread out a layer of finely beaten kapa on top of it. He slipped his hands under both, lifted them, and turned to face the sun. He chanted while 'Ikaika whispered in Eli's ear.

"He's thanking the Creator for the beauty of this day . . . praising His many names . . . and giving thanks for the healing warmth of the rising sun. He offers the lauhala . . . and the kapa . . . as a suitable foundation . . . for the transport of the stone back to its rightful home."

The sun's rays had crept down the wall beneath the picture of Christ and approached the blackness that enveloped the rock. Eli wondered if the light would be able to penetrate the darkness, the darkness that had slithered into his life over the past few weeks.

The teacher had finished his chanting and turned again to Eli, who had slouched against the side of the door. "Now comes the most crucial time. I alone cannot complete this ceremony. I need your help, Brother 'Elika."

"Eh? My help?" Eli shrank down against the door frame. The sharp edge of the molding stabbed his chilled backbone despite the layers of cloth.

"I've been trying to do something about this—this—" He gestured toward the stone.

The kumu stepped towards him. "This part of the 'aina?"

He felt like he was being challenged. "I see it more as a cold, dead piece of lava." Eli stood away from the door. He rose to his full height, less intimidated than he'd felt a few seconds ago.

"On the contrary, friend," said the kumu. "The pōhaku is anything but cold and dead. It is a part of a living, breathing 'āina, connected to everything around it." Part of the kumu's face had yet to emerge from the shadows, but his dark eyes shined with an intensity that seemed depthless, like stars in polished obsidian. Eli felt like he would be sucked into them but he somehow wasn't afraid.

"Grandpa, some part of you knows this," 'Ikaika pleaded. "It's been inside of you for years. You've been able to deny it all your adult life, but you can't resist it forever. Please forgive me, Grandpa." He grasped the old man's hands. "I mean no disrespect . . . it's a part of who you really are."

He loved his grandson dearly, but this sounded like liberal, new-age monkey business.

"Elika," said the kumu, "I know this is hard to understand, but your parents knew this wisdom as did their kūpuna." The teacher and the student had gradually moved towards him until they were all grouped tightly by the front door. "We have allowed the new ways to wipe away what was once meaningful."

Eli reflexively shook his head in denial, but something flickered in the dark recesses of his memory. A part of him rushed back to a time over fifty years ago. He was waist-deep in a He'eia fishpond. His Grandpa Keali'i had

been teaching him the proper way to throw net over a lively school of mullet. The tall white-haired man had been patient and tender. "It's all about pono, keiki, the special balance that exists in your body, your mind, and most importantly, in your spirit. The life and the land are one."

How had he managed to forget such a fundamental truth after all these years? His Hawaiianess had been left behind. He'd been so anxious to become what he thought he was supposed to be, a good Christian. How could that have been wrong? When he looked at the picture of Christ, his grandson and the kumu were out of focus. When he shifted his concentration to 'Ikaika and the teacher, the picture of Jesus blurred. Why couldn't he bring them both together at the same time? At the base of the wall lay the thing that had blocked out a big part of his life. If he could only somehow roll away the stone.

"I'm quite sure you're aware," said the kumu, "that it's not the pōhaku that's causing your troubles."

Eli felt the warmth and care of the kumu's grip around his left wrist. "What do you mean?" He pulled his arm back, but the kumu wouldn't release his grip. "Are you saying this is all my fault?" Adrenaline shot through his wiry sinews and he pulled with all his might. The powerful jerk freed his wrist and sent him stumbling back into the wall with a momentous crash. His grandson's support prevented him from collapsing but the vibration had shaken the framing in the adjacent wall where Christ's countenance had been hanging. Until now.

"The picture," he gasped. He staggered across the room, expecting to find the glass covered frame lying in pieces. It had fallen and struck the rock but to Eli's amazement hadn't sustained any noticeable damage. He snatched

it off the surface of the lava and scrutinized it as closely as the early morning light would allow, but couldn't find a single scratch.

Eli hung it back on its hook and leaned against the wall. It had become a giant jigsaw puzzle in his head. He hardly knew where to begin. He turned to the other two in utter amazement.

"I don't know what to say."

"I think it's time," said the kumu, "to allow this pōhaku to return home." 'Ikaika had opened a woven lauhala container about the size of an offering calabash. The inside was lined with fresh ti leaves. The kumu placed the mat and kapa on the floor directly in front of the stone and stood next to Eli.

The kumu spoke softly from the shadow. "Say whatever is on your heart. I'll translate it into Hawaiian."

Eli felt like he stood on a stage in front of a million staring eyes. He looked at the kumu and 'Ikaika but they only nodded in support. His tongue was a swollen toad in his mouth, stuck to the back of his throat. He stuttered and stammered, hemmed and hawed until the calming vision of his white-haired kupuna appeared in his mind, holding that ancient throw-net. He closed his eyes. "Oh gracious Creator of the Universe, help me to appreciate all the beauty that is around us. Help me to bring it all into balance, into the moment, and to appreciate that the life and the land are one. Help this part of the 'aina to be returned safely home from whence it came. 'Amene."

He opened his eyes to see his grandson gently placing the wrapped rock into the lined lauhala box. The kumu tied it tightly with a stripped ti leaf stem and placed it gently into his bag. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he hugged 'Ikaika and the kumu.

"You did well, 'Elika Kealahou Keali'i," said Kumu. "Life and the land are one."

A ray of morning sun crept onto Eli's stockinged feet, comforting and warm.

### The Risk

The velvet green pali wall rushed towards the chopper's windshield, and Morgan Beck clutched the small helicopter's seat and braced himself for the sickening crunch. His gray-haired reflection stared back at him from the chrome frame tubing: stretched and distorted. Fractions of a second dragged by as the cab was sucked closer to the mountain's face. His eyes locked onto the giant dagger of on-coming green-black lava rock as he waited for scenes of his life to begin passing by—silently apologizing to his darling Lani, who would probably be more angry than sorry at his demise. He didn't want to die with the dizzying combination of fuel exhaust and Masa's pickled onion breath caught in his nostrils. But the blustery tradewinds finally released them from their gusty grip and allowed the pilot to veer the helicopter away from the razor sharp ridge.

"Cap!" Masa yelled, over the roaring rotor. "How many mo passes we gonna make? Da win's really kickin' up."

Morgan shook his head. "Try up above Ha'ikū. I thought I saw something near the kukui nut trees." He swallowed twice to squelch his souring pordagee-omelet breakfast along with his stomach's rising stalagmite of fear.

"Da han-held radio—pohō up deah. Da tracking station gon jam da signal." Masa's big jaw flexed behind his salt-and-pepper goatee. His voice took on a quiet intensity that cut through the rising wind. "Look, Cap, even if Mahina herself stay ova deah, dis storm not gon wait much longa. Mo bettah we try again in da morning."

"If nobody's up there, we'll be down in time for the six o'clock news."

"Yeah, well, jus so long as we're not part of one eulogy!"

Morgan's attempted smile felt like a grimace as another blast of wind tried to rattle the helicopter into aluminum confetti. The Ko'olaus, O'ahu's basaltic backbone, rose skyward over three thousand feet from the sprawling banana patches below. The overcast clung to the teeth of the ridgeline above like the froth of a giant gray tsunami, waiting to unleash a pounding rain on top of the already rising wind.

Unhooking the mobile phone from his utility belt, he patted the pockets of his faded yellow coveralls, making sure he'd removed any other unneeded gear. He even considered taking off his wedding ring—but he was all out of spit. He was glad he'd worn his crab shoes instead of those clunky regulation boots. The tabis allowed him to move up and down the mossy cliff with the same amount of confidence he had when he and Masa stalked schools of halalū or manini with a throw net across O'ahu's coral reefs.

They'd been airborne for over an hour since central dispatch had received a call from the state hospital, reporting a female escapee headed towards the mountains from the asylum a mile to the west. With weather conditions deteriorating, Morgan hadn't felt comfortable sending one of the younger, less experienced men, but it was more than that. A yearning from somewhere inside pulled at him, almost begging him to go. It would be his last chance in the old chopper and, after a fruitless fifteen-year search, his last chance to look for Mahina.

They were only sixteen then but she'd already become a Hawaiian goddess with a voice like the gentle sighing of the wind through the fronds of



the ma'uma'u. They'd spent that summer suspended in delight, keeping their young love from her family, who thought they knew better than to allow their daughter to date a haole. He waited for her every weekday afternoon around the corner from the hālau, behind a low hedge of mock orange. She called him Keli'iahonui, the patient chief, and walked with him, barely touching his finger tips, to within a block of her Nu'uaniu home, a mile above the downtown Honolulu hula studio. The sun's rays caressed her body in ways and in places that he never saw them do to anyone else. She moved in the perfect harmony of pono.

When her parents found out she was involved with him they sent her to Hawai'i Preparatory Academy on the Big Island, never to return home, on holidays staying with an auntie somewhere in Pāhoa. His letters were returned unopened, his calls unanswered, his pleas at her parents' home curtly dismissed. She was his first love and he didn't know how he would be able to live without her.

Time and his courtship of Lani had helped him forget the pain, but not the desire. Fifteen years ago, when he'd heard that she'd been committed to the hospital, he'd tried to visit her that same week only to find that she'd already escaped into the mountains beyond the facility walls. The very next day he applied to the rescue squad and had been scouring the shrouded green cliffs every chance he got.

Now just three days from the freedom of retirement, he wanted to be excited, but instead he was afraid it would be like soggy somen noodles—bland, flat, and boring. He would definitely miss the geology. Looking at these majestic peaks up close, he tried to imagine the two million

years of shield building that created the massive nine-thousand-foot high, twenty-mile wide dome. Over the course of thousands of years the tradewind showers had cut fresh emerald peaks and deep lush valleys, where one could still find the amazing bio-diversity of the lobelias and honey creepers. Time had also left the leached-out, eroded, grey-brown hills dry and brittle and overwhelmed by haole koa and kiawe, plants brought in to support an O'ahu cattle industry that no longer existed.

He hoped he hadn't done the same thing to his own marriage. Two million years seemed like a long time, but in geologic terms O'ahu was still considered relatively young. And likewise, thirty years of marriage paled by comparison. But he didn't have time now to feel sorry for himself. He needed to find that lady and get her down out of these mountains before the storm broke. He safety-checked his harness one more time, zipped up his coveralls, and tightened his velcro glove straps while Masa manhandled the copter up above Ha'ikū.

"You sure you no like retire today?" The stocky pilot was struggling to keep the craft hovering ten feet over the small clearing. "Paki stay at da command post."

"Not today." He didn't want to retire—or to be retired. Lani's idea of retirement was him accompanying her to language conferences in Rochester, Tuscaloosa or Albuquerque. He'd been to the mainland one time—and once was one too many. The food, the people—he didn't have anything against mainland haoles, he'd simply rather be around locals. It wasn't that he was a big people-person, he just liked the idea that he was a part of a place where that special feeling of aloha oozed up out of the ground like pāhoehoe. And these people counted on him. He could still handle. He sucked in the small

bulge above his belt line and flexed his noisy knees. He looked up at his old friend, who was wrestling with the controls, and paused to savor the times they'd spent together, on and off the job.

He loved tip-toeing with Masa through the tidepools out around the eastern point of O'ahu at Makapu'u, waiting for the early rays of the dawn to show them where the fish were hiding. It helped him achieve a oneness with the land he loved, an acceptance he hadn't always felt as a haole in a local world, even though he'd lived here all his life. At first, Lani had gone with him when he cast his net and surfed, to share his love of the land and sea, to help her understand that "Hawaiian-ness" wasn't only measured biologically or in the classroom. But after a while she'd complained that the sand got in her bag, the wind spoiled her hair, the salt air and the sun ruined her complexion, it was too early. . . until he finally stopped asking.

Small cracks had developed in the heels of his tabis. They, too, would need to be replaced. "I guess I'll have more time to relax, eh, big guy?"

"Sure ting, bruddah." Masa smiled and then rolled his massive shoulders. "Half hour, Cap—wit or witout Mahina?"

"No problem. If I'm not back by five-thirty, you know what to do!" Morgan slid the door open and eased out into space—immediately risking a two-thousand foot plunge into the banana patches below. The winds pummeled his body as if determined to swat him out of the air like a pesky mosquito.

His wife, of course, would have blistered his eardrums if she found out he was back in the helicopter only three days from his thirty-year retirement.

She never let him forget that time two years ago when he'd been left

dangling at the end of the copter cable above Moanalua on the Honolulu side of the mountains. He'd been in a few other tight spots over the years but none that he felt he needed to share with his wife. It probably would've been o.k. that time if the damn Channel 2 News chopper hadn't shot the whole thing on a live feed and interrupted Lani's afternoon Oprah with "continually updated coverage."

Thank God she hadn't confronted him at the fire house. But when he tried to slip by their bedroom door on his way to the shower the next morning, she was ready and waiting. "What the hell did you think you were doing!"

Her voice ripped through his auditory canals like a volcanic blast, melting him in front of the bathroom doorway. She stomped out of the bedroom and wedged her short, slim frame between him and the opening. Her silky brown complexion glowed brick red and the veins in her left temple beat like a shark skin pahu.

"What?" For lack of a better strategy, he feigned ignorance, but she wasn't buying it. He took a step back, fumbling with his hands that only seemed anxious to betray him.

"Don't give me that crap!"

"Just doing my job, babe." He reached for her shoulders but she knocked his hands away. "Don't you 'babe' me! We had a deal, remember?" She jabbed him in the middle of his white shirt with a blood-red index finger nail. "You promised— no more airborne stunts! And then yesterday I see you dangling at the end of a rope! Well, I'm just about at the end of mine!"

He swallowed hard. She was right, he'd promised her that if he didn't take his twenty-five year retirement by the time he turned forty-six, at least he

would quit being the lead man on the chopper rescues. He'd intended to get the three squad leaders—Paki, Kazu, and Hank—up to speed, but something always seemed to get in the way. Lani would probably accuse him of getting in the way, but it was his kuleana. He had never quit on anything in his life before—and he sure didn't intend to start then. But he didn't want to quit on his marriage, either.

His tongue was tangled up in his search for a cross between an apology and a defense and she cut his line before he could sort it out. "I guess there isn't anything you can say, but I'm through worrying all day whether or not you're coming home in one piece. If I ever find out you have the urge to rejoin the Flying Wallendas, I promise you, I won't be here when you come back." She whirled on her heel and stormed back to the bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

He really had tried to fulfill the agreement. He'd certified the three younger men and, though he missed it terribly, he'd deferred to one of them each time a rescue call had come in. Twelve times in the past twenty-four months he'd ridden along only as an observer. It still scared the daylights out of him—but there was something about the opportunity to save somebody's life that made him feel like he was doing something meaningful.

Their home on the parched Mōkapu peninsula lay only five miles northeast of the lush foothills of Kāne'ohe. On the cramped quarter-acre lot he seemed to spend most his time trying to get the dying plants to grow—the white ginger was definitely in trouble—or seeking refuge in the air-conditioning's artificial clime. His baked brown lawn would never measure up to the cool emerald cliffs.

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Beautiful yet foreboding the mountain loomed closer, while he fought to keep from getting turned around backwards. Then the chopper's braided steel cable swung him face-first into the deep, spongy clump of laua'e and false staghorn fern, where he bounced back and clawed for solid footing. He'd come up short of the clearing but he'd have to make do. As soon as he'd gotten a secure hold, he unhooked the safety line and slipped out of the harness. He gave Masa a "thumbs up" and the chopper roared away into the grey afternoon. If he wasn't back in thirty minutes—with or without the escapee—he'd have to spend the night clinging to the howling, soaking pali. Or worse.

A moss-covered finger of the ridge protruded out past his left elbow and he hugged it like a long-lost love. When his breathing had slowed, he swung his legs up around the porous rock and sat for a minute. The chopper had already disappeared from view. Two new helicopters were to be introduced into the program sometime next week and the rattling metal contraption that he'd been riding for the past fifteen years would be mothballed. He'd never liked that term or that stifling chemical smell. But right now, not even the rough winds could dissipate the sweet perfume of white ginger.

He'd planted it under their bedroom window—white ginger had been her favorite when they first met during his junior year at the University of Hawai'i. He'd picked the fragrant blossoms for her in the mornings before class and she'd smiled at him like a quiet, gently unfolding flower. He saw her lips shadow in the first glow of dawn, her eyes in a pair of dew drops nestled in the ti leaf tassel. She almost made up for the one that got away.

He'd intended to apply to grad school in Hawaiian geology, but then they decided to wed the summer after he received his BA. He hooked up with the fire department to keep the bills paid while she completed her degree in comparative Pacific languages, planning to return for his graduate work as soon as she finished. But his return kept getting delayed. First came her BA, then her MA, followed by additional course work so she could teach at UH, and by then he'd gotten comfortable with the routines, the schedules, the camaraderie with Masa, the fishing and surfing on his days off. Before he'd realized it, the years had slid by and graduate school was no longer relegated to the back burner—it wasn't even on the stove. He hoped he hadn't let his marriage follow in kind. Inhaling deeply, he wanted to retain a taste of the sweet ginger, but he didn't know if it was still there.

Firmly wrapped around the rocky finger, he looked up the narrow trail towards the ravine, where he thought he'd last caught a glimpse of her. The pale green kukui boughs shimmered in the dull grey light, but the missing woman was nowhere to be seen. He cautiously rose to his feet and tried not to look down. One false step would end his career three days too early.

By the time he was up to the gully, the wind had begun moaning. It grew louder, even when the gusting slackened. But it wasn't the wind. A voice was chanting. It was an 'oli of protocol, of entry into a special place. He'd heard it years ago, from that time in his life that he'd since buried under a load of frustration like the pile of fallen rocks at the base of Ha'ikū.

The trail leveled out a little as he approached the grove, where he ducked under the shielding branches around a ridgeline in the cliff. Behind the trees, a cleft in the crag opened out from a dark fissure in the mountain

wall, a refuge safe from the face of the wind. And there she stood.

He darted back around the edge of the rock, crouched in the wet californian grass, and peered into the sanctum. It had been thirty-five years since he'd been this close to her. He didn't know if his quickened heartbeat resulted from the strenuous climb or her regal profile.

The cheeks that he'd held in his fingertips long ago still shimmered with a warm bronze glow. The supplication sighed from her full, soft mouth like a mountain mist. The nostrils of her wide 'upepe nose gently flared with each breath. Long, dark lashes slowly lifted to reveal tender eyes. When he was sixteen, he'd thought he could've looked into those maka palupalu forever. Her forehead rose up from delicately arched brows, high and dignified. Luxuriant chestnut hair cascaded down her back.

A khei, adorned with yellow and purple—the colors of Lili'uokalani—lay draped over her body like a royal cloak. A Ni'ihau shell lei hung with dignity from around her neck and rested on her ample bosom. She slowly turned as she chanted, reaching out with a ti leaf and gesturing as if it were a magic wand in a fairy tale. A ray of pale light broke through the overcast, shone down into the sanctum and caressed her in a shimmering aura. His breathing had become tighter now and had nothing to do with the strenuous climb.

He instinctively looked down at the illuminated dial of his black and silver Seiko. Five oh six. He still had time. Time to convince Mahina to come down with him—well, not with him, since he was married—before Masa was forced to ground the chopper ahead of the on-coming storm. She was standing a few feet from him, almost as if she had never left.

When he tried to rise, lightheadedness caused him to stumble. He



instinctively reached out, grasping at the grey weathered branch of an 'ōhi'a lehua, a gnarled guardian of the hidden cleft. But he missed and his head bounced against the rock face before he tumbled into the ferns. He rolled over and tried to rise, but his head throbbed and the cobwebs hadn't cleared yet. He needed to stand up, take her by the arm, and lead her to safety.

"Keli'iahonui." The sound murmured from her lips like a quiet mountain spring and spoke to a portion of his heart he thought he'd sealed off all those years ago. She seemed to glide to him without disturbing a single frond while he struggled to his feet. She eased into his embrace as he buried his face in her fine long neck. They were safe in the cleft of the rock, away from the wind's rising fury. His lips gently covered hers and he remained motionless, feeling her soft warm breath on his upper lip, waiting to recapture the years he had been denied. He wanted to release his feeling for her, the emotion that he had lost, but the sudden scent of white ginger reminded him of someone else.

He gently pulled away from her supple mouth, causing her eyes to open, and fumbled weakly for an excuse. He looked down at his watch. He'd never been unfaithful to his wife before and for some reason this didn't feel like a good time to start.

"I . . . I . . ." He shook his head, a tear dripping off the side of his nose.

"Shhh." She placed a tender finger across his lips. "It's alright."

He felt he could stand still in this haven from the storm forever, to never again require anything except to be with her, to feel her gentle touch, to hear her still, soft voice.

But nothing would stand still: not the world, not the way things used to be, not his retirement, not the rising storm, and worst of all—not the

blasted hands on the Seiko which now indicated that only nineteen minutes remained until Masa returned for him. He couldn't squeeze all that lost time into nineteen years, let alone, nineteen minutes. He placed his hands on her shoulders and once again tried to explain.

"Mahina . . . I want to . . ."

"So do I, Keli'iahonui. So do I." She stared into his eyes while she gently rubbed his bruised cheek with her fingertips. "But there are things in this world over which we have no control. There are people who depend on us, who care for us. Your wife is a very lucky woman."

The beauty of Lani's smile unfolded inside of him and he shook his aching head, trying to put it out of his mind. The more he wanted Mahina, the more he felt this attachment to his wife. He didn't have time to sort it all out. The chopper would arrive soon, much too soon.

"I need you," he said, "to come down with me, before the storm makes it impossible for the chopper to reach us."

She pulled slightly away, pushing down on his forearms. "And what kind of life would I have down below?"

The question cut into him like an obsidian shard, while the wind sent a blast around the protective shield of rock, rattling the kukui leaves. He'd never been involved with another woman since he'd married, but people did it all the time—even Masa kept a secret relationship from his wife once in awhile. And Mahina wasn't just "a relationship."

"Could you give yourself to me—and to your wife?"

He looked into her dark brown irises but couldn't think of a way to phrase his feelings.

Her moist lids fluttered. "I wouldn't expect you to. Besides, the ancient

ones need me here.”

“You can’t stay here, there’s a storm coming.” He tilted his head, trying to pick up the ragged whir of the helicopter. “We’ve only got a few more minutes ‘til Masa gets back with the chopper and—”

“You know I can’t come with you.” She placed her hands on his cheeks, so lightly they felt as if they weren’t really there.

“But why do your kupuna need you here?” She didn’t sound unstable but her behavior had him mystified. He searched for clues in her smooth, open face.

“I am the last of my line.” She paused, licking her lips. “It is my responsibility to be the keeper of the bones, to make sure that the final resting place of my family is undisturbed.”

“Why do you have to do this thing?” The day was continuing to darken, charcoal clouds pregnant with water vapor. “The kupuna had often spoken to me. I had come up here many times, to make sure the remains of my family lay in peace. The spirits showed me the way.” She smiled slightly. “But not everyone believes in the ‘uhane. After our parents passed on, I moved into our old home along with my younger sister, Roselani, and taught Hawaiian at the elementary school in Nu‘uanu. I told her about the ‘uhane and my responsibilities to the kūpuna.” Her lips formed a taut, firm line. “She and her businessman husband said I was crazy, especially when they’d been drinking. We fought for months. One night the neighbors called the police and she filed a complaint.” Her voice wavered, softer, yet somehow still audible above the wind. “She told me she wasn’t going to take it anymore, that if I didn’t join the real world and leave all the nonsense—she called it nonsense!—behind she would have me declared unstable. When I

left the school and prepared to move up here, she had me committed." She smiled again. "But they could not keep me there. The kupuna showed me the way out. And later, they told me Roselani had died in a car crash, that it was all up to me now." Her eyes flared with conviction. "You cannot make me go back."

Unsure if he could accept what she said, and still a little woozy, he simply hugged her close.

"It's alright, Keli'i, I know it's difficult to find the truth, like looking for something that's been lost." She whispered in his ear. "You need to return to your own life now, down below."

"But I want to be with you." He had wanted to be accepted into this intimate understanding all his life, but his lack of blood had kept him from it. He was of the geology, but not the biology. Ironically, it was in this most crucial understanding that the thoughts popped into his head in terms that could only be identified as haole, rather than Hawaiian. He felt like he was a keiki o ka 'āina but his mo'okū'auhau was filled with Irishmen, Germans, Welshmen, and Scots while hers was made up of nā ali'i, the royalty of ancient Hawai'i. That was one thing he'd never be able to change. And another thing that wouldn't change was the arrival of the chopper in a scant three minutes.

"Mahina, we need to leave now. We can work this all out when we get down."

"You know I can't go back." She gently pushed away from him.

He grabbed her arm and started to drag her out of the sanctum.

"No, Keli'i." She pulled her arm loose. "I told you, I can't go with you."

He felt like it was happening all over again, the loss, the pain, the loneliness—he didn't think he could endure it a second time. He looked into her eyes as she slowly backed away. He wasn't sure what to believe, he didn't know what kind of life they could have together, but he knew he had to do something. He clenched his teeth and lunged for her waist, but he came up empty, as if she wasn't there. The branch of the old 'ōhi'a smacked him in the face, causing him to nearly lose his balance. He kept his footing despite a sudden increase in the wind's intensity that tilted him towards the edge. Maybe he should stay.

The copter suddenly swooped into view, the rescue harness dangling at the end of the cable like a pendulum. Through the windshield, Masa's blurred face appeared grim as he fought to keep the ancient machine stable. In the next moment, the first drop of water plopped on Morgan's forehead, heralding with a loud splat the approaching squall.

Masa lowered the cable to within an arm's length.

"I'll stay with you then," he said, "up here." A soft grey mist seemed to surround them like auras.

She took his face in her hands with a touch so delicate he couldn't even feel her fingers. "I'm sorry, Keli'i."

"Let me stay," he pleaded.

"Keli'iahonui, you will always be with me, and I with you." She brushed her lips across his. "We will always have our aloha in this life—and the next. Go now and be well, my love." She glided away from him through the mist, back behind the old tree.

His face drenched with tears and the on-coming rain, he fastened himself into the harness and felt the cable lift him off the cliff. When he

reached the open door, he swung himself into the body of the chopper and unhooked, wiping his face on his sleeve. He slid the door shut and hid his face in his hands as Masa raced the copter away from the storm. The fresh perfume of white ginger had followed him, bringing with it an unexpected comfort. After a minute of silence, Masa turned to him.

"Pretty ruff out deah, today, Cap. But dispatch wen call: da hospital wen fine da misseen wahine. Sorry you nevah fine Mahina."

He lifted his face up out of his hands, opened his mouth to speak and then thought better of it.

"Yeh, you know, maybe bettah dis our lass trip befo you retiah. You wen look pretty buss up rite befo you wen hook on to da cable. Was da win, yeh?" Masa nodded at him, as if willing him to agree.

He slowly shook his head up and then down and the pilot turned back to the front. Masa had obviously not seen Mahina, but how was that possible? The landing grid at the Kāne'ōhe fire station was still ten minutes away, but he needed to figure it out before he changed his mind and tried to return back up the mountain to something he could never have.

As soon as Masa brought the chopper to rest Morgan, his head still throbbing, hobbled through the rain's increasing intensity toward the dispatch office. Once safely inside, he then reached for the straps on his gloves. When he ripped open the velcro, two ginger buds slipped out from under the cuff, fresh and sweet. They must have gotten stuck there when he was still on the cliff, trying to save something out of his past. He held them tightly in his fist until the sweet scent oozed over his palm, then he picked up the phone and dialed home. He didn't know if Lani could even begin to understand, but it was a risk he was willing to take.

Or It Might Be You

The church grounds lay dormant, shadows beyond the amber street lamp. Duncan rounded the back corner of the preschool building like he had every night for the past fifteen years while Leon Russell rocked through his Walkman headphones with a raspy rendition of "Might Be the Prince of Peace Returning." He shook his head. Yeah, well, not in my lifetime, Leon.

He twisted the polished aluminum door knob until it clicked locked. The tendons in his bronzed forearm still ached from the morning's workout—he'd sworn he'd get under fifteen percent body fat before he hit fifty—but everything else appeared to be in order, nice and quiet, just as it was supposed to be at ten fifty-seven p.m.

The faint outline of Diamond Head rose into the cloudy night sky a few miles to the southeast like the Statue of Liberty. "Give me your tired, your poor," he whispered—but he stopped short of further indulgence. The growing number of vagrants, all looking for a handout, a free ride, sucked up tax dollars that could be spent elsewhere or better yet, returned to his own pocket. He earned his money. Why should he have to give it away so someone else could cruise?

He clicked off the cassette, the darkness enveloping him with an absence of sound undisturbed by geckos and katydids. Silver-blond strands hung down to his shoulders like a mane. He moved stealthily under the sleeping leaves of the playground's monkeypod trees like a jungle cat, not wanting to break the stillness.

Coconut fronds hung frozen against the eastern boundary's chain link fence. Thick warm air dragged in through his moustache hints of mock orange blossoms. The arch of his left foot itched. He didn't want to break the silence by rasping it over the edge of the pocked concrete walkway. But something else had violated the void.

He slowed his breathing and tried to keep his mind quiet. Outside the southern end of the playground, a dark lumpy shape had appeared, right where the corrugated fiberglass awning extended over the dumpster. Something—or someone—lay on the blacktop behind the big rolling rubbish bin.

He snorted softly in disgust. It had to be another damn vagrant. Street people had come to the Mānoa Baptist Church before, looking for a handout—probably just money for booze or drugs. The church tolerated them, “caring for the least of them in His name” or something like that, but usually directed them to a state-sponsored facility, The Living Water Mission or The Institute for Human Resources. The board of deacons even sent a team of volunteers once a month to man the soup kitchens, shake a tambourine, and save some souls.

But not here, not at the church. That would be a health hazard or a safety code violation—or something. As church caretaker, he had received a clear mandate from the head of the properties committee to roust the freeloaders and send them packing—to somewhere other than the church compound. If you allowed one stray mutt to lie around, pretty soon there'd be another, and another, until a whole pack of 'em congregated, contaminating the holy ground where decent working folk came to worship and give their hard-earned tithes and offerings. And besides, his wife Momi



didn't want them slinking around their caretaker's cottage in the back.

He approached the dumpster, the perfume of sweet blossoms evaporating under the onslaught of a dank, musty stench. He couldn't tell if the stink rose up out of the garbage can or lingered over the black lump lying behind it on the driveway. It felt soft and warm under the prodding of his big toe, but he drew his

foot back quickly when it moaned beneath the greasy gray blanket.

Whoever—or whatever—it was woke up.

The blanket peeled down and revealed a shaggy-haired, middle-aged local man with a wiry salt and pepper beard. An unbuttoned thread-bare army jacket covered his upper body. He raised his arms, stretched, and sat up.

"Aloha," he said. "Get wadda?" He blinked and rubbed his face. "Can, or what?"

Duncan's tensed muscles seemed to relax at the sound of the stranger's voice. It reached down into him, a soothing soft baritone like the wind in the waokele that covered the peaks surrounding the valley. He was about to reply when he was stopped short by the image of Deacon Saito, head of the *properties committee*, who reminded Duncan of a catfish with legs. That meeting fifteen years ago loomed up as clearly as if it had been only yesterday.

The retired army colonel, flat top turned steel gray, had swiveled back and forth in the padded office chair. His fingers had toyed with a thick rubber band, making circular motions like a disco dance. Duncan sat at the edge of his folding metal chair, ignoring the pain in his butt and the chill of the stale AC. He wanted to make a good impression, to convince the deacon he was up to the task as caretaker. If he got this job, his family would be set, a sweetheart deal, no pay but swapping him the cottage in return. No lease, no

contract, just a handshake deal, the way things were supposed to be.

"So—Duncan, right?—your wife is quite a singer, an angel in God's choir. She's a real blessing, but we're here to talk about something more important than the music." He stopped twirling the rubber band and sat forward in his chair, a zealous glow in his eyes. "The security of these holy grounds is paramount to the safety and well-being of this church."

"I agree, Deacon." His head bobbed like a yes-man.

"We can't have these vagrants, these bums lurking around the church." He fiddled with the wispy strands of his moustache. "If they want to clean themselves up—bathe, put on some decent clothes—they're more than welcome to come and worship—and, of course, give their tithes and offerings. But if they're slinking about in the dark, fouling up the place, we need to get rid of them. If asking them to leave doesn't work, call nine-one-one and have these bums thrown in the hoosegow."

"Of course, of course." He continued to nod, trying to look sincere.

"You seem up to the task, Mr. McCandless, but if you can't handle it,"—his lips pulled apart, revealing a predatory grin—"I'm sure we can find someone who can."

"Oh, don't worry Deacon, I'm your man. I'm definitely your man." He vaulted to his feet, thrust his hand forward, and vigorously pumped the soft pasty hand of the chairman. Resisting the urge to wipe his palm on his pant leg, he wondered why he felt like he'd just made a deal with the devil.

Since then, he'd never had to call nine-one-one. Maybe it was his brusque, unsympathetic approach. Maybe he didn't actually ask them to leave—it probably more closely resembled, "Get the hell outta here!" He'd never had to lay a hand on anybody, which was just as well—who knew what

grungy strains of bacteria covered their bodies?

He looked down on this particular unwanted visitor, preparing to put an extra bark in his voice, when he felt a pleasant flutter in his chest.

"If no can," the street person said, "no can." He rose up from behind the bin barefooted and brushed off his trousers, crudely stitched together from empty one-hundred pound Hinode rice bags. He stuffed the thin ratty blanket into a well-worn haversack, looking fully prepared to journey back out into the night.

"Can." He couldn't believe he'd allowed that word to escape from his tightly pressed lips. He'd never offered one of these squatters anything but the threat of the back of his hand, the bottom of his calloused heel. He hoped he hadn't opened a Pandora's box—not even God could help him if his wife or the Deacon found out.

"Can?" A gap-toothed grin had spread out across the vagrant's face with a child-like innocence that startled Duncan. "I no like make trouble, you know." He extended a battered one-and-one-half liter bottle. "I jus nevah get chance yet fo drink my eight to ten glasses a day—fo proppah nutrishen, of course." The smile had crept over into the corner of his mouth and he seemed to suppress a chuckle.

Duncan was beginning to smile back in spite of himself. He took the dented plastic container from the bruddah and turned the label upright into the rays of the streetlamp. In barely discernible lettering it read: "Mauna Kea Volcano Hawaiian Springs Natural Artesian Water." He shook his head and clicked his tongue. As if they needed bottled water in Hawai'i, which probably had the purest water in the world—what a scam.

"Ass a good one, ah brah, 'Natchro Artesian Wadda.' Probly get one

portagee liveen up Punchbowl-side, fillin deez bottles from his gahden hose.” A warm giggle oozed from between his lips, bubbling up into a full-bellied razz.

He fought to stop it but it infected him too, slipping in under his funny-bone, tickling his auditory nerve. He laughed right alongside the trespasser. “I’ll go—heh-heh—fill this. Be right back.” And then you’ll have to leave. Why hadn’t he told him that? Something about this guy . . . He tramped back across the shadowy lot where his house lay nestled in the far mauka corner. From there, he enjoyed an unobstructed view of the dark peaks. The visitor’s laughter drifted after him across the blacktop, keeping a half-smile on his face.

He glanced at his silver Seiko as he mounted the front porch steps: eleven fourteen—he was normally all pau checking the grounds by now. He placed the balls of his feet down on the sagging stairs with extra care in order to not awaken his wife. When he first reentered the house, it appeared all the lights were off, but then he noticed a blue glow seeping out from under the master bedroom door. As he quickly padded towards the kitchen to fill the bottle, the door cracked open. He froze in mid-stride. The background mumblings of the TV were overcome by the rising tenor of his wife’s voice.

“Where were you?” she said. The “you” trailed off into an adolescent whine, a tone she’d used for years to prick his auditory nerve but even more so now that the children had moved off-island, Fiona to Moloka’i and Bart to the Big Island. She poked her head out of the doorway, eyes like black volcanic glass. “You don’t usually come home this late.” Her production had deepened, as if she’d turned up the reverb on her vocal chords. A new edge had crept in, the investigator voice, the one that believed he was guilty unless

proven innocent—but he was never really sure just what he was supposedly guilty of. When he failed to respond, she arched her black brows and tightened her lips. “Wellll?”

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, not sure how to explain the scruffy plastic bottle. “Almost pau checking the doors, just a couple more.” He glanced away from those piercing obsidian eyes.

“Taking up healthier drinking habits?” She directed her chin towards the evidence he wished he could somehow conceal with his hands.

“Me?” He shrugged. “Nah. You know me, I’m a Mountain Dew kinda guy.”

“No?” She drew the door open and stepped into the hallway, her dark blue “Save the Wildlife” nightshirt hanging down below her mocha kneecaps. “Whose is it then?”

“Oh, just some dude looking to get a drink—nothing to worry about. You go on back to bed, I’ll be along.” He forced a smile and made a beeline for the kitchen.

“I’m not finished.” The investigator voice had now turned icy, so different from the soaring arpeggios she produced Sunday mornings as the choir’s soprano soloist.

He yanked on the faucet arm and stuck the opened neck under the hissing stream. “What was that?” He knew his ruse wasn’t fooling her. “Beg your pardon?” If he’d filled it from the hose by the side of the garage he wouldn’t have stepped in this damn mess.

The floorboards under the kitchen’s entryway squawked. “I said, I’m not finished.” She straddled the threshold, her smooth strong hands knotted into fists, tight forearms crossed over her bustline. “Just what do you think

you're doing?"

The water bubbled up near the top of the jug as he shut the valve. "Getting him a drink, that's all." He left it on the counter, and turned to face the music, which was beginning to sound like a funeral dirge.

"Getting who a drink?" The harsh light of the overhead bulb paled in comparison to the glare he was now receiving from those eyes.

"I don't know who—some guy asking for a drink." His hands hung open at his sides. He could slip out the back door, but such a temporary solution would put him in the dog house for at least a week. He looked into her face, trying to find a softer edge under the force of that scowl.

"A homeless person, right?" She stepped towards him, like a boxer cutting off the ring.

"How should I know?" He rolled his eyes. "Just following the Golden Rule. Isn't that what we're supposed to be about?" He tried to stand his ground, but his footing had begun to erode.

"Golden Rule my ass!"

"You don't have to get excited." He raised his hands, palms out.

"And you don't have to encourage those bums to hang around on private property!" She stomped up inside his comfort zone, looking fit to explode. Remnants of Enjoli cologne wafted up off her tense neck muscles.

"Shh, shh." He put his hands on her shoulders, but she swatted them away like flies.

"Don't you shush me, Duncan McCandless! You know how I feel about those mutts sniffing around here! What if one of them came panting when you weren't home?" Her fists released, not in a gesture of openness, but of something else—maybe karate. "What then, Mr. Golden Rule?"

He suppressed a nervous chuckle. If anything like that ever happened, the forensics lab would probably have a tough time piecing together the poor fella's dental remnants.

"You think this is funny?" Her brows arched up near her hairline. "You think you'll still be laughing if Deacon Saito finds out?"

"How would he find out?" He imagined the head of the properties committee in an undershirt and polka dot boxers, his pot-bellied frame slouched intently over a surveillance console, wearing headphones like earmuffs, twisting the few wispy moustache hairs protruding just above the corners of his mouth, and mumbling, "Do unto others before they do unto you." This time the chuckle began to escape from his sealed lips and he had to put his hand over his mouth to stem the escaping mirth.

"Oh, that's right—keep laughing, funnyman. Remember to keep laughing when they throw us out of here and we end up in a roach-ridden, drug-infested, four-story-walk-up-hell-hole, two blocks from the airport approach corridor." She threw her arms over her head in disgust and stomped back toward the bedroom. "And if I even think I see anybody out there in the dark, I'm calling the cops—I don't care who it is." She slammed the bedroom door behind her. The theme song from "Law and Order" seeped out of the bedroom, *base notes vibrating the floorboards.*

He picked up the jug and stared bleakly out the kitchen window, trying to make some sense of the darkness and the light. He tried to tell the difference between the shapes: the long grey edges of the buildings, the black blob shadow of the octopus tree near the road, the dull haze of the amber streetlamp, the flicker of passing headlights, the white church steeple in silhouette. The visitor was out there, too, somewhere in the dark. The filled

water bottle that had seemed so harmless when it was empty now felt much heavier in his hand.

He trudged back out of the cottage, cradling the bottle in his arm's crook. He thumped down the weathered wooden stairs, stopped, and plopped his butt on the bottom plank. He gently placed the jug next to him, balancing its lumpy base on the uneven step, hoping it wouldn't fall. His hands, rough and scratchy against his face, massaged his sagging jowls.

He knew his wife was right. He couldn't allow one bum's thirst to threaten their sweet deal. But the weight of politics in the world couldn't begin to compare with the monkey business you had to put up with in church. Wasn't religion supposed to be a sanctuary from the troubles outside? Whatever happened to all that "love your brother" stuff? Lights on the peaks of the surrounding black ridge stared down on him. He could deal with his wife, but risking his home for the sake of one vagrant? His calf twinged. Probably wouldn't even be able to workout in some roach motel.

He lurched to his feet, grabbing the bottle before it toppled over. He slogged back across the parking lot, trying to focus through the shadows and the shades of grey. The visitor remained where Duncan had left him, now sitting upright with his legs crossed, yet relaxed. His eyes were closed and he was humming, a deep steady vibration.

"Ommmmmmmmmm."

Duncan bit his tongue. How was he going to throw this guy out when he was meditating? Squatting in front of him, he held the bottle out to the dark figure. "Ahh, bruddah . . . pallie . . . here's your water."

"Eh? Oh . . . sorry, I wuz rappin' wit da akua." He gently removed the heavy jug from Duncan's hand, tipped his head back and trickled clear liquid



down his throat. He smacked his lips and sighed.

“With the akua? You were praying to God? I thought maybe you were Buddhist.”

“Boodiss, Chrishjen, Catlick, Joo, Muzlim, Soofee . . . I tink, even Zoroashtree-an.” A gleeful smile played across his mouth.

“Pardon me?” He lost his balance and sat down on his rump. “How can you practice all those different religions at once?”

“Dey not dat diffrent.” He leaned in a little closer. “Dey ja like spokes on da same wheel—da closah you get to da middo, da mo dey stay da same.”

A warm tickle vibrated his ear drums. What was this guy talking about?

“Da ting is, mos peepo, dey only see da diffrence—small kine, you know. Mo bettah dey see da harmony, all us guys togedda: bosses/workahs, Japanees/ Okinawans, Solis/ Tongans, haoles/ popolos, mens/womens, rich/poor . . . you get da pitcha.”

He shook his head. “Sounds like you’re talking about our congregation.”

“Eh, no shame.” He laughed. “Mos peepo la dat. Dey scared maybe dey no mo da ansa. So dey gotta tro da fake, you know, try preeten like dey get um. Dey no mo, but.”

Duncan knew he was supposed to tell him something, but it had temporarily slipped away. “Well then, what is the answer?”

He took another swallow of water. “You know. You gotta love da creatah wit all yo heart, all yo soul, an all yo mind. And yo braddah too, you gotta love um. If you can do dat, you goin live forevah.”

He felt like his brain was beginning to hum. He took a deep breath,

once again inhaling the sweet mock orange instead of the stench. “Well then, who’s my brother?”

He pointed at Duncan with a scarred finger. “Why you ack like you no unnustan—when you do? Hard-head, you. You makin’ ja like one fairysee, tryin fo trap me, hahn?” He laughed again. “Okayokayokayokay. I goin tell you one story.

“Had one man, an he was goin from one town to da udda town. An bumbye had some bad guys, dey wen see da man, an dey tell each udda, ‘We go buss um up.’ An dey wen geev um dirty lickins, steal his money, take his cloze, an leev um la dat by da side of da road, almost maké. One merchant come ovah deah, he see da guy, but he pass um, ja like nottin. Den, had one preess come ovah deah, but him too, he no even like lookum da guy, an he run from ovah deah. An den, had one mo guy comin down da road an he see da man lyin ovah deah. Ho! He run to da guy, he take off his coat and he cuvva up da guy, he take off his shirt an he bundo up da guy head, an he give da guy liddo bit wadda an foods, fo he no maké. Den, he pick up da guy an he carry um to da hotel an he tell da onah, ‘I geev you dis money fo dis guy can stay ovah heah, an I geev you some mo money so you can feed da guy an take care him until he recuvva. An bumbye I come back an geev you mo money if you like.’ An den he go.” The visitor sat back and picked his front teeth with his thumbnail. “So . . . who’s da bruddah to da guy?”

Duncan shifted his weight to his right haunch. “Well, the one who helped him, the one who cared for him so he wouldn’t die. The Good Samaritan.”

“Go. Make laddat.”

He felt a release, like bubbling up out of the dark ocean depths into the

bright sunlight, filling his lungs with air as if he had only now begun to breathe. A tear ran down his cheek. He looked at the visitor and smiled.

"That simple, huh?"

"Yeah, well . . . simple, maybe, but not always so easy, yeh?" He stood up, brushing off his baggy pants. "Nows da paht weah you spose to tell me fo beat it, no come ovah heah any mo, yo wife no like crimnos lurkin aroun da house . . . sumptin' laddat, yeh?"

He stood up, shaking his head. "I . . . guess so."

He reached for Duncan's hand, his shake warm and sure. "No worry, brah. Errytin gon be arright. You take care, now . . . an tanks fo da wadda. An remembah, wen tings are at der weress, dass wen human beings are at der bess."

It sounded familiar. "New Testament?"

"Nahhh, brah." He giggled. "Dats from da movie, 'Star Man.'"

He looked up into the heavens where a full moon was beginning to creep out from behind the clouds. The visitor was already half-way down the driveway when Duncan hailed him. "I don't even know . . . your name."

He stopped. "I tink you do." He turned with a wave and continued on. "But if you like, you can call me Keiki-o-ka-'āina." And then he was gone.

Maybe some part of him did know the visitor's name, but Child-of-the-Land would do. He wasn't sure how he was going to handle things with his wife, or with future visitors, but right now he still had to finish checking doors. He headed for the sanctuary building, clicking on his Walkman as he glided through the moonlight. Leon Russell wailed, "Might be me, and it might be you . . . it might be the Prince of Peace returning."

It might be.