

Written in the Sky

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Master's Plan B Paper
Pacific Islands Studies
Spring 2004

Chapter 1

The Boy Slept under the Bridge

I stand on a sandy hill and the salty air smells of geraniums and eucalyptus. I'm back at Grandma's house. I hear her banging around the kitchen singing along to 1420 on the AM radio. I always loved being at Grandma's house; there was such a strong sense of security. Safe. Sound. She calls my name. It's been some time since I've heard it. "Ikau! Ikauikalani! Come eat, the food is ready. Hele mai, pa'ina!" I walk into the kitchen where she's wiping the dishes at the sink. She still has her legs. I run up to her to give her a hug. She kisses me on the cheek and whispers in my ear: "Mariah Wong."

The boy was jerked awake from his dream by a burning, stinging sensation on his left knee. With eyes shut tightly, blind fingers ran across a rapidly swelling mound of flesh with two small holes where the centipede had bit him again. It happened before, and so he jumped up and wildly searched through his things to see where it went. With no sign of it, he settled back down and tried to resume where his dream left off, to no avail.

It had been weeks since his grandmother died, but sometimes it seemed as if he was once again living with her on her farm in Kahalu'u. Along with his name, which he was ashamed of and never used, that time of his life was gone forever and only existed in his memories. He was fourteen and had nowhere to go. His mother left when he was seven, and his grandmother had been his only family. Bills for dialysis and cancer treatments were so high that the bank foreclosed on their homestead. Without any income, they couldn't afford the rent in town and he and his Grandma were left stranded in Honolulu. When she got admitted to the hospital, most of their things got lost or taken

to the dump by the angry landlord. All that the boy owned in the world were a few clothes, his grandmother's quilt, and a braided lock of hair she gave him the night she died, which he kept safely tucked away in a pink Almond Roca tin can.

So he found a place to sleep under a bridge near the fishpond at Ala Moana Beach Park. It was dry and safe and it was a secluded hiding place from the cruel outside world where nobody bothered him. Although he now had a centipede for a roommate, the soft grass growing there formed a soft nest that cradled him under his grandmother's handmade quilt. He just laid there for a while, reminiscing about happier times, then wiped the dream from his heavy eyes, stretched his back, and greeted the new day.

He glanced upward and squinted at the sky, admiring the way the foamy, fizzy grape-soda clouds became streaked with strawberry sherbert. The lavender plumes slowly flamed a deep coral-rose, then a juicy tangerine, and finally sweet lemonade. God was painting the sky again. Every day the sunrise was always different and each one had its own story to tell.

On this particular morning, an orange dolphin swam blissfully in a burgundy sea. From nowhere, a tangerine shark cloud billowed and began attacking. Just as the shark's teeth sank in, the dolphin swung around and jabbed its nose into the shark's side, shattering it into millions of canaries. The famished dolphin devoured the tiny birds one by one heartily, as the clouds meshed together and formed a quilt pattern in the sky. Deep inside he knew this was a true sign that it would be a good day.

He always loved dawn and dusk because those were the times when the sun was closest to the earth and when God listened to prayers and often talked back. With great

reverence, the boy flung open his arms and embraced the morning, kissing the cheek of God, and got up.

He proceeded with his usual daily routine. Dusting off his quilt, he carefully folded it diagonally and tied the opposite corners into a knot. Folding the side flaps in, he converted it into a kind of pouch to keep his few possessions. Over his black T-shirt, he put on his jeans jacket. It was covered with original Hawaiian tattoo designs he had drawn in with permanent marker. It was his greatest work of art. He briskly combed his knotted hair with his fingers to pluck out the leaves. He stuck his few belongings into his makeshift bag, which he slung diagonally across his chest, and emerged to greet the rest of the world.

As he walked across the grass he marveled at the vividness of his dream. It was like Grandma was actually talking face-to-face with him like she was still alive. But it had been years since he remembered seeing her before her amputations. That time was usually filled with trips to the beach to catch crabs, pick 'opihi, and harvest ha'uke'uke, or to the mountains to catch prawns and gather Hawaiian herbs. But once her diabetes worsened and she became confined to a wheelchair, he became her legs. He helped her the best he could.

But what puzzled him the most was the name, Mariah Wong. He didn't remember hearing it before. Was this some suppressed memory or was his Grandma sending him a message from the other side? He pondered on it, but eventually dismissed the dream as some freaky hallucination not worth fussing over.

The early morning air tasted delicious on his tongue and he drank the sweet tonic without spilling one drop. The beach park was not quite crowded with visitors yet, just

the usual harmless, homeless campers, so he entered the restroom to get cleaned up. By now he was so hungry he could eat a rubber slipper for breakfast.

The bathroom was deserted. Still wearing his torn surf shorts, which he had found tossed in a crumpled heap on the shower bench one day, he shocked his nerves with a cold water blast. Hi'uwai, he remembered. That's what Grandma used to call the first morning cleansing. It was normally done either in the ocean or in a mountain pond, but it was the time to spiritually, as well as physically, wash away the "dirt" to begin the new day with a fresh start. A cold sprinkle from a rusty showerhead was a poor substitute but it would have to do.

He loved being clean. So did most of the other beach people despite the common stereotype that they did not bathe. For him, washing reminded him of habits learned from his grandmother while growing up. Spying a small hotel shampoo bottle on the ground, he happily opened it and lathered his whole body with the pearly liquid. It was heavily concentrated and soon he was covered from head-to-toe in rich, perfumed lather. Covering the bottle tightly, and rinsing the slippery soap off, he tossed it into his pouch for later.

He closed his eyes and let the water pummel his face. He imagined he was once again standing under a mountain waterfall where his Grandma used to take him to catch prawns upriver. After catching some prawns, they usually gathered pepeiao, bamboo shoots, fern shoots, green papayas, and wild sweet potato leaves and she would cook them up in her famous jungle stew.

Grandma often let him swim a little before once again returning home. On one occasion, while standing under the rushing waterfall, he could have sworn he had a

spiritually awakening experience. It felt as if he were experiencing a kind of baptism. Although the water was icy cold, a warm sensation entered the top of his head and spread downward throughout the rest of his body. He had imagined that his entire being was touched by the finger of God and he went home that day with a glorious feeling he had never felt before. Just now, it was almost like he was standing once again under that same waterfall. But reality soon kicked in and he was transported back to the present when he heard the sound of men's voices echoing by the urinals.

He shut the water off and dried his body with a towel he had smuggled from his Grandma's hospital room. He changed into his only pair of jeans, which was worn out around the knees, and put on his last clean T-shirt, a gift from a friend that was fired from a booth that solicited shoppers to fill out credit card applications.

After towel-drying his tangled locks, he washed his dirty clothes in the sink with more of the shampoo, squeezed out as much of the water as possible, and prepared them to be dried in the sun. Adjusting his pouch, which he slung over his shoulder, he gathered up his wet laundry and stopped briefly at the mirror to survey himself.

It had been so long since he'd seen himself that he had almost forgotten what he looked like. He carefully studied the image that stared back at him from the cracked, mottled glass. Framing a slim gold-skinned face were knotted, sun-bleached dreadlocks that fell down to his shoulders. His thin nose and green eyes were apparently inherited from an unknown Caucasian father, probably some military transient his mother had brought home. And although most of his peers were suffering from teenage acne, his face remained remarkably smooth with a little bronze fuzz sprouting around his lips. He wasn't bad looking. But because his peers often teased him while growing up, he had a

self-esteem problem. Stupid haole, they often called him, even though he probably had more Hawaiian than any of them.

He was so used to the harassment that he had come to accept the stares of the people at the park as normal behavior. He tried his best to blend in with the day crowd. But people often ogled him for his nappy hair or judged him by the bizarre images drawn on his jacket. "Why do you have an earring in your nose? Why's your hair like that? Don't you shampoo?" He had accepted that it was just an ugly part of life that people could be extremely cruel. Trying his best to cheer up the sad boy that was glaring back from the mirror, he gave up and walked out the door.

He emerged from the bathroom feeling refreshed, although his stomach felt as if it were eating itself. Still there was something magically revitalizing about ice water in the morning. Although his gas tank was running on fumes, he didn't let his hunger affect his attitude. He draped his wet laundry on a nearby tree to dry and stretched his body out in the shade below. Opening his pouch between his stretched out legs, he rattled his Almond Roca can and counted the few coins he had stashed inside.

If he only had ten cents more, he could buy a refillable cup of coffee. And for another thirty-five cents he could buy a bagel and have a decent meal. Instead he settled for brown lettuce and a piece of parsley from a plate lunch in the garbage can. After finding some old fries, he took a swig from his water bottle and leaned back against the tree to soak in the sights and sounds of his beach park home.

Ala Moana Beach was one of the few places in town where he encountered everybody from East Honolulu from all walks of life. There were upper-middle class joggers to blue-collar workers taking a break from work, to Waikīkī tourists renting a bit

of Paradise to take back to their cold, foreign countries, to local families barbecuing and celebrating a loved one's birthday. And then there were the homeless: some were simply professionals down on their luck, but others included welfare recipients who'd been kicked out of 'A'ala Park, teenage runaways, former prison inmates, drug abusers, drunks, and crazies: all scary-looking but mostly harmless.

The old Chinese man was on the beach again doing his morning exercises. The boy found his slow, fluid movements mesmerizing. He watched as the man formed a small imaginary ball with his arms and slowly pushed it away with a graceful sweep to his right, formed another imaginary ball and brushed it to his left, and swept both arms again as if swimming in water. Entranced, the boy stared for what seemed like hours.

On her usual park bench sat the bird lady who was feeding the scavenger birds that polluted the park with their droppings. Bobbing their heads above the smaller, more plentiful turtledoves were the larger, mostly white pigeons with their bright stop-sign red beaks and feet. Also tossed in the mix were fat laced-neck doves, brown mynahs with yellow beaks and eyes, red-breasted Cardinals, and plenty little brown and green birds that hopped around from grass to grass eating the tiny seeds off of the long blades. They moved in waves like schools of fish, following the scattered seeds that the lady sprinkled about. She cackled a loud witchy laugh and danced as if conducting an orchestra.

Under her usual banyan tree, the red-eyed Asian woman was getting irritated from shaking her sleeping invisible friend, who just wasn't budging. She was always seen arguing with him (or her; after all no one saw this ghost person). Once when the boy politely said "Hello," she immediately scolded her imaginary friend for being so rude and not returning his greeting.

The boy continued to stare from his shadowy hiding place, pretending to be invisible and immune to the "supposed" sane reality of the tourists swarming the park daily. Japanese tourists of every type and color buzzed the beach. There were those with skin so light it almost appeared blue, who feared that the sun would scorch their delicate skin, while others vigorously applied liberal amounts of cocoa butter to their brown outer husks. Some of the young Japanese kids had bleached blond hair, while others had red spikes. Some had frizzed, frazzled hair that looked fried from bad perm jobs, while others punked their hair with anime superhero-styled wisps of pink and purple clumps sticking out here and there. One young man in particular had long, fake dreadlocks like a Rastafarian, and would have passed for a light-skinned Jamaican if it weren't for his strong Japanese accent singing along to Bob Marley tunes ("*bafaro soruja, borun in Amerika*"). The boy was so preoccupied with his people watching, and checking to see if his clothes had dried yet, that he barely noticed a man nearby struggling to slip a dollar bill into one of the vending machines.

Sitting in a mechanical wheelchair, he was rather small, in his mid-forties, with salt-and-pepper hair, a round stomach that looked like a hard basketball, and two shriveled legs that hung limply in front. His paralyzed hands were so gnarled that he resembled a sea lion trying to clap his two hands together as he struggled to slip the money into the machine to buy some candy. The boy impulsively went over to the quadriplegic man to see if he needed assistance.

"You need help?"

"Thanks, brah!" the wheelchair man said with a smile. The boy grabbed the dollar from the man. "What's your name, cuz?"

"Me? I'm Ikau."

"Right on, Bruddah E.! I'm Alex. Make a fist." The boy did and the man tapped his hooked hand against the boy's fist with a loud, "Bam!"

"Bam!" repeated the boy, grinning. He placed the dollar bill in the machine and asked, "Which buttons should I press?"

"I like dah chips! Press A-four."

"Okay, it's fifty-five cents."

The boy pressed A and 4. The chips dropped with a soft thud, and the change dropped into the coin return slot with three loud "chi-chings".

"You can grab 'em for me, cuz?" asked the wheelchair man, as the boy fetched the chips and scooped out the coins.

"Here's your change," said the boy.

"Nah, brah, keep 'em."

The man held out his hooked hand once again. The boy again made a fist and they bammed each other before the man drove away, tearing his bag of chips open with his teeth. The boy just stood there dumbfounded. He gazed at the coins as if they were three stars that had just fallen from the sky and landed in his hand.

Almost feeling sad for having to part with them so soon, he gathered the rest of his money, approached the counter, and bought the last remaining bagel and a cup of coffee. Despite the bagel's huge size, he ate it quickly. And because the coffee was refillable, he went back often and drank it with lots of sugar and powdered cream. He couldn't remember the last time he had been treated to such a breakfast. It was the best meal he had eaten in a long time.

Chapter 2

The Lesson of the Ants

Feeling satisfied by his brunch, the boy relaxed again under the same tree to let his stomach settle. Glancing up the tree he observed many ants walking up and down along the side of the trunk. He had never noticed them before but recognized a peculiar pattern to their behavior. The insects seemed to be traveling along an invisible line, touching antennae with the others coming in the opposite direction. Without skipping a head, each ant coming from either side followed suit and marched in line.

The longer he stared at the tree, the more he became intuitively drawn into its amazing existence. There was a mysterious, powerful force attracting him and the boy did not resist its pull. A soft humming sound seemed to resonate from the tree's essence, sounding like music to a song. He focused on the vibration and the music became louder. It was an earthy rhythm. The tempo was infectious and it matched the cadence of his pounding heartbeat. And if the words were being whispered by the wind, he heard the song of the ants.

Naonao, 'ānonanona, nonanona, lonalona.

Naonao, 'ānonanona, nonanona, lonalona.

Focusing deeper and deeper, the boy watched as the bark of the tree became his terrain and the moss and mushrooms that grew on the surface became huge monuments. The world of the park slowly shrank down to a patch on the tree just a few inches in front of his sleeping body. In a dreamlike, Alice-returning-to-Wonderland sort of way, he crossed the threshold into the world of the ants.

I am a lonely ant trying to find my way. I hear the home song guiding me, but it's too faint. After awhile, an ant appears singing. She bumps my head and shares the song. More ants soon appear. Some are soldiers protecting the colony, but most are workers carrying food back to the others. Bumping heads reminds me of Grandma's side of the family always kissing one another when greeting each other. Each time it happens, the song grows stronger. That's how I find my way home.

The hand supporting his head started to tingle, so he sat up. He blinked and he was once again lying in the same spot staring at the ants. He had never really noticed their amazing culture before, but he realized how much the survival of the entire colony depended on the total participation of each individual working as a collective. The boy watched with astonishment as the tiny creatures managed to carry the dried up carcass of a dead cockroach that was many times larger than their own bodies. There was a lesson to be learned by observing their actions.

The day was cooling down. The sun was already beginning to arc downward from its highest point, just about the same time when the kids were let out of school and began flooding the park. He had apparently dozed off which was peculiar because he had so many cups of coffee that morning. It was almost as if he had another spiritually awakening daydream and he decided to internalize it and try something he had never tried before. Like the ants, he would "bump heads" with each person he met.

The boy got up and dusted his clothes. He noticed a green caterpillar crawling on one of his locks and he gingerly plucked it out from his hair and placed it on a leaf, being careful not to smash it. Around the park ran a bicycle path with all kinds of people

walking back and forth. He would follow his own invisible line. Quickly he refilled his water bottle with cold water from the fountain, took a long drink, and began walking.

A couple of runners approached the boy. He waved to them and the husband and wife smiled and waved back. Well that wasn't so bad, he thought.

More people came toward him, a bunch of Japanese tourists. He smiled and waved to them as well. They looked at him with great fright. "Aloha!" he said. Most stared blankly at him, and immediately swerved to the side to avoid touching, smiling, or even seeing him. He stood in place still smiling and nodding his head to them, feeling foolish.

"Aroha! Aroha!" squeaked two high-pitched voices behind him. The boy turned around to see an elderly Japanese couple bowing to him.

He bowed back and repeated, "Aloha."

"So, ano, so sorri," said the man politely. "But, watto a-ro-ha mean?"

"Aloha means 'Love'," replied the boy, rubbing his chest. "That's how we say, 'Hello' here in Hawai'i."

"Hai, so dess ne-e-e. A-ro-ha mean r-a-a-bu," said the old woman.

"Yes," confirmed the boy after some hesitation.

"In-to-rest-ing," said the old man thoughtfully. "Aloha."

"Hai, aloha," echoed his wife.

The old man stretched out his hand in the typical, polite, American manner he probably learned in his English class. The boy shook it with respect and waved lovingly to the old woman.

"Aloha," he said once more, astonished at the way both tourists had pronounced it beautifully with no foreign accents. And neither had sneered at his nose ring or dreads.

Up ahead a woman approached, running while pushing a baby's stroller. "Hi," he said. She didn't reply and jogged on. More joggers passed. All ignored his greeting as if he had the bubonic plague. Some even snickered and whispered to each other.

The boy saw several of the regular homeless people who usually stayed on the right to side of the park. A grizzled Hawaiian man lived under the large kamani tree and rummaged from garbage can to garbage can, feasting on thrown-out leftovers. And parked under her large banyan was the blond-haired lady who rattled on and on with anyone willing to listen. She wore a purple mu'umu'u and hauled her multi-colored bags in a shopping cart. And under his usual palm tree sat the dirty, red-faced man who kept raising his paper bag-covered wine bottle at passersby screaming, "Take me to your liter! Hah hah! Get it? Liter!"

Off in the distance was an extremely dark, chocolaty man with long, nappy, sun-reddened dreadlocks wound tightly into a bun in the back of his head. From faraway he kind of looked like an ant. The boy approached warily.

"Hello, my bru-thah," sang the chocolate man with a toothless grin.

"Uh, hello," replied the boy hesitantly, "brother."

"And how are you? How have you been?"

"Uh, fine I guess." The boy felt uncomfortable, even weird, and started edging away. "I gotta go now to. Bye!"

"Wait," the man shouted after him. "I just want to talk!"

"Gotta go, sorry!"

"I have something for you, Ika! Ikaikalani!"

The boy froze in place thinking, How does this guy know my name? Slowly he turned around. "What did you call me?"

"Don't go yet, I got a message for you," the man said in a slightly different tone of voice and a strange glassy look in his eyes. As if entranced, he handed the boy a bright green paper with a roughly sketched picture and some writing on it. "You look well, Ika."

"Did we meet before?" The boy stared down at the paper dumbfounded. A flyer announced a free lecture by a visiting Native American shaman at the University later that week. Confused, he looked up.

"Remember, someone is always looking out for you."

"Who are you?"

Suddenly the trance-like state seemed to drain from the man's face and his toothless grin beamed once again. "Much love to you, my bru-thuh."

"Didn't you just call me by my name? Who are you? How do you know me?"

"Go and follow your path. Don't stray son, follow your road!"

Walking away slowly, the boy looked back as his sweaty fingers left damp imprints in the paper. The chocolate man had vanished and was nowhere to be seen. The boy blinked his eyes and looked about wildly, wondering if the man had been a daydream. But the paper was real and so was the man. Briefly grazing his eyes over the flyer without really reading it, he crumpled it, shoved it into his bag and walked on.

Not very many people knew his name. Only his grandmother called him Ikaikalani. Everyone else used palatable shortcuts: Kelly, Kalani, Cal; Lani, Lonnie,

Lon. But lately nobody asked or even cared about his real name. He was simply "the boy" to anyone interested in acknowledging his existence.

More people passed by and the boy waved at a man riding a bicycle and some young children on scooters wearing protective helmets. More joggers, some wearing earphones and listening to the radio, ran past, ignoring him.

Nearby the boy watched as a small band of four or five young men laughed loudly under a tree, pushing each other roughly and slapping each other's heads in some senseless test of manhood. The men wore tank tops, exposing their heavily tattooed muscular arms. They swore profusely, spitting out the "f-word" without shame. The boy observed from a safe distance when the apparent leader of the gang, who was casually smoking a cigarette, noticed the boy and waved him over with a sly, calculating grin.

"Hi," the boy called out innocently, approaching slowly and warily like a naive kitten first encountering a pack of wild dogs. He was unsure whether or not he would be received warmly or get torn to shreds.

The laughter slowly died down when a voice called out, "Hey, look at the fag!"

"Yeah," the leader agreed, eyeing the boy up and down like a juicy steak ready to be eaten. "What a fag."

The boy's eyes grew wide as he realized the impending danger he had put himself into. "What was that?"

"Where are you going, fag? What, your mama wanted a girl? Is that why you dress like a sissy? What's with your hair?" the men called out to him. He looked either Hawaiian or Samoan because he had wide nostrils and dark, full lips surrounded by a long, straggly goatee. He inhaled the smoke deeply and blew it out his nostrils like one

of those red bulls always seen in cartoons. "Why don't you brush your freaking hair? What, get ukus?"

The boy tried to laugh it off as he watched the leader's bloodshot eyes burn a hole in him. The man's face remained serious and unchanged. The boy slumped his shoulders and slowly walked away, but the men continued hassling him. One of the guys in the back stepped forward, holding out a stunted cigar that they were passing around to each other saying, "Eh, kid, like hit this blunt? "

The boy waved his hand to decline. "No, thanks."

"You no smoke weed?" the gang leader asked, turning to his friends and laughing hysterically. "I knew he was a fag!"

The boy tried to walk away, but the dude yelled, "Get dah little fuckah," and the men huddled around him as if they were playing a game of rugby and he was the ball. Dark shadows loomed over him, while a dozen rough, calloused hands grabbed and jabbed his sides.

By pure instinct, the boy took off his pouch and swung it around his head wildly. "Leave me alone," he screamed as the men continued tormenting and punching him in his side. "I said, leave me alone!"

The shoving match quickly escalated into a miniature brawl and the boy actually began to fear for his life. With his quilt bag weighted down by the Almond Roca can, he swung hard, smacking one guy in the face, and konking another man on the side of his head. His spirit swelled as several of the gang members backed off one by one. But the leader and several of his followers persevered fearlessly. They tried to restrain him while the gang leader waved his cigarette dangerously close to his face.

"How would you like to be branded like cattle?" the man whispered sadistically. "It only hurts for a short time, then you don't feel a thing." The boy trembled nervously as the bright orange cherry came dangerously close to his eyelashes. "What fag, you scared?"

With one last burst of energy, the boy screamed with a high-pitched shrill, stepped hard on one of the gang member's feet, and managed to break free from the gang's death grip. Swinging his bag hard again, he smacked the gang leader in his eye, knocking the cigarette out of his hand. "Assholes!" he yelled, running towards the snack bar amid loud jeers from the crowd behind.

"We're not *pau* with you, faggot!" the leader called after him. "We'll be back, you see!" The gang hooted and howled as the boy slumped behind a nearby seagrape tree and wished, with all of his heavy heart, for his Grandma to come back and make this nightmare go away.

Chapter 3

The Maimed Dove

The boy sat motionless for a long time, pretending not to hear the taunting behind him. Minutes later he noticed the bullies' laughter die down. When he turned to look, he saw that they had left the park. He let out a sigh of relief and allowed his frazzled nerves to slowly subside in the cool sea breeze.

It'd been a while since he had endured such embarrassment. But although he was always being picked on at school while growing up, he could never get used to it. For some reason, people enjoyed calling him names. Whenever that happened he would

retreat somewhere and get lost in his fantasy world of daydreams. Trying his best to maintain his composure, he searched desperately for a happy thought to help him get his mind off things.

He had only a few memories of his mom. His favorite one was when he had turned four. "This is how old you are," she said as she held up all of her fingers except her thumb. "Just add a finger every time you celebrate Christmas. That's when you were born! My very own Christmas present, you were. You almost died you know." He loved to sit in her lap and warm his cold hands around her neck.

She was built tall and strong, typical for a Hawaiian woman of chiefly ancestry. She was beautiful with long, thick, sun-bleached hair like his. Grandma used to call both of them 'ehu. It was one of the rare times he could remember her sober because she was so often drugged up most of the time. Usually she was either dozing on heroin, or completely drunk and hanging out with different military guys for days at a time. But he could still hear her voice as if it were yesterday saying, "Ikauikalani, my special Christmas present!" Ten fingers later, that memory was still his most precious one.

Rather than helping him forget his problems, the memory of his mother produced a burning pain deep in his chest. His feelings locked tightly inside, he tried to cry. But no matter how hard he strained his eyes remained dry. He knew if he could just release his pent-up emotions, he would know that he was still human and not some mindless machine digging in the garbage for food or begging for money. But he had little success.

He stared blankly out to sea. Something inside made him feel like jumping in and drowning, but the ocean had a kind of healing effect. Its rippled surface shattered the sun's rays into millions of sparkling stars, bedazzling and bewitching him and driving

away the memory of the gang's harassment. The soft purring of the water rose and fell with the surging tide. The ocean pulsed rhythmically and the surface was dotted with surfers taking turns riding and slicing the raging waves. Watching the surf reminded him of more blissful memories of growing up in Kahalu'u.

My Grandma loved the beach. When I was young I would watch her from shore. She would jump from rock to rock in her tabis, trying to avoid the crashing waves. She worked quickly, sliding her butter knife under the shells and popping them off one by one. "Don't turn your back to the ocean," she warned. "Maka'ala, be alert! You could get washed out to sea!"

She told me about the time her auntie got swept out. She called for Kane-o-kekai, or Kane-o-ka-moana, and was saved by a shark, one more of our family's 'aumakua. "She almost drowned, but the shark came. She held the fin and it brought her to shore." Grandma said if I ever need help, I could call the shark. I never like try. Sharks are scary.

Sometimes all she brought to eat was one bag of poi and lunch was whatever we caught off the rocks. One time Grandma ate live wana right before my eyes. Using her rubber slipper, she let the sharp needles get stuck inside. She smashed 'em on the rock and scooped the soft meat with her finger. It tasted okay but I didn't like the slime! Same with the 'opihi. I know how to pick 'em, but that's not really my favorite.

Grandma loved body surfing. She taught me how when I was real young. "Kick hard! Let the swell push you forward!" Grandma loved the ocean when it was flat and she loved it when it was rough. She must have been half fish. I never know most grandmas stayed home and watched "Wheel of Fortune" and made crafts. I thought

nothing could keep her down. I never know she would get amputated and then die. And now she's gone and I'm all alone.

For some strange reason, he couldn't cry at the thought of losing his Grandma. Even at the hospital room when she passed, it should have been the saddest day of his life. But for some reason he was emotionless. But as long as he thought of her, she never seemed too far.

The cruel sun was beginning to bow in the sky, causing the trees' shadows to stretch longer and longer. Eventually the shade from his tree shuffled slowly away, exposing him to the blazing afternoon heat. Tired of the blinding light hurting his eyes, he shifted over to the opposite side of the tree.

Moving around in the open grassy field, the boy noticed something curious in the corner of his eye. Hobbling in the dirt nearby, flailing and flapping its wings wildly, was a dusty gray dove. The frantic bird was trying desperately to escape a mangy, feral cat only two strikes away from a perfect kill. The withered cat had black and white fluffy hair, but was severely balding in patches where clumps of hair had fallen out. It was most definitely diseased. Slapping the air wildly with its battered wings, the bird pleaded for mercy.

"Tsa!" the boy hollered, swiping the air with his hand and stomping his foot loudly. "Leave him alone, stupid cat!" He stood up, stomping his foot again, and the cat hopped back and hissed, bearing its sharp teeth and claws. "Get away, tsa!" The cat hissed again angrily and slumped away disappointed, its tail tucked between its legs. He held out his hand to comfort the bird, but the terrified dove managed to flap up into the tree to nurse its wounds.

"No worry, I not going hurt you," he said. "No need be scared." The bird turned its head sideways to look at him with one eye. "Okay then, just stay there until you pau heal. You're safe. The cat no can get you." The dove continued twitching its head, cooing contentedly and winking its one eye at him. It bowed its head and tucked it under its wings.

As long as he could remember he couldn't bear to see any living thing in pain, especially when his Grandma would slaughter a duck or a chicken for dinner. Seeing those innocent creatures lose their lives broke his heart. He was so used to feeding them and seeing them run around alive in the yard that he couldn't bring himself to eating any of them come dinnertime. Seeing the helpless dove reminded him of his pets.

The boy settled back into the shade, watching the sun get yanked down into the ocean. His stomach groaned and grumbled as he wondered when he would be able to eat again. Suddenly the thought of eating a wild chicken didn't seem so repulsive anymore.

His mind wandered as he noticed a Hawaiian man bustling down by the river. He had wiry white hair, which he kept in a long braid down his back. His skin was dark and shiny, and his belly protruded slightly under his white tank top, as if he were a few months pregnant. He wore tabis, like his Grandma used to wear, and large black sunblocker eyeglasses, the kind fishermen usually used. He was hauling around a plastic bucket and catching fish in the murky water with a bamboo pole. The man was catching a lot of fish and he seemed to be having a good time talking with people passing by.

Making sure not to make direct eye contact, the boy observed him carry his cache back to his own camp to prepare his dinner. The man squatted near the water faucet to wash the fish and clean out the guts with a Swiss Army knife. After preparing the fish,

the man gathered some wood from under the trees and began building a fire in a nearby grill. The boy kept track of the man's every move, as he seasoned the fish with a spice mixture from his bag and placed the fish one by one to roast on the grill. After a few minutes on one side, each fish was turned over to cook for a few minutes on the other side. Eventually the delicious smoke wafted in the boy's direction. He tried in vain to ignore the tantalizing aroma, but smell was irresistible.

Turning away from the barbecue, the boy readjusted himself to watch the oncoming sunset. The sky slowly orange and the sun's final rays flashed green along the ocean's horizon. Just above the first evening star, a golden cloud resembling a sick lion limped by, licking its wounds. The poor beast was so emaciated, its ribs stuck out of its torso like bars on a cage. The lion was withering away. But nearby another wispy cloud became absorbed into the lion's belly. The happy animal grew fatter as the cloud drifted out of sight. The boy definitely knew this was a good omen. But as the sky darkened, so did the visions.

In a fluffy patch of clouds, a rabbit hopped contentedly by. Seconds later a huge black rain cloud resembling a pack of wild dogs loomed up and began pouncing on the unsuspecting creature. The dogs grew bigger and more ominous: an apparent sign that a raging storm was approaching. The vicious animals dashed the poor rabbit like dandelion fluff blown to the wind. The dying sun's final rays gave an eerie appearance of splattered blood everywhere. The entire sky was the color of wine, as if the rabbit lay victim in a growing pool of oozing blood.

Fearing this vision warned of imminent danger, the boy prayed fervently that he would be protected from harm. Although a small voice inside assured him not to worry,

he had a strong feeling that something bad was going to happen. He was so preoccupied with the frightening image that he hadn't noticed someone approaching from behind. Growling over his shoulder, a gruff voice said, "What, kid, like eat?"

Chapter 4

Hawaiian

The boy followed the man to his campsite and warmed himself by the fire. He watched as the Hawaiian man made him a plate of fried fish, boiled rice from an old pot, and pork and beans from a can warming on the fire. The boy scarfed the food with scarcely a breath between mouthfuls and the man watched with a big smile as he promptly refilled the boy's empty plate.

He looked scary at first glance, but he seemed nice. His long, white hair was neatly braided down his back, and kept in place with a newspaper rubber band. Although he was shirtless earlier, he had on a white, long-sleeved cotton shirt that covered up most of his tattoos, except for the tiny teardrop on his cheek and the black spider on his neck. After two more servings, the silence was finally broken by the man's gravelly cough. The boy looked up, embarrassed, and thanked the man shyly.

"So what," the man growled, "you run away?" He hacked loudly and spit out a large wad of dark green phlegm to his side.

"No," squeaked the boy.

"What, you fight with your faddah? No like live at home? You not doing drugs, hah?"

"No, it's not like dat."

"No lie to me, brah," the Hawaiian man warned him, "I no like punks, you hear me?" He glowered at the boy as his eyes steadily shrank down into two thin creases, getting lost in a face carved full of deep grooves. "How come you stay here?"

"I got no place to go. I was living with my grandma, but she died."

"Really?" said the old man, somewhat believing his story. "How old you?"

"Fourteen."

"What about your folks? No more family?"

"I never knew my dad and my mom left when I was seven. My grandma thought she died because we never heard from her since. She was always high on crack, or shooting up. Probably died of an overdose or maybe some boyfriend killed her, I don't know. My grandma tried looking for her but no luck." The man's demeanor softened as he listened quietly. The boy continued.

"Last year, Grandma got cancer, so we left Kahalu'u and moved to town where she got better treatment. When she died at Queen's hospital, I just came down here to the park. I don't know what to do now." The old man nodded.

"And you no more friends or family?" The boy shook his head. "What about one fostah home? Kid your age shouldn't be out on dah streets, pretty dangerous." The boy shook his head vigorously. "Firs' ting in dah morning, I taking you Social Services. Dey going take care you. Dat's what I going do, first ting!" The boy frowned and stood up to leave.

"Look, I appreciate the food, but I don't need a social worker too, okay?"

"Oh, so you like sleeping under a bridge, hah?" The boy's eyes grew wider as he realized that he never told the man where he was staying. "Eh, I get eyes, I see you

hanging around dis park. So how long you tink you can handle eating from dah rubbish can? Pretty soon you going sell your body for money, maybe you last one month, maybe two months tops!"

"And who you, my guardian angel?" The boy stood up again and waved a 'shaka' sign to his new friend. "Thanks for the grub, but you not my faddah. I bettah go back to dah bridge."

"Wait," the man called after him. "Okay, okay, I promise, no trouble. You sleep here, it's warm by the fire." The boy turned around, thought for a moment, then he joined him next to the grill, as the man rolled out another blanket for the boy to sit on.

"Everybody call me 'Hawaiian'. What your name?"

The boy hesitated. He hated the fact that nobody could pronounce his real name properly, and he didn't know what name to choose. Deciding to avoid the trouble of explaining himself, he answered, "I'm Hawaiian, too!"

Clasping the boy's hand firmly in his own as if they were equals, the man replied with a big smile, "Right on, Hawaiian! We gotta watch out for each uddah, yeah? Us Hawaiians, rare breed nowadays." The man gathered the dirty dishes. "I going wash up. Watch my stuff, hah?" The boy nodded without a word and carefully unknotted his pouch, unfolding his bag to convert it back into a quilt. "Eh, that's one cherry blanket," the man said.

"Thanks. My grandma's design."

Hawaiian smiled. "We talk some more when I get back."

The boy thoroughly enjoyed the man's company. After sometime, he learned that Hawaiian's real name was Clarence Keali'i Holomaika'i III, and that he had lived in Hilo

for most of his fifty-eight years. After he was released from prison for armed robbery and grand theft auto, his old lady kicked him out and he flew down to Honolulu to find work. Hawaiian occasionally sold newspapers for quick cash and often slept at the park when the shelter was overcrowded. There were a few bad encounters with some police officers, but for the most part he was content. His warm tone and genuine honesty made the boy feel comfortable, even though he was an ex-convict. After hours of deep conversation, the boy began settling down to get ready for sleep while the man pulled out a large book and started writing.

"What's dat?" the boy asked.

"My brain!" joked Hawaiian.

With a puzzled look, the boy asked, "What? Your brain?"

"Oh, just my thoughts, my dreams and my memories. Tings I find, what I learn, I keep 'em in my book. Sometimes I just draw. Like see?"

"Yeah, maybe later."

The boy nestled into his blanket. He flopped around on the rocky ground, which was not as comfortable as his spot under the bridge. He remained restless. After about an hour, he got up complaining that his neck was sore. Hawaiian closed his book and offered it as a headrest. Contented, the boy listened to the soft rustling of the wiliwili trees in the slight night breeze and drifted off to sleep...

I'm flying again. I just love this feeling. The moon is high and I can feel the wind blowing through my hair. My legs are hitting the tops of the trees, so I flap my arms as hard as I can to get higher. It's working! I can see Grandma's house in the distance. I flap harder and hear her calling me in the night. "Ikau. Ikauikalani, wake up! Ikau!" I fly through the window and see Grandma rushing

toward my bed where another me lies in a deep sleep. "Ikau, you must wake up."

It's scary seeing myself from this angle, floating above my old bed. Grandma shakes my sleeping body frantically and I just lay there like a corpse. She screams, slapping me, "IKAUIKALANI, WAKE UP!"

As if jolted by electricity, the boy awoke to the sound of shouting voices echoing in the darkness. In the near distance, the boy heard loud crashing and a woman screaming for help. He recognized the sound of a wicked laugh he remembered hearing earlier.

"Hawaiian, what's happening?" asked the boy groggily.

"Damned punks," the man muttered. "Cannot leave tings alone."

"Who?"

"Damned gangs, no mo' notting bettah fo' do but harass dah homeless. Quick, go!" As the shouts grew closer, he fumbled with his rice pot.

"What do I do?" The boy panicked.

"Grab your stuff and go. Hurry!"

"What about the book?"

"Just hold on to it fo' now, we'll meet up later. Go now!"

The boy grabbed his things and ran behind another tree. It was where he had sat earlier to watch the maimed dove. While he waited behind the trunk, he strained his eyes to see in the darkness. In the soft glow of the dim streetlights he saw two, then three of the gang members he had encountered previously.

"What, old man, tink you tough?" the boy overheard one gang member say.

"I no like trouble from you guys, I was just leaving," Hawaiian said with his hands waving in the air. Several of the gang members were carrying large flashlights,

and were shining the lights about and directly in his eyes. Hawaiian squinted and backed away like a mongoose in the path of a speeding car. Blinded, he cried, "What dah fahk, leave me alone!"

There was a brief silence, then a match light flickered in the dark and the boy saw the leader's face as he lit a cigarette. The cherry grew brighter as the man dragged deeply. He laughed his same wicked laugh as he blew the smoke out forcefully. He looked a lot like a man-eating dragon admiring his virgin sacrifice before making a kill. Behind him stood several of his other followers polishing their baseball bats, preparing to step up to the home plate.

"You damn punks," Hawaiian said with disgust. "You tink you so tough, try being locked up in one Texas prison with Blacks fighting Chicanos every day. See how long you last."

"Oh, big guy," laughed the leader. "So you from the big leagues. I bet you were some big ol' Black man's bitch, eh?"

"I was nobody's bitch," Hawaiian sneered. "But I see you know all about that kind life. Keep it up! You probably wind up with life in prison, whoring yourself to some fat prison guard fo' dope."

"Fahk you," the leader spat, shoving the old man hard in the chest. "I dah boss and I call the shots, I ain't nobody's ho'. You want some o' dis?" he coaxed, squeezing his balls with one hand. "Why don't you show my boys some skills you learned in the big house." He grabbed Hawaiian behind his head and shoved it into his lap, forcing him to go down on him.

Hawaiian fought to keep his head straight up in the air, as the leader pushed him down again. "Leave me dah fahk alone!" Hawaiian growled angrily.

"On your knees, bitch!" the leader commanded. "Let's see how well you can polish my knob!"

"You try, punk, and I'll change your sex in one bite!"

"You heard the boss," hollered one of the gang members, slapping the metal bat loudly in his hand. With one powerful swing to the back of his knees, Hawaiian slumped down with a loud scream. From afar, the boy cringed.

"You muddah fahkaks!" screamed Hawaiian in agony.

"Next time listen, old fart," the leader cackled, as he grabbed Hawaiian's hair from behind and ground his face into his pelvis. "You like that, bitch? You old faggot!"

Hawaiian's muffled shouts were soon drowned out by the gang leader's scream, as Hawaiian apparently kept his promise and bit down on the troublemaker's crotch. "You dirty bastard!" The leader flicked his cigarette to the side and kicked Hawaiian's head as if trying kick a field goal.

The boy gasped. His soft screams were muffled as he pressed his face firmly into the side of the tree. He watched helplessly as his friend's head flew back. Blood and spit sprayed everywhere and his body crumpled to the ground in a heap. The boy stood frozen in terror, too shocked to even scream for help, as the rest of the gang members joined in kicking and hitting the man's lifeless body with the baseball bats. Leave him alone, the boy screamed inside his head. Please God, make them stop! The men continued beating his lifeless body until it was unrecognizable. Finally the boy called out, "Help somebody!"

The beating subsided as the men looked out in the darkness toward the boy's direction. "Who's that?" called out the leader. "Want some of this?"

The boy covered behind the tree as the men approached him in the dark. All of a sudden he heard the sound of wings flapping from above. Looking up he saw a bird flutter to the ground from its roost. He recognized the dove he'd helped earlier because it had a stump on the left foot and only one mangled toe on the right. The bird bobbed in his direction and hopped along the sea wall. Reluctantly, he followed. The dove continued to hop, leading him toward the seashore.

"Who is that? What, scared?" The gang's voices called out in the night. They squinted their eyes to see who it was that was watching them, but it was too dark for them clearly. "Get over here!"

The boy followed the bird and the men's voices slowly faded away in the shadows as the sky began to moisten and weep. He scrambled clumsily along the rocks of the boat harbor like a molted crab leaving its shell behind. Although the raindrops fell, the dove never left his side. Hopping along the wall and occasionally turning its head sideways to ogle him with one eye, the bird guided the boy to safety. As if understanding the situation, the bird cooed soft lullabies to slow his pounding heart. They eventually found shelter from the pouring rain under the eaves of the yacht club.

Someone had apparently called 911 because the emergency crews arrived shortly. The blasting sirens and the bright flashing lights pierced the mists of the rainy park. As the rain subsided, the park's inhabitants crowded around the crime site to see the commotion. Police questioned everyone about the incident with little results. But as the only witness to the crime, the boy preferred not to come forward and watched the crime

scene investigation unfold from a safe distance. Though he wanted justice for his friend's murder, he just couldn't bring himself to talk to any police.

Clutching the book to his chest, he remembered his vision in the clouds of the rabbit and prayed for guidance and protection. It was not the first time he witnessed death. However their time together was too short. He searched the morning sunrise, but all he saw was a single cloud meandering across a blank sky with no particular form. It was like a lump of unmolded clay yet to be shaped. He stared and waited to see what it would become. But answer never came.

He wasn't astonished that he was unable to shed a single tear. But he was frustrated and confused. Why is it that bad things always happened to good people? How could there be so much evil in the world? Life just didn't make sense anymore. Inside he felt stiff and empty.

Soon after, about the time when the Chinese man arrived for his daily morning exercises, the boy wandered back to the crime scene. There were news reporters and photographers buzzing around the same smothered campfire where the boy had been lying just hours before. They were interviewing anyone willing to talk, and the wild-haired shopping cart lady was probably featured on every station's newscast.

Avoiding the press, the boy simply followed the rubberneckers and craned his neck to see if there was anything left behind. There was no trace of the gang members or Hawaiian's body. Without any hope of identifying the perpetrators, the HPD officers wrapped up their investigation of the homicide of the homeless John Doe.

Chapter 5

The Guide Book

The boy sat in the same spot as the previous morning, wishing that his memories of the night were just a bad dream. He watched the Chinese man doing his morning routine on the sand. The maimed dove hobbled around, stabbing its beak repeatedly at bits of leftover rice from the previous night's dinner. The beach park once again buzzed with tourists of every color. But the boy's thoughts were so scattered he noticed little of the activity around him. Instead he prayed hard for his Hawaiian friend to come back. After a short time, the constant praying began to have a meditative, mesmerizing effect on him. Because of his lack of sleep, he almost dozed off when he saw the old man approaching him from a distance.

Hawaiian was cleaned up. His hair was unbraided and brushed neatly. And he smelled like Old Spice. I walked towards him but he held up a hand and backed away. "I'm glad you're okay," I said, relieved. "I thought maybe the gang killed you." Hawaiian smiled at me and pointed to his book, which I was holding. "Oh, you forgot this," I said. "Sorry I took off with it. Thanks for letting me borrow." He just smiled and waved his hand again, pointing at the book, then at me, then again at the book and one more time at me. It was weird and I didn't know why he wasn't speaking to me. "Don't you want your book?" I asked. "It belongs to you, I'm sorry I took it." He just shook his head, still smiling. I gazed down at the book. Through a thin haze I saw my name on the cover in large, gold letters:

'IKAUIKALANI

I blinked my eyes, trying to clear the smokiness, and stared in disbelief at the letters and ran my fingers along the imprint. "How did you know my name? I didn't tell you my name!" I was confused, but Hawaiian simply smiled again and

he started to glow. The light grew brighter around him and my friend was gone.

Glancing down again at the book, I was shocked to find that the gold writing had disappeared.

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The boy's eyes felt heavy as he forced them open. The weight of the entire sky suddenly seemed his to carry. With great effort he awoke, looked about, regained his bearings, and picked through his belongings.

While rushing to escape danger the night before, he had bundled his things in a hurry. The quilt packaged everything haphazardly but securely. He unwrapped his parcel as if opening a steamy, hot laulau. Oh Grandma, wouldn't that be so good right now? There was the Almond Roca can (his Grandma's favorite candy) with his riches, the crumpled paper from the chocolate man and the weathered leather book Hawaiian had given him before dying. He felt sad recalling this friend he'd only known for a day but wanted to remember for a lifetime. Although he wished he could have saved him, he was almost certain that Hawaiian was in a better place; the same place as Grandma, maybe the same as his mother -- if she was still alive -- and, at times, a place he often wished to be.

Although the boy had been holding the book the entire time, he observed it closely for the first time. He flipped the book over and ran his fingers across a faint impression that vaguely resembled the word, JOURNAL. It was probably once embossed with gold before being sandpapered down to an indistinguishable iCUPNAI. The book was rather big and heavy and had served as a suitable headrest. The egg shell-colored pages were thick. One-third of the book was filled with handwriting and drawings, but the rest was left empty and thirsty for ink. The filled pages had dates in the top right hand corners: 8/12, 8/14, 8/20, ...10/4, 10/7, 10/11. Sometimes words alternated

with pictures, and other times there were drawings with words. There were many interesting short stories and there were several well-done sketches.

One journal entry described being in jail on Kaua'i and another was about living on the beach, catching octopus and fish for dinner. Hawaiian also recorded the day he flew down to Honolulu to make a fresh start, and included a description of an elderly woman he had befriended he called "Gladness".

Littered throughout the book were bits of paper shoved deep between the pages, occasionally revealing themselves by drifting out from their various hiding places. Two faded strips, one gray and the other one yellow, were expired city bus transfers that had been lodged between 11/24 and 11/25. Why keep old transfer slips, the boy wondered, when those things are only good for an hour?

He continued searching through the book, finding small leaflets of different colored paper with photocopied messages and scriptural quotes from the book of Matthew. Hawaiian probably passed out Bible pamphlets to tourists for extra cash, the boy decided. Some of the quotes pounced out at him while others purred gently. One particular scripture caught his eye. The image of a candle had been formed by the facing profiles of two children, and the quote spoke about letting your light shine in the world.

Inside some blank envelopes were many cigarette labels and mail-order forms for special merchandise from Kools, Camel, and Marlboro. The boy figured Hawaiian was either a chain smoker or he collected the cigarette labels from the garbage cans. He remembered seeing Hawaiian digging around in the trash bin the week before. So that's probably what he was doing!

Other treasures from the book included a small sewing kit with thread, needles, and pins. Also found was a thin, transparent plastic ruler which measured inches on one side, metric on the other, and had a round magnifying glass on the end. The boy entertained himself by running the lens across the words, watching the letters on the page grow larger and distorted. One he raised the curved lens up and looked at the world, people walking in the distance appeared upside-down. When he focused on the ground, small things seemed to pop out at him.

Weaving among the weeds, a little cockroach was going about its business. Up close the enlarged image of a furry-legged alien creature seemed to shoot invisible lasers at him. As he played with his new toy, a circle of light formed on the ground by the refracted sunlight. The higher he held the lens, the larger the circle grew. The lower he held it, the smaller the light circle shrank. When he focused the sunlight into a single point, wisps of smoke appeared where a tiny fire was slowly beginning to ignite in the grass. He stamped it out with a slipper and returned the ruler to its page, making a mental note about how useful that could be.

The inside of the back cover pocket held matchbooks from Waikiki hotels, U.S. stamps, a few foreign bills (some with Queen Elizabeth's image and others resembling Asian currency), and a Halloween coupon for a free scoop of ice cream from Baskin-Robbins. Best of all were two "Instant winner" tabs from McDonald's: one for a free Big Mac and the other coupon for any large soft drink. The boy's mouth began to water.

Finally uncrumpling the wrinkled flyer from the chocolate man, he noticed it was an announcement for a free college lecture by a Native American medicine man. He smoothed out the flyer, made a mental note to attend, and stuck it randomly somewhere

in the book. Tying his quilt into a bag again, he headed for the park bathroom to clean up since he did not take a shower that morning.

From a distance, the boy noticed something silver shining on the cement. Coming closer, he gasped. It was a dime! He picked it up and noticed more coins up ahead: scattered pennies, and several nickels. Someone had dropped change but only bothered to pick up the bigger coins. Looking around, he bent over and gathered twenty-one more cents, and threw it all into the Almond Roca can with a loud clatter.

It was hard to keep his eyes off the ground after that. He often found a smashed penny here and there, but never this much money at one time. As a kid he would always make a wish whenever he found one, and he'd always wish for more money. He never thought that it would come true. Along the way he also noticed an empty Marlboro light pack with a proof of purchase still attached. Tearing off the label, he added it to the others inside the book, and dropped the trash into the nearest garbage can. Some people, he remarked with disgust, no more respect for the 'aina!

After a long cold shower, which provided relief from the hot sun, his strength was once again renewed. Deciding not to hold off on washing his dirty laundry, he dusted off his clothes, tied his hair back and made sure he looked decent before proceeding along the bike path toward Ala Moana Shopping Center.

It had been some time since he had eaten food from a real restaurant. He had almost forgotten what a Big Mac tasted like. He was eager to redeem the "Instant Winner" coupons, and hoped he had enough money to buy a side order fries.

Chapter 6

You Deserve a Break Today

The day was hot and the boy walked the bike path at Ala Moana Beach Park, directly across the street from the shopping mall. Without a watch, he guessed it was around three in the afternoon since the park was once again flooding with schoolchildren and the traffic was thick. Joggers passed by with scrunched faces as though his very existence gave off a sour stench. Several tourists with European accents ignored him, and a tour group of Japanese steered around him as if avoiding stepping on dog doo-doo. His spirits sank. He never felt more lonely and unlovable in his whole life. It wasn't until the young mother, jogging and pushing her baby stroller, smiled and waved, "Hi," that he felt good again.

The boy observed the homeless squatters as they went about their various daily activities. As usual the same red-eyed Asian woman was arguing loudly with her invisible companion about something unintelligible. Another grizzled local man was digging in a garbage can for food. And the red-faced man had just returned from the mall with another bottle of wine. He was settling down under his usual tree, ready to break into a bottle of White Zinfandel.

The mall was a crazy mass of shoppers and skilled hustlers selling everything from cheap plastic sunglasses to cellular phones in flashy colors. Silver toe-rings competed with koa bracelets and ceramic flowers for the ear. And vendors pushed their ginger-scented body oils, fluorescent bathing suits, and acrylic hand-painted coconuts on the unsuspecting customers.

The boy enjoyed the rich smorgasbord of people: wealthy tourists willing to spend a buck on useless doo-dads; chattering teenagers dressed in school uniforms, pointing fingers and laughing at toys; flocks of socializing senior citizens sitting around with their walkers and wheelchairs, waiting for rides home; and hermits with shopping carts stopped at each trash can to check for food.

Like the rest of the mall, McDonald's buzzed with customers from various backgrounds, everyone eager to get a quick, cheap bite to eat. The boy noticed several cashiers standing at registers taking orders, so he selected the shortest line and waited nervously as he slowly approached the counter. The line moved quickly as one young, red-skinned, blond-haired couple, probably on honeymoon from the mainland ordered two chicken sandwich combos.

Opening the book to retrieve the two "Instant Winner" tabs, he realized that they had both expired. Worrying that the cashier would reject them, he had second thoughts and decided to step aside for a moment. Looking behind, he noticed that a long line of customers had built up behind him. "Why don't you go ahead of me?" he offered an older mainland couple next in line.

"No, no," they said, "you were waiting longer."

"You go," he insisted, sidestepping. "I gotta count my money."

"Oh, okay," said the woman, shrugging her shoulders.

He waited for the line to shorten while he counted out his change to see if he had enough to buy a hamburger in case the cashier did not accept the coupons. But his thirty-one cents wasn't enough to buy even a cookie. Those were three for a dollar. The smell of burgers and fries tantalized him and made his stomach growl even more. He took a

deep breath, hoping desperately that the cashier would not notice the expiration dates, and stepped forward.

At the counter stood a short, graying, Filipino woman with a blank look on her face. "Welcome to McDonald's," she said blandly. "Can I take your-r or-r-der-r-r please?"

"Uh, yeah, um..."

"You need mor-r-r time?" she asked in her strong foreign accent, impatiently drumming her fingers loudly on the counter.

"Uh, yeah, I have some coupons here... one for a free Big Mac..."

"Show me," she said with a frown.

The boy handed her the coupons shakily, giving the people behind him a stiff grin. The cashier inspected them with disgust and thrust them back at him.

"They ar-r-re no good. Expir-r-red," she announced as if informing the entire store. Everyone turned to stare at the boy.

"Oh," he peeped. "Sorry, but uh..."

"You going order-r-r something, or just stand ther-r-re?"

"Well, can I get a cookie?"

"What kind? We hab peanut butter-r-r, oatmeal, or-r-r chocolate chip."

"Uh, chocolate chip, I guess."

The woman reached into the cookie container and placed the cookie inside a small paper bag with a bunch of napkins. She looked down and pressed the buttons on her cash register saying, "That's por-rty-one cents, please."

"Sorry, I only got thirty-one cents," the boy said softly, looking down at the coins in his can. "Can I still buy the cookie?"

Her eyes slowly looked up at him and narrowed. She mumbled, "Just take it, okay?" She took the change and handed him the cookie. "Next!"

He grabbed the cookie and shuffled off. Suddenly realizing that he had lost his water bottle the night before in the frenzy and he was really thirsty, he went back to the cashier. "Can I have a cup of water?"

"Sorry sir, that's pibe cents."

"What? Five cents for one cup?"

The woman was getting irritated. "You hab pibe cents?"

"No," he whispered.

"Then please leab, sir. Next!"

Just then, another woman's voice from behind the counter said in a strong, Samoan accent, "Excuse me, sir? Please ton't leaf." With his face flushed, the boy turned around to see the manager, a hefty Polynesian woman with her long hair wound up in a bun in the middle of her head, and a Tahitian Gardenia pinned inside. She was standing a full foot taller than the older, shorter Filipino cashier, waving him back politely. "Sir, is-s someting tah matta?"

"He does not hab eenup money," interjected the cashier, but the manager ignored her and opened the locked register on the left.

"I nevah like cause trouble," the boy said. "I just wanted my free Big Mac. I nevah know the coupons had expire."

"Expired? Let me see. Ella, please help tah nex customah." Obeying her boss, the cashier took the order of the next customer, who was watching the whole scene with sympathy.

The boy handed her the small slip of paper. Squinting her eyes, she looked at the microscopic printing of the expiration date and nodded her head.

"Okay, yes, tah coupon is outdated, but I will still honor it. Was tat all?" Surprised, the boy gave the manager the "Instant Winner" coupon for a free drink, and she promptly asked him if he wanted "Coke, Tiet Coke, Sprite, or Fruit Punch".

Without thinking he blurted, "Coke."

As if on impulse she added a large order of French fries, folded down the top of the package, and graciously offered everything to him, apologizing for any inconvenience and wishing him a nice day.

The Filipino cashier, who was carefully scrutinizing the whole incident, mentioned, after the last customer had left, "What ar-re you doing?"

"Thank you, Ella. I will watch the front now. Why ton't you start mopping tah floor while I count your drawer?" The scowling woman left with a loud "humph", and the manager again apologized and invited him to return soon.

"Thanks so much," he said.

"Ton't mention it." She waved off any obligation and eyed the book firmly tucked under his armpit. "Wea tid you ket tah pook from? I tink I seen it peefore."

"An old man gave it to me last night."

"Oh. Chust porrowing?" she said with a frown. "I'm sure he wants it pack."

"He got beaten up pretty bad."

With a serious look she asked, "He okay?"

Speaking slowly, the boy said, "He died last night."

After a long silence, the Samoan woman whispered, "Meet me around tah pack in ten minutes."

The boy sat down, inhaled the food in what felt like two breaths, then wandered outside and down the back alley.

The manager came out with two sacks full of old burgers and stale chicken nuggets. The boy was so grateful, but all he could do was just stand there and stare. She said, "I used to give tah Hawaiian man tah old food that sat around too long. We supposed to the frow it away, but I no like waste."

"Did you know the Hawaiian man very long?" asked the boy.

"No, not long, but he was ferry special." Her voice shook and her eyes watered.

"I will miss him. Now go, hurry!"

"Thanks again!" he whispered loudly.

The woman held a finger to her lips and said, "Ton't mention it. To anyone. I ton't want to loose my chop. I have ten kits to feet!"

He walked off quickly, checking about to make sure that nobody witnessed what just happened. The last thing he wanted was to cause any problems for the kind woman who had come to his rescue. After all, he knew how hard raising one child could be, let alone ten hungry mouths!

Chapter 7

Flying into the Night

The boy strolled back to the park with a spring in his step and his hands full of McDonald's packages. It was probably the most food he had seen at one time. Rather than hoarding the whole bunch and letting it waste, he decided to share his spoils with the other hungry people at the park.

He approached the crazy red-eyed Asian lady, who had been sitting in the same spot when he left the park, still arguing with her invisible friend. He gave her some cheeseburgers, which she accepted without making eye contact. She immediately opened one for herself and unwrapped another for her invisible buddy, who apparently was not hungry because he/she wasn't biting. Scolding her invisible person for wasting the food, she finished the second burger when she was done with hers.

The grizzled man, who had been digging in the garbage can earlier, ignored the boy and wouldn't accept any food. Every time he approached the man, he would walk away, waving his hand as if swatting at flies. Finally giving up, the boy put two cheeseburgers on a nearby park bench for him to retrieve later. The red-faced drunk man had fallen asleep under the tree, and the boy left him a couple of sandwiches for when he woke up. For the bird lady there were some chicken nuggets for her and her little friends. I hope they don't mind eating other bird meat, he thought. That's kind of cannibalistic! The birds didn't seem to care as they fought and pecked each other for the torn up morsels, which the woman sprinkled about copiously.

Finding a comfortable place on the beach to stretch out and sink his toes into the soft sand, he munched on a fish burger and watched the people casually passing by. The

beach was filled with people of various body types shamelessly flaunting their near-naked bodies for the whole world to see. How could these people wear such things, he thought, as one fat, reddened man walked by with a tiger-striped thong that dangled in the front and exposed his sunburned backside. Don't they have any shame? Disgusted, he looked away at the other beachgoers.

Small children played carelessly, running back and forth from the water's edge, building castles in the sand. Several men threw a ball and cheered and booed as they tackled one another. And high school paddlers ran along the water's edge in lines of two, training vigorously for their spring racing season. It was getting hot so he took off his white T-shirt and rolled his jeans up past his ankles. He wished that his swim shorts weren't torn, and remembered the sewing kit in Hawaiian's journal.

Retrieving the needle and thread, he pulled out his shorts to repair them. He knew how to sew because when his grandma's eyesight grew bad, he would assist with her quilting. Carefully threading the needle the way his Grandma had taught him, he pulled the string through the eye and began stitching the hole closed. Before long, the shorts were repaired and he was able to change before the sun sank into the horizon.

While looking for the green flash, he observed the silhouettes of the canoes out in the deep water up against the pumpkin-colored backdrop. Apparently the same high-schoolers had finished their run and were racing each other in the open ocean. He watched them lean forward in unison, thrust their paddles into the water ahead, and pull back hard with their whole bodies to propel the boat forward. In the distance, he heard the soft drumming of the paddles hitting the sides of the canoe, and the shouting from the steersman, who was urging his teammates on. After several strokes on one particular side

(about fourteen or so) one of the paddlers called "hut, ho!" and they all switched sides. He never paddled before, but it looked exhilarating.

Leaving his belongings on the sand, he jumped in the warm water to take a quick dip. There was still light out, even though it was after sunset, and the pink clouds reminded him of carnival cotton candy. Just wetting himself long enough to rinse off the day's accumulation of sweat and oil, he emerged from the water, gathered his things, and washed off the sand and salt in the nearest shower. Even the water from the shower was still warm from the sun's intense heat, and it felt good in the cool, evening air. After entering the restrooms and changing back into his jeans and T-shirt, he settled down under a tree to let his swim shorts dry and to eat some dinner before heading back to his bridge.

Far away in the distance, a bird was approaching him from the West. Taking a bite from an apple pie, the boy stared at its form, which kept growing and growing. Squinting, he suddenly realized it was a Hawaiian owl, *pueo*, the guardian spirit of his grandmother's family, her *'aumakua*. He hadn't seen an owl in years, especially in the city. With a pang he remembered his first encounter.

Me and Grandma went walking because she needed help gathering Hawaiian medicine. She pointed to certain plants, and I got them for her. Sometimes I had to climb trees; sometimes I dug for roots. Koali, pohuehue and kauna 'oa treated open wounds, 'uhaloa was good for sore throat, and laukahi helped with boils. 'Olena cured earaches, and laua'e made a strong tea to clean out the system. I remember we came across a nest with large eggs in a field of tall grass. I was curious, but Grandma told me to leave, and she covered the nest back up with the surrounding grass. After awhile, we saw two owls flying wildly up and down.

She said something in Hawaiian, then left. She explained after, that the pueo was our family guardian and always helped us in times of need. Once her Auntie was going to get bust up by her drunken husband. But she was saved when an owl took her someplace safe. Since then, our family has always had respect for our 'aumakua.

The owl landed on the tree nearby and stared intensely at the boy. Beneath the purple, starry blanket of the sky, the last bit of sunlight slowly drained away. He watched the owl. And with its ancient eyes, the owl watched back. Feeling obliged to do something, he quietly chanted several lines of greetings and thanks he had remembered learning from his grandmother:

E Keolalani e!

Ke mahalo aku nei ia 'oe,

no kou aloha nui e.

E ho mai ko mana,

mai luna iho no,

Aloha, aloha, aloha no e!

The owl seemed to bow its head, hopped gracefully from its perch and landed on the ground. Instantly it shimmered into thousands of sparkles, and was transformed into a young, American Indian man who was tall and slim and wore his hair in two braids, with owl's feathers neatly plaited inside. He smiled at the boy and spoke without moving his lips as if communicating through some form of telepathy.

Ikauikalani! Pehea mai nei 'oe e ku'u wahi keiki?

Confused by the Indian man's proficiency in the Hawaiian language, the boy asked in English, "Who are you?"

'O au no ia ke kupuna o kou kupuna. 'A'ole kama 'aina anei 'oe ia 'u?

Somehow mysteriously understanding him, the boy recalled several recurring childhood dreams of this mystic man, whom he knew was his ancestor and spirit guide.

E hele kaua e lele a'e! Ho'omana'o 'oe, 'ea?

The boy understood the man clearly, and accepted his invitation to go flying. That is, if he still remembered how. Holding tightly to the man's hand, he watched the man shimmer back into an owl. The boy concentrated with all his might and his body broke into one million stars as he also shimmered. The world spun around him as he stretched out his large wings and with several thrusts he took flight.

He relished the newfound feeling of freedom the night air offered him. The other owl trailblazed ahead as the two of them carved their way through the darkness. The ground below seemed to rush past him. All he could see below were the city lights that lined the streets. The pattern of the streetlights reminded him of the meticulous stitching of his grandmother's quilts.

As the two owls raced toward the mountains, the brightness below dwindled and they were immediately bathed and swathed in a cold mist that frosted his feathers. After they crossed the peaks, the darkness was again shattered by scattered streetlights marking the wider spaces between the houses of Windward O'ahu.

Far below he could make out his Grandma's old homestead: the mango tree he climbed as a child, the small banana grove next to the old plantation-style house, and the fence that lined the yard, keeping her dogs safely inside. Across the road was the beach where he swam with his grandmother's dog, Poki.

The world spun again and a force pulled him to a mountain cliff where he again resumed his normal shape and stood beside the man, gazing up at the open sky. The stars were laid out in front of him and he could see the patterns of their movement like mechanical clockwork. Outlines of animals and people representing constellations gestured at him and danced with each other in the sky.

The man pointed to each star and recited the names in Hawaiian. *Makali'i, 'Iao, Hoku'ula, Maiao, Kahikinui, Unulau, Polohilani, and Holoikahiki*. He paused, pointed at one particularly bright star, and said *'Ikaikalani*. It exploded like a Fourth of July fire blossom and turned into a white dove, resembling his maimed friend, and flew past him barely grazing his head. Not believing what he saw, the dream was rewound, as if someone hit the rewind button on a VCR. The bird appeared to get sucked back into the sky like some vacuum cleaner was suddenly turned on, and the star burst once again, turning into the same dove and again flying past him. The boy glanced at the man with a look of surprise, and the man simply smiled and nodded.

In a split-second of eternity the scene melted away. The boy was transported to a thick forest where the sunlight penetrated the canopy of red and orange autumn leaves. The man stood in front of him, holding a book that looked like his journal, except it was made entirely of gold. On each page were symbols that could have been some strange form of encrypted writing. In an unexplainable way, the boy recognized them. From deep within his soul, he understood the language as if he had always spoken it, but had somehow forgotten the words when he was back on earth. The book told stories about ancient men, their great works, and their inspiration from God. One word stood out: *Zarahemla*, although it also confused him.

"Why are you showing me this?" he asked.

"You have much more to learn," said the man in perfect English, shimmering into an old, white-haired Hawaiian man.

"Who are you?"

This time the man didn't reply but continued to stand there. The boy watched as the two of them returned to the same park where he had apparently dozed off without knowing. He watched the rising sun's warm light grow behind the man's shoulder. The boy stared with amazement, desperately recalling every part of his dream from beginning to end before the waking world caused him to forget.

"Wait, don't go yet. Who are you?"

Without a single word, the man smiled, shimmered again into thousands of sparkles as he changed back to his owl form, and blinked away.

Abruptly the boy awoke. It didn't seem as if he had been asleep all night, but apparently had been. He felt strangely weak, but rested. What a strange dream, he thought. Too bad it wasn't real. He looked about him, relieved that his belongings were intact and that nobody had bothered him throughout the night while he slept. He stood up to stretch out the numbness in his legs, and glanced at the ground under the tree. Nearby there was a fresh pile of bird droppings with what looked like rat hair and bones, and at his feet there were several large feathers that looked like they belonged to an owl. As he reached for them, a passing breeze came from nowhere and carried them up in the air, out of his grasp and out of sight.

Chapter 8

Soul Mates Are Everywhere

In the low morning tide the rocks stuck out from the water's smooth glassy surface like worn down dragon's teeth. The boy stared out in admiration. Off in the faded distance, several large ships, cruise-liners and one that looked like a tugboat pulling a barge, punctuated the horizon.

Pecking around in the grass was a small flock of doves. Carefully he studied their feet to see if his maimed friend was among them. To his surprise, several doves had disfigured feet. He pulled out his last cheeseburger and took a huge bite from the stiff, styrofoam-like sandwich, leaving half of it behind in the shape of a crescent moon. Taking another bite, he broke up the remainder of the bun and scattered the crumbs. Startled, the birds avoided him. But one fearlessly hobbled forward and jabbed enthusiastically at the largest chunk. The boy recognized his friend's left stump. Another bird bobbed close behind, trying to mate with the maimed dove. The male was missing one toe on his right foot. Momentarily distracted by the bread, he began eating also.

Think I'll name them, the boy thought. After some consideration he said aloud, "Pegleg and Two-Toe!" Both birds jumped up, frightened by his excited tone. But they eventually wandered back and resumed eating.

The calm ocean seemed to be inviting him in. He left his belongings on the sand and plunged in fully clothed. *Hi'uwai!* After a moment of underwater silence he exploded from the baptismal fountains. He pictured a caterpillar breaking free of its chrysalis as a newly transformed butterfly. He dove again. This time he shot upward

into the air and pretended he was a flying whale. The morning water shocked his body in a final wake up from a heavy dream. The saline penetrated his hair and clothes, washing away all sourness. The problems he experienced the past week dissolved and drifted out to sea.

The beach was still deserted, so he undressed underwater and washed his clothes in the foam. With only his underwear on, he stepped out of the water feeling clean and content.

Gradually the beach began filling with people. The same old Chinese man, who never missed a day, was doing his morning exercises again on the sand and the retired Japanese guy with the metal detector was combing the beach for hidden treasure. A Samoan lady washed her baby's okole in the shallow pool while her children played ball near the shore.

He rinsed off the salt and sand at the outside shower, changed into his surf shorts and sat back to dry himself and his wet clothes. The warm sun felt good on his skin. He faced *makai* and smelled the salty air mixed with seagrape and coconut suntan lotion. The waves were starting to kick up. Several local dudes, carrying their surfboards under one arm and riding their skateboards, were scoping the small swells for any prospects. The boy watched as they jumped in and paddled out to catch some waves. When the clothes eventually dried, he got dressed and walked toward the snack shop.

He instinctively looked on the ground for coins. Sure enough, there were a few pennies, and even a dime. To his surprise each coin had a happy face sticker on one side. He continued down the sidewalk, taking a more of them, even a quarter! But that was it and he stopped to count his find: $25 + 10 + 5 + 5 + 6$. Wow! 51 cents!

When he reached the counter there was hardly any food in his price range. The bagels were all gone. And the muffins, which were the next cheapest items on the menu, cost eighty-five cents. He decided to go back to McDonald's for a 49-cent burger, after finding yet another dime and penny along the way.

The mall was once again in full swing and bustling with people. Tacky Hawaiian music blared from the speakers above. Restaurant smells mixed with car exhaust wafted from every direction. And McDonald's, as always, was filled with people of all walks of life, planning to get a cheap bite to eat. But because he was too early for the lunch menu and none of the breakfast food appealed to him, he bought an apple pie and sat down at one of the tables.

Through the glass the boy observed a tattered, blue-eyed man dug through the garbage, looking for something to eat. After some time he found some discarded fries and part of a vanilla shake. He stuffed his mouth without chewing so that his cheeks protruded outward making his face resemble a puffer fish.

The boy looked around to see if anyone else noticed him. Several Japanese tourists didn't care. A young mainland tourist couple had watched with great disgust as their child pointed curiously at the man. But a nearby store clerk, probably on an early lunch break, chased after him to give the man his own set of food. At first the boy felt sorry for the hungry man. But then he was filled with a sense of hope that not all people were insensitive.

Rather than diving directly into his meal, he put it aside to take out Hawaiian's journal and feed his even hungrier soul with words of nourishment. Thumbing randomly through the pages, he came across a passage about samplers at the food court.

The Cajun restaurant get honey-glazed chicken, and the Thai restaurant get chicken satay with peanut sauce. The ice cream shops let you taste the different flavors, and the coffee shops passout samples of the Latte special of the week. The juice bar give out cups of orange, watermelon, pineapple, or wheatgrass juice. Pretty good except the last one. And at Merrie Malia's, you can get free kona coffee and passion-orange juice.

The boy chuckled to himself, wishing he'd read that entry before buying the apple pie. He pocketed the dessert for later and headed towards the food court to see if Hawaiian's advice was for real.

On the way there was Merrie Malia's, so the boy strutted casually in to see what they had. The store was like a mini-Waikiki, cleverly designed to spoon-feed the happy Hawaiian experienced to visitors in a single bite. Two Japanese girls clapped happily as a third opened an oyster at a booth that sold pearls from shells that customers picked out. Wow, he thought. A little store within a store! He smiled at the salespeople. All frowned back disapprovingly.

Yards and yards of fabric confronted him. Workers busily arranged racks of flowered clothing like honeybees buzzing from bloom to bloom. Fields and pastures of cropped alohaweare rustled at him, homegrown flowers and plants meant to spread sunshine on foreigners eager for more aloha to wear, each, and drink.

Aha! He followed the smell of freshly brewed coffee and spotted the food booths, which were situated towards the back of the store. There was hot coffee and Hawaiian herbal tea on the right, and two different types of chilled fruit juice on the left. Walking up to the left side, he noticed a young, shapely Hawaiian woman dressed in a nice *holoku*

with pink flowers in her long, dark, upswept hair, pouring out mini cups of guava juice for customers to taste.

"Aloha!" she said lovingly. "Want to try some macadamia nut cookies?"

"Mahalo!" he replied. Her wide smile was infectious and he couldn't help but smile back. While drinking and nibbling, he pretended to peruse a rack of postcards and watch the promotional tour video, before depositing his cup in the trash basket and going for some hot Kona coffee.

"Want a piece of macadamia-nut chocolate?" asked another somewhat Hawaiian-looking woman. She spoke with a Japanese accent and barely resembled an Asian woman buried under heavy layers and layers of aloha. He thanked her, munched happily, drank down the single mouthful of Joe, and refilled a second, then a third cup of coffee. Going back to the juice, he helped himself to more cookies.

"I see you like our products very much," murmured a sterile voice that snuck out from behind him. Turning around, he saw a tall Caucasian man with a protruding belly, glasses sitting on the tip of his nose, and several long strands of graying hair brushed over from one side to the other, trying in vain to hide a large bald spot in the middle of his head. His nametag indicated he was the store's manager, and he had been dusting around the Hawaiian candy rack, watching him and frowning with disapproval. "We have some nice care packages on sale. Perhaps you would like to purchase the family pack?"

"Uh, uh..." the boy stuttered. "N-no-o, thank you."

"Or maybe you would like to buy some coffee..."

"Thanks but," he blurted. "I better be going already!"

"Yes!" The manager simply stared with no hint of emotion. "You'd better."

"Sorry, I was just looking at some aloha shirts," fibbed the boy.

"And then you were leaving."

The boy slumped backward when a woman's voice sliced through the tension.

"Okay, sir," she said politely. "Sorry to keep you waiting, we did have the red print in your size. Medium, was it?" He saw the young, pretty Hawaiian woman from the juice stand holding up three aloha shirts in various smashing colors. "Hello, Jerry," she remarked to the manager. "Thank you for looking after my customer." To the boy she said, "Sorry, sir, I could only find the purple in Large."

"This... kid... is buying all those?" the manager asked suspiciously.

"I don't know," he replied.

"Oh," said the woman, "well then. Anyway, I think I saw your father leaving."

She winked.

"Thank you," the boy mumbled and silently praised her, his savior. "Uhm... bye now." He hurried outside as the manager scolded the woman for catering to riffraff, and how he never wanted to see that kind of trash in his store again.

On a detour through the food court he got to sample honey-smothered chicken, popcorn shrimp, and a chunk of jalapeno-cheese pretzel. After having some cheesy Italian breadsticks, chicken satay and mango smoothie, he washed everything down with some iced lemongrass tea. Although very satisfied, the boy felt bad for eating so much free food, and vowed not to abuse the system again. Settling down at a table in the center of the bustling food court, he reopened the journal to read more about his late friend, Hawaiian.

The flyer from the chocolate man got loose and fell out from its hiding place. A lecture sponsored by the University's Cultural Exchange Center featured a Native American medicine man from a tribe with an unpronounceable name. The topic of the lecture caught his eye.

"The Power and Influences of Dreams"

Dr. Daniel Owlfeathers

Professor of Ethnic Studies, Zarahemla University

Native American Shaman/Healer, Ataquawopi Nation

Wednesday, April 12, 1:00 PM

University of Hawaii, Adams building, Room 301

He had never really taken a good look at the paper before, but the subject matter intrigued him, especially with all the strange dreams he had been experiencing within the previous few days. Just noticing the little details surrounding the lecture, he was even more determined to find out more about the subject matter and what the man had to say about it.

What shocked him the most was the name of the university from where the guest lecturer was a professor: Zarahemla. How can? the boy thought. That was the name from last night's dream! The Power of Dreams, huh? Maybe this man can tell me what my dreams mean! He looked at the date and wondered what day it was. Ever since his grandmother died, he hadn't cared to keep track. Okay, Sunday, he thought. Monday... Tuesday... oh my God, that's today!

He glanced around for a clock, and didn't notice any nearby. Seeing a friendly-looking, older couple sitting nearby he asked politely, "Do you know what time it is?"

"It's almost 11 o'clock," the gray-haired gentleman said, glancing at his wristwatch and smacking his lips loudly while munching on a plate lunch of fried rice and orange chicken from the Chinese restaurant.

"Thanks," he said, as he thought about whether or not he should make the long trip to the college campus. Looking inside his Almond Roca can, he realized he didn't have enough money to catch the city bus. And even if he walked the distance, he had never been there. And yet he could easily get lost trying to find the building, where he would still probably miss the lecture anyway. Sadly he resolved that it just wasn't meant to be. Too bad!

Returning to his book, he read a few more short entries until one particular passage hit him as though he were receiving a message from the other side. It was about how Hawaiian was able to get about on the bus system without having to pay the dollar fee, but by using the bus transfers:

Sometimes people throw away the transfer slips, and if you look on the ground or in the trash maybe some are still good! The yellow one is good on any bus going to Waikiki and the pink one will take you on any 50-something bus out to the country. The gray transfer is good on the No. 4 bus and it will take you to UH right at the turnaround.

His eyes grew larger as he read the words over and over, questioning their validity. Is this real? Should I try it? he wondered. It can't be a coincidence that I'm reading this now, just when I need a ride to the university.

He quickly packed his things, stopping momentarily to reread the passage carefully again, and proceeded to the main bus stop on the mauka side of the shopping center. He noticed that the same blue-eyed man he had seen earlier was now rummaging

through the trash on the opposite side of the mall. Remembering his uneaten apple pie he approached the man and gave it to him. "Thanks, brother," the smelly blue-eyed man said with a heavy lisp. "God bless you."

The bus stop was loaded with people sitting or milling around waiting for the next buses heading in the directions of their various destinations. There were people of every flavor and nationality from around the globe, speaking many different languages that were unintelligible to the boy. They were either yapping brightly while bowing their heads respectfully, or chattering quickly rolling their tongues as they spoke. Many of the light-skinned faces were burnt red under the harsh Hawaiian sun, like steamed lobster shells. And some skins simply bronzed beautifully into rich copper, brass, and hematite tones. Some wore straw hats and cheap sunglasses with alohaweare, and some were casually dressed with tank tops and fake flower leis. But they were all standing around confused, reading and pointing at pamphlets and maps of directions all over the island, written in their own foreign languages.

The boy peered timidly around. Buses arrived and stopped momentarily, spitting out people, before continuing on their way. Some were dressed like workers rushing late to work at the mall, and other people, some weighed down with shopping bags, waited patiently for their transfer buses to take them home. The boy noticed some college-aged students jamming the breezeway, complaining about having to stand up on the crowded buses. He joined them at the stop marked No. 1 to No. 8 for the University bus to arrive.

The boy sat on a bench next to a Japanese girl reading some college book entitled, *The 47 Ronin*. "Excuse me, does the No. 4 bus going to UH run here?"

"Yes, it does," she answered pleasantly, still holding her page open with her pointer finger and acknowledging him momentarily before resuming her speed reading.

"Cool." He gave her a shy nod. "You go to college?" he asked.

"Yeah, this is my second year. I'm reading this book for my history class. We have a quiz today and I'm cramming! What about you? You look kinda young to be going to UH."

"Oh, yeah I go high school. I just going to see this free lecture. See?" He handed her the flyer, sat next to her on the bench and quickly scanned the ground for tickets.

"What high school?" she asked, ignoring the pamphlet.

"Oh, uh... uh..."

"Yeah," she said slowly, her eyes narrowing. "And why aren't you in class?"

Without flinching, he fibbed, "I go private school. Today only get half day."

"Oh, you go to an ILH school?" she sneered. "Which one?"

His eyes grew larger from fear of getting caught in his lie. "I... uh... go to..." he stammered, as his brain raced and raced to pluck out a name; any name from any of the town schools, none of which were coming to mind on the spot.

"Well?" the girl asked getting suspicious. "Don't you know the name of your own school?"

Without thinking he spat out the first name he could think of. "Iolani."

"Really?" She seemed surprised. "I figured you for Kamehameha. I went to Punahou!" Her demeanor dimmed suddenly as her eyes surveyed his appearance with a slight disapproval. She perused his decorated jean jacket with pen-drawn images and shiny safety pins, and ogled his wild hair. "Doesn't your school have a dress code?"

"No," the boy snapped, not appreciating her judgment of him. The No. 2 bus stopped to expel an elderly woman carrying a heavy bag, and a young man dressed in long black pants, a crisp, white shirt, and a gray bow tie, who shuffled off in a hurry. No transfers yet, he thought, getting anxious.

"So, when do you graduate?" the girl inquired nosily, tearing herself once again from her reading to continue her inspection of him. "Are you looking for something?" she asked, noticing him eyeing the ground.

He ignored her hand stood up nervously to look inside a nearby ashtray for any small slips of crumpled paper, finding none. "Oh, I graduate 2005, I guess, or maybe 2004."

She mentally counted up the years, as did he, and they both realized at the same time that he had given away his true age. "So you should be in the seventh or eighth grade?"

"How much longer till the bus comes?" he asked, getting fidgety.

"A few minutes." The girl stared confused. There was an awkward moment of silence, which she broke abruptly. "Why did you lie about being in high school? Is it because you're supposed to be in school? I don't understand."

"I don't know," he said.

She looked him up and down again and mentioned slowly, "You don't really go to Iolani, do you?"

He just mumbled without looking at her, "No."

"It's okay with me, my brothers went to public school and they turned out fine," she said try to lighten things up. "So what school, really? Do your parents know you're skipping school? You could get into trouble!"

"Whatever," the boy said softly, still looking down and scraping his sandaled foot on a dried piece of gum that was imbedded in the sidewalk. The University bus finally pulled up, saving him from having to answer any more of her pestering questions. It was fairly deserted with only a few college students on board and an impatient driver at the wheel.

"Here it is," she announced, marking her page and gathering her things to board the bus. "You coming?"

The boy slouched and shrugged his shoulders. "I'll wait for the next one."

"What? The next one's not for another half-hour. Get on!"

"No, I gotta wait."

"Eh," barked the bus driver roughly, "you kids going get on, o' wot? I running late!"

"I don't have money," whispered the boy. "I cannot go."

The girl shook her head. "Just get on the stupid bus," she hollered at him. She presented her bus pass and stuck a dollar in the machine for her new friend.

Chapter 9

The Dream Professor

The boy reluctantly got on the bus and took a transfer from the impatient bus driver. He proceeded to sit down next to the girl, almost losing his balance from the bus taking off before he could get to his seat. "Thanks for paying," he said to her.

"Alright now," she demanded, scowling. "No lies, okay?"

"Well I didn't mean to, but you're too nosy! Besides I really shouldn't be talking to strangers anyway."

"Who are you calling stranger? You were acting stranger than me digging around in the ashtrays. What were you looking for, a cigarette?"

Thinking momentarily he decided that the story was too long to tell so he said, "Nothing really."

"Well, I still don't know your name. I'm Tristan."

"Tristan?" the boy said with a slight smile forming. He couldn't help it. It wasn't everyday where he met someone with an out of the ordinary name like his.

"What's so funny?"

"I'm not trying to tease you. It's just that I've never heard it before."

"I know it's not your typical Japanese chick's name, but my parents were being creative. My dad's name is Troy and my mom is Kristen. Half and half. Get it? Tristan."

"That's pretty creative alright." The boy looked away from the girl and gazed out the window at the people and buildings passing by.

"Well?" she said, not breaking eye contact. "Aren't you going to tell me your name?"

Since nobody ever seemed able to pronounce his name properly, especially non-Hawaiians, he busted his brains for one of his many names to choose and blurted out unthinkingly, "Ikauikalani Kealahahele."

"Whoa, slow down a bit!" Tristan laughed. "Cowie--Kalani... Kalakaua?"

"It's Hawaiian," he mumbled, embarrassed.

Slapping his shoulder, she exclaimed, "I figured that out."

Getting perturbed, he said, "Look just call me Kelly. That's what my friends called me when they couldn't pronounce my name."

"Oh I get it, like the surfer, Kelly Slater? I'm sorry I laughed at your name. It sounds beautiful, I was laughing at my ignorance. What does it mean?"

"I don't know. Ikauikalani is a family name. People mostly call me whatever they like, but my grandma used to call me 'Ikau' for short."

"Well 'Ikau-for-short', I think..."

"Just call me Kelly," interjected the boy. The girl sighed loudly and rolled her eyes back in irritation.

"What I was going to say, Ikau," she said, emphasizing his name, "was that I wish I could have a name like that. It sounds so musical, I bet it has a beautiful meaning." And with that, she turned away and resumed reading her book, her eyes flying over the words that her speeding finger was pointing at, ignoring the boy entirely throughout the trip. She had at least one-third of the book left before class started and the quiz apparently counted a lot toward her final grade.

There, he thought, I did it again. Now even she won't talk to me now. That's exactly why the boy sometimes hated talking to anybody at all. Somehow things always turned out bad and whatever he did he seemed to screw it up even more. If they weren't picking on him or teasing him about his hair or his name, they'd get turned off and pushed away by his defensive attitude.

He just sighed and stared out the window, as the bus continued to stop at each bus stop along the way. The bus driver maneuvered the steel monster with skilled expertise, accelerating it briefly, but decelerating once again at the next stop ahead. At each stop, the voice over the speaker announced the street name, and occasionally some people got off and new people got on. But Tristan looked up from her book only once to look out the window to see where she was before skimming over her book again.

The boy pulled out his Almond Roca can, and placed his transfer inside, briefly glancing at his grandmother's braid, making the can clank loudly with the few coins remaining. Tristan did not look up. He recovered the can, placing it back inside his pouch, and pulled out the flyer once again to see where the lecture was being held. He had never been to the university before, but he was determined.

"Do you know where Adams Hall is?" he asked her timidly, apologizing for distracting her from her reading.

"Yeah, I had a philosophy class there last year," she said looking up at the flyer. "Dreams, huh? Looks interesting."

"I been having strange dreams lately. I thought I could ask this guy."

"Like what?" she asked, marking the book once again with a finger.

"Different ones actually," he said hesitating. "Mostly about my Grandma. She died last month."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Were you close to her?"

"Yeah," he said slowly. "She was all I had."

"What do you mean, 'all I had'? Where's your mom?"

"I don't know."

"Wait, I don't understand. Are you a runaway? Where are you staying?"

Getting scared, he mentioned, "I'm just staying with family."

"Oh," she said suspiciously, inspecting his clothes again, noticing his scruffy appearance. "And how old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"Okay." She looked ahead and become aware of their location. "We're almost there, see? University Avenue!" The boy looked outside and observed the many college-aged young adults scattered about either on foot, on bicycles, on mopeds, or parking cars along the highway. People continued to file on and off the bus at each stop. "It'll take us right up to the circle. I'll show you where to go from there."

When the bus made its final stop, it emptied completely and the boy simply followed the other people as the flow of exiting passengers spilled out onto the sidewalk. Sticking close to Tristan, he avoided getting stampeded over by the many students either leaving or approaching their various college classes located all over the campus grounds. Some people, apparently art students, had their arms overloaded with canvases, easels, and boxes, containing paints and brushes. Others carried their huge books on their backs

like wise tortoises looking for a shady spot to lay their eggs. The boy followed Tristan up the sidewalk to the stairway, which was lined by plumeria trees.

"Listen, I only have a few minutes before my class starts, and I'm headed in the opposite direction," she exclaimed carefully. "But if you turn right around the gray building, you'll find Adams Hall straight ahead."

"Thanks Tristan. I really appreciate everything." He turned to leave.

"Ikau, wait!" she hollered at him. He turned to her, and she handed him her bus pass. "You keep it."

"No that's okay," he exclaimed, refusing it.

"I would give you money but I don't have any cash on me at the moment. I usually buy lunch using my meal card. Don't worry about it, I can always get another bus pass."

The boy felt embarrassed. "You don't need to."

"How do you expect to get back home without any money?" she asked. "Your family could get worried if you don't show up."

"I can't," he said, resisting as much as possible.

"Just take it," she demanded, kissing him on the cheek. "It's only good for this month, but it's brand-new." She paused. "You know, Ikau, you really should be in school. A good mind shouldn't be wasted, and you seem pretty smart for fourteen." She ran up the path and waved. "Bye Ikau!"

Something tickled inside of him as he hurried off into the direction she had pointed out. Even though he didn't want to admit it, hearing someone call him by his name again felt really good.

Along the sidewalk he admired the flowering trees and the way the light filtered through the filigreed branches. The shadows formed lacework patterns across everything and everyone underneath. An impressive building on the right had large bold letters above the door that read Adams.

Students gathered around tables and benches and chatted impressively about people like Emanuel Kant and Karl Marx, and about such subjects like nineteenth-century history in Southeast Asia and African-American women's literature. The students seemed very mature to the boy, more refined than teenagers, as if they really wanted to be there to study and not just because attending school was the law. Several young students talked outside. One heavy-set girl, smoking a cigarette, argued on and on about the continued degradation and oppression of women under the paternalistic systems of governments around the world.

An older man with balding white hair nibbled on the earpiece of his reading glasses, squinted at the boy and nodded cordially. He nodded back and continued on his way feeling pleased -- not accepted exactly but certainly not an outcast. Behind them, an elevator was slowly filling up with a crowd of people. The boy approached timidly.

"Is there room for one more?"

"Come in!" said a red-haired guy wearing white-rimmed Ray-ban shades, holding the door for him. The boy squeezed in with the rest of the people.

"Floor?" asked a short, round Asian-looking woman with a mole above her lip.

"Three," he replied, noticing the button was already pressed.

"Oh, me too."

"Are you all going to the lecture?" asked a tanned surfer girl.

"The dream talk with the Indian medicine man," the short woman said with crisp enunciation. "Yes, I've read all of his books. He is absolutely brilliant. I can't wait to meet him."

"Yes," agreed the boy, his skin tingling and the hairs on the back of his neck standing up. The elevator hummed, vibrated softly, and bounced as it opened to the third floor. Everyone exited and the boy followed the crowd to the lecture hall.

Everyone filed in to the dimly lit rows of seats. Standing at the podium was a beautiful, dark-skinned, Indian-looking woman, swathed and wrapped in layers of brightly dyed silk, with a red dot in the middle of her forehead. She reminded him of some elegant Hindu goddess that had decided to step out of her heavenly abode to walk amongst mankind for a day.

Off to the side several other people were talking intently. One regal-looking Hawaiian woman, with tendrils of thick, streaming hair kept in place by a haku lei, was engaged in heavy conversation with an older American Indian man with a long braid down his back, and silver/turquoise jewelry on his neck, ears, hands, and fingers.

"If we could kindly take our seats," the Hindu goddess said in a strongly British sort of way, "the sooner we can begin, yes?"

The crowd settled down, briefly making acquaintance with their neighbors. The boy was pleasantly reminded of the ants touching antennae. More people crammed in and lined the walls. Another younger Hawaiian woman stood waiting to honor the speaker with a thick maile lei, entwined with ropes of little yellowish-green berries the boy recognized as mokihana. The delicate aromas were unmistakable and the crowd stirred in anticipation.

"Great thanks be to all of you for joining us today," the goddess said. "We have a wonderful guest joining us today, all the way from Zarahemla University. He is a leading authority on the phenomenon of dreams and their influences and inspiration on the arts and humanities. He is the Director of the Institute of Native American Studies, serves on the National Council of Native Indian Burial Sites, has been a Speaker and Resource Person for the United Nations Indigenous People's Council, and in addition to all of that, also serves the people in his own nation as a judge, cultural leader, and most important, a shaman and spiritual leader. Let us welcome, with great aloha, Dr. Daniel Owlfeathers."

The man stepped forward as the Hawaiian woman with the flaring hair performed a welcoming chant. The audience listened in reverent silence. But the boy was so pleased that he grinned. After the chant, the audience relaxed slightly only to be stunned again by the guest speaker's response: a forceful, gracious flow of words that sounded like a rushing tornado. It was in an exotic language the audience seemed to absorb as if understanding each word. A thrill fluttered through the boy's *piko* at experiencing such an intense moment of great *mana*. The younger Hawaiian girl stepped out to present the man with the lei. He kissed her, gave a short introduction, and plunged into his theme.

He first enchanted the audience with songs and poems in both English and his native tongue, which was sadly becoming extinct. The population of his nation had dwindled to a few hundred due to alcoholism and poor medical care, and the only remaining knowledgeable elders were quickly dying off. Over the years, growing up in a capitalistic society had put a lot of pressure on the younger generations, causing them to gradually forget their cultural identity. There were so many similarities between his people and the native Hawaiians.

He launched into a dissertation of the importance of dreams to human populations in various world cultures, but focused particularly on Middle Eastern/North African, Native American, and Oceanic peoples. He began with the Hebrew religion, citing examples from the Old Testament of Jacob and his son Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, and how his skill of interpreting dreams saved his life. He connected with examples found in the New Testament. Apparently another Joseph, this time the father of Jesus, was instructed in a dream to relocate his family to Egypt. By doing so, the baby Christ was saved from Herod's massacre of Hebrew boys.

Then he explored Native American traditions about dreams. He spoke briefly about dream catchers, and showed off some of his favorites. Then he concentrated on the "vision quest" traditions of the Great Lakes tribes of Native Americans. For example, young hunters of the Ojibwa Nation would participate in spiritual journeys where they would actively seek guidance through their visions. Through this type of "dream incubation", there would be great healing. The man cited a book called, "The Power of Myth," by Joseph Campbell, and mentioned that one of the problems why young men in urban areas struggled, was due to the lack of a specific ritual marking the transition from childhood to manhood, explaining why many often joined gangs, causing problems for the rest of society. The boy was reminded about the gang he had encountered earlier, but was also pleasantly reminded that he was definitely not like that.

After performing several of his shaman's chants, he invited the audience to share some of their personal dreams while he attempted to interpret them. The woman with the mole above her lip volunteered first. She had a dream about learning to ride a bicycle. Her father was supposed to be holding on, but he let go suddenly, causing her to fall and

badly scrape her face. The medicine man asked if her father had left her mother during her childhood. Tearfully, she admitted this was true. Dr. Owlfeathers comforted her and said that abandonment issues with her father affected her inner conscience. There was a lot of emotional blockage she needed to unravel in order for her to be able to open herself up to a man. But once she came to terms with those issues, she could easily find someone compatible and compassionate to share her life with. Many in the crowd wept in sympathy as the healer combed the audience for more dreamers seeking interpretations.

The boy wondered how people could just expose themselves and their problems without a care in the world for everyone to see. Unexpectedly, the shaman pointed to him with an authoritative gesture. "And how about you? Any dreams you'd like to share?"

"Oh... uh..." The boy glanced around wide-eyed at the staring onlookers. It was as if a huge spotlight had suddenly appeared from nowhere and shone down directly upon his head, like he was some freak sideshow attraction suddenly thrust into the main arena of a big top circus. Their inquisitive faces frightened him. The audience members stared closely and showed their true interest in what the boy had to say. He shook his head frantically as he tried to duck away from all the new attention.

"Don't you dream?" asked Dr. Owlfeathers soothingly.

"Uh... yeah," the boy muttered.

The man smiled knowingly. "You are definitely a dreamer. I can see it in your eyes." His voice soothed the boy and dispelled his fear. "We may have to talk more later, you think?"

The boy nodded clumsily and the guy from the elevator seized the opportunity to ask if it were true that flying dreams indicated sexual depravity. With a laugh Dr. Owlfeathers explained coolly that such dreams had many interpretations, and were quite common.

"One interesting tradition I discovered is that in the Hawaiian culture, flying dreams were actually believed to be the memories of the spirits of heavy sleepers as they left the body during the night. The great Hawaiian scholar, Mary Kawena Puku'i recorded many accounts of Hawaiian dream traditions. She taught that the soul wandered at night and that dreams were the memories of our astral journeys. I find it quite interesting." He turned to the woman who had welcomed him with the chant. "What do you say, Dr. Halekunihi?"

"You are correct." She smiled. "I had no idea you were an authority on Hawaiian culture as well."

"Oh, no. I was just reading *The Polynesian Family System in Ka'u* for background information and personal interest. Your Hawaiian culture is fascinating. There are many similarities to ours."

After what seemed to the boy like eternity compressed into an hour, the beautiful Hindu goddess stood up and announced, "We only have a few minutes remaining. Let us devote that time for questions from the audience before we end today, yes?"

Final comments from the audience consisted of praise in thanks to the healer for blessing everyone with his wisdom. After the applause, the boy slipped outside. To his delight, there was a table filled with refreshments. He helped himself to some fruit

punch, cookies, and a banana. Resisting the temptation to stuff his bag with more food, he dawdled about in hopes of speaking to the professor about his dreams.

When the medicine man approached the refreshments, the boy made his way over to him. "Hello," Dr. Owlfeathers said invitingly. "Did you enjoy my lecture?"

"Very much." The boy smiled with stiff politeness. "I just had a lot of questions to ask."

"Fire away." The man just smiled down at him kindly, but the boy's mind went blank. Because of all the weirdness that had been going on lately, he had a hard time focusing his thoughts and everything poured out of his mouth like a jumbled mess.

"Well the owl came, and I was flying again... and I was at my Grandma's house... and the dove exploded..."

"Exploded?" the man asked, his forehead furrowing.

"Yeah... no, wait! The star exploded and I saw a dove..."

"Okay, a dove is a good sign. It is a symbol of peace. But back up a bit. You said you saw an owl?"

"Yes, he showed me many things. That's when the star exploded! And I saw him, clear as day, as if he was still alive..."

"Alive? You mean the owl?" The man's eyes widened briefly, as he listened to the boy with intense interest.

"No, my friend Hawaiian. And my Grandma was walking around, and there was a book made of gold, and...oh, did I tell you I was flying? I love flying dreams, those are my favorite." The boy was so excited he didn't realize that he wasn't making any sense.

Then he remembered the woman's name and blurted it out. "Mariah Wong! My Grandma mentioned her name in my dream. I'm supposed to find Mariah Wong!"

"Your grandmother visits you in your dreams? Has she passed away?"

"Yes, she died. But I keep seeing her, and she keeps telling me to find Mariah Wong, but I don't know who she is. Is it for real? Am I crazy?"

The man simply smiled, laid a hand on the boy's head and asked, "Tell me, what is your name?"

The boy hesitated. "Ikauikalani," he said.

"Ee-cow-ee..." the man stammered.

"Kalani. Ikauikalani."

"Ah! Ikauikalani," the man repeated, his voice gliding over each syllable as if he were learning a new melody for the first time. "And the last name?"

"Kealahahele."

"Ikauikalani Kealahahele?" The boy nodded awkwardly, the man's hand still on his head, as the man began rambling quickly, his words pounding into the boy like a tsunami flooding his whole being.

"You're not crazy at all. God has a plan for each of us in this world, and you will do miraculous things with your life. You may sometimes feel like you're all alone, but there are many people looking out for you. Just remember to see the good in all things, and learn to trust and follow your inner voice. You'll soon come to understand that sometimes good can come out of bad things, which only serves to prove how strong we really are. Can you accept that?" The boy nodded again as best he could, and the man's hand slipped off. Dr. Owlfeathers smiled and turned to leave.

"But what about my dream? What about Mariah Wong?"

"What do you think it means?" he answered, emphasizing the word "you".

"I don't know."

The man thought hard for a moment. "I think," he said, "You should listen to your grandmother." And with that, he disappeared into a crowd of jabbering people who either wanted his advice or his autograph. Disappointed, the boy walked back to the refreshment table to refill his plastic cup with the red, watered-down juice.

The boy thought deeply about what just happened. What did the man mean? Why did he put his hand on my head and say those things? Why do I feel so funny? Something felt different to him, although he couldn't make out exactly what it was. The hairs on his arm were standing up, and there was a soft ringing in this ear as if he was struck by lightning. Suddenly everything around him was sharpened, as the quiet mumblings and murmurings of the audience turned into loud noises that invaded his mind. Feeling dizzy, he left the bustling crowd to take a seat on a bench nearby.

Just as he was finishing up the last of his juice, the man appeared once again, emerging from the crowd and handed him a small book. "I must leave now. I have another engagement to attend, but I want you to have this." It was the paperback book he had mentioned in his talk, entitled *The Polynesian Family System in Ka'u*.

"This book may be hard to read for you at the moment, but maybe one day it will come in handy when you are old enough to attend college. The author, Mrs. Puku'i, is quite knowledgeable. You could probably find some understanding to your dreams in this book. Take care, boy." They shook hands and the shaman left with the other professors.

The boy opened the front cover, and there was a single owl's feather; the same kind that the man had in his hair, and the same as the ones the boy had seen on the ground after his dream. Written on the title page was a short inscription. *"Flying dreams are my favorite too. Keep dreaming! Owlfeathers."* But what surprised him the most was the P.S. attached below. *"Wasn't that some dream last night? I'll come back to visit again soon. Go in peace, spirit brother."*

Chapter 10

Now the Healing Begins

The boy just sat there staring down at the book, reading the man's handwriting over and over again. He didn't really understand exactly what the man wrote. Was he the owl man from his dreams? The pueo was his grandmother's 'aumakua, but what did that have to do with an Indian medicine man? The boy thumbed through the pages, his seventh grade education no help in making any sense of what the book contained. Some of the words were in Hawaiian. And even the English words were too advanced for him to understand. But it was a gift, and he would certainly cherish it. Maybe one day I can be a professor like him, the boy thought. But that would mean I gotta go back to school. Never mind then!

By the time the boy decided to leave, most of the crowd had already dispersed, except for two old ladies with nets in their hair and the same print of aloha shirts. A man had pulled up and they were clearing the refreshment table. One of the ladies saw the boy and waved him over.

"Come, boy! You like cookies?" the woman spoke with strong, broken English. "How about fruits? You like apple? Pears?"

"Yeah, might as well take the whole bunch," the other woman said. "Going waste. Poho!" With enthusiasm, the boy stuffed his pouch with oatmeal, peanut butter, and chocolate chip cookies, some oranges, apples, and bananas.

"You like juice? Going dump," the man said as he loaded the empty trays onto his cart. The boy emptied his water bottle and filled it with the sweet, red liquid. The man nodded his head cordially, and the boy thanked them and left. He could not remember another day in his life where he received so many gifts from total strangers.

Taking the stairs, the boy reached ground level and noticed some birds picking around for anything remotely edible, so he broke off a piece of the oatmeal cookies and tossed it to them. Stabbing the crumbs with forceful jabs of their beaks, two of the birds had familiar, gnarled feet that resembled his beach-park buddies. It was too far for them to have flown, but the coincidence seemed too great. Is that really Pegleg and Two-toe? he asked himself. He tossed them the rest of the cookie and went on his way.

In a pleasant daze he wandered across campus, admiring the many sculptures on the grounds. Next, he entered the library and hopped onto an available computer terminal to cruise the Internet. After a few minutes of that, he visited the cafeteria next to the library and helped himself to some free packets of taco sauce, Italian salad dressing, mayonnaise, sugar, ketchup, and shoyu. He swiped some napkins, straws, chopsticks, and plastic utensils before getting shooed away by the pantry worker who came by to wipe the counters and restock the condiments. After much meandering throughout the

university, he returned to the same bus stop, and proudly flashed his new pass to the next bus heading back to his beach park.

Getting off at the shaded bus stop across from Ala Moana shopping mall, he noticed the crowd was avoiding sitting next to a large Hawaiian man sleeping on the bench. He was obviously homeless because there were several shopping bags with his things gathered nearby. Nobody dared to bother him. The passengers stood along the curb, ignoring the man and patiently waiting for their buses. The boy weaved his way through the crowd and walked back to the familiar surroundings of his park home.

Having spent most of the day at UH, he got back when things started cooling down, just as the sun was beginning to set. Afternoon joggers and after-school kids jammed the sidewalks. Several local families were barbecuing and picnicking under the trees. He saw the bird lady, and gave her some cookies to feed her flock. Over by the bridge the large fish swam in the ashtray-colored water. He crumbled the cookie and sprinkled the best into a frenzy of snapping mouths and bubbling water. Sprinkling the rest, he smiled as the fish enjoyed their feast.

Off in the distance he saw the same grizzled man from before digging in the garbage again. "Want some cookies?" he called out. The man continued to dig, ignoring him completely. The boy got closer. "Hello, you want some fruits?"

The boy knew that the old man didn't talk to anybody, but he still treated him with respect, fully expecting the man to respond at any time. As usual there was no reply. So he left one banana and three oatmeal cookies wrapped in the napkins on the bench nearby, knowing the man would probably pick them up later. He passed out cookies and

oranges to the old Hawaiian couple camped behind the bathrooms, and he gave more cookies to several more people, including the sleeping man under the tree.

Finally he settled down near the beach wall to watch the sunset. In the sky several packs of cloud animals stampeded by, so he barely noticed the wild-eyed Asian woman approach with her invisible friend. Apparently they were in the middle of a heated debate, because the woman was shouting angrily, her voice rising and falling like choppy waves. Every so often she would whisper, "Stop that shit, everybody's watching!" Then out of nowhere she would rant and rave, pointing her finger and shouting, "No! You're wrong. Shut up. I said, shut the hell up!"

The boy watched her with great compassion as she pulled on her hair and came even closer. The first time he saw her he was terrified. But after observing her these past few weeks, he had come to regard her as someone who would never willingly hurt anybody. Stopping in front of him, she turned for the first time and glared at him with her red eyes, as if trying to make out his shape through thick fog. Awkwardly he smiled and asked, "Are you hungry? I have some fruit."

The woman just stood there, burning him with her fiery glare.

"Banana?" he offered, holding it out to her. Gathering no response, he asked, "You rather have a cookie?"

She stared with her mouth slacking open and a thin string of drool dripping from one corner. The boy felt uncomfortable as the woman's eyes watered and she mumbled another curse to her invisible companion for being so bloody irritating.

"I got oatmeal and peanut butter," he said again. "I had chocolate chip but it's everybody's favorite." He held out the cookies as if trying to help a lost dog, eager to make friends but also wary of the possibility of getting his hand bitten off.

Again, she just stared. Oh, God, he prayed silently, what's wrong with her? How can I help?

He grabbed her hand and placed the cookies inside her curled fingers. "God bless you," he said, wishing with all his heart.

Without flinching, the woman looked down at the cookies in her hand and garbled two small words in a wobbly voice. "You... too."

Flabbergasted, the boy watched as she clumsily plopped herself down to take a seat beside him. Before this moment she had never spoken a single word to him directly, and barely even made eye contact with him. Not knowing what to do next, he asked, "Are you okay?"

Concentrating on her cookies, she frowned and dusted off several ants that only she was able to see. Not receiving an immediate answer, he resumed gazing at the sky when he heard her mutter, "Yeah, why?"

Still confused, the boy kept his head facing the ocean, but his eyes strained sideways to keep watch on her every movement. He wanted to be prepared to stand up and run if she tried to do anything weird. "Nothing. Just asking."

The woman dusted off more invisible ants, and her clumsy motions became less and less erratic. She finished off her cookies and looked out toward the ocean, watching the clouds change color under the sun's streaming rays. There was a noticeable change

washing over her, as her glassy eyes began to see, as if for the first time, the living world around her.

"Did you ever notice," the woman said in a timid, raspy voice without looking at him. "Each sunset has a different story to tell?"

"Yeah," the boy said, his face joining his eyes as he acknowledged her every word.

"Look there," the woman said, pointing at a drifting dog-shaped cloud. "Do you see it? It wants to go home."

"Yeah," the boy could only say, amazed that the woman could see the same image that he could. "You're right."

"Home," the woman said again, just discovering her voice again. She seemed to get swept away in some far-off happy dream of pancake breakfasts and sit-down family dinners. The boy noticed that her eyes teared as she recalled some long-lost memory that probably contained children's laughter and cat's fluff. Without warning, the woman jumped up. "What time is it?"

"I don't know, I don't have a watch."

"I don't know what's gotten into me. My kids... I forgot about my kids! My family must be worried..."

The boy was seriously getting scared. The same crazy woman he'd seen camped out at the park since the first day he had gotten there was now having a real conversation with him, and it was probably because of something he did to her without knowing. Was it something I said, or something I did? he thought. In a way, he was glad that she seemed better due to some unexplained miracle. But he would be just as happy if she had

reverted back to her old self, so that he would know for sure that he wasn't really losing his mind. "You have family?" he inquired.

"Yes. My son, Scott." She turned to him. "He's about your age." Her eyes were no longer empty, but neither completely comprehending. She still seemed a little foggy but was slowly finding her way back from the shadows. "I've seen you before. What's your name?"

"I'm Ikau. Ikauiikalani."

"Such a nice name. My name..." she said, forgetting herself as her eyes drifted out to sea again.

"Yes?"

"My name... it's been so long... so long ago... my name is Lynn, but my family calls me Peaches."

He didn't know what to say. "Nice to meet you... uh... Peaches."

The woman smiled when she heard the name. "So long ago."

"So where is he, your son Scott?"

"What time is it? I should get home. My family must be worried about me. You have a quarter?" She was like any other person now, no longer bound to her invisible prison.

"Actually, I don't."

"It's okay." She looked out at the sky again and pointed at the lost cumulus lamb, which was rejoining the rest of the flock of fleecy clouds. She touched him lightly on the shoulder, and crossed the street to use the payphone near the snack shop. Because the activity at the park was waning, he could hear her from where he was sitting. She was

crying ecstatically. Even the person on the receiver was excited to hear from her, because the boy could hear the woman's voice on the other end shouting for joy.

He stayed on the wall until there was no light-blue left in the sky, and the stars began peaking out at him one by one. After the day people had left, he descended to his usual sleeping spot under the bridge. He carefully untied the knot in his pouch, converting it back into a blanket, and prepared for bed. As he settled down he smiled to himself. It was just really strange for him to finally hear a voice talking back to the lady for once.

Chapter 11

The Secret Garden

I'm walking along the river, gathering everything Grandma asked for: ho'io fern shoots; sweet potato leaves; green papayas; ear-shaped pepeiao mushrooms; wild watercress, from the river; and kauna 'oa, and orange vine used to make a powerful poultice for healing open wounds. When I return home she's in her wheelchair waiting for me in the kitchen. Her amputation is fresh, probably a month. She takes my ingredients and cooks up the best chicken hekka in the world. She carefully applies the kauna 'oa to her right stump, then we settle down together with some hot mamake tea. "How come you never call Mariah Wong yet?" she demands. "I don't know who is that," I say. It's the truth. "Ikauikalani, listen to Grandma before it's too late. Find Mariah Wong."

It was that recurring dream again. The boy awoke, still confused about who this Mariah Wong was. His dreams of Grandma were so vivid that they seemed like reality while his real life was the nightmare. In desperation, he recalled happier days and

Grandma's cooking. Life on her Kahalu'u farm was so carefree: wild guavas and strawberry guavas were made into juice, jams and jellies; mangoes picked either green or ripe were eaten pickled or dried; and chicken and duck eggs were gathered daily, to be boiled or fried into omelets. There were also sweet mountain apples, juicy lychees bursting from their red, thorny, armored shells, and in late summer, creamy avocados, good with salt and pepper, or with sugar on bread.

All night he had tossed and turned, unable to sleep and waiting for the sunrise. When he had finally been able to doze off, the dream snuck its way into his thoughts. Everything happened both slowly and quickly, as things usually happened in the world of dreams, and what could have been mere minutes seemed an entire life span. The moment the sun began lightening the sky, the boy's eyes automatically fluttered open. Yawning deeply, he stretched in the cool morning air and seized the new day. A few oatmeal cookies were left in the bundle, an apple, and a couple of oranges... a substantial breakfast, even enough left over for lunch! He forgot what there was to be sad about, thanked God for his food, and munched on an apple.

As far as he could see, the sky remained cloudless down to the horizon. He sat on his bridge watching it in silence before heading makai to wash up. In the early morning hours, the beach park was still relatively bare except for the familiar squatters who peppered the park area. The old Hawaiian couple, camping behind the bathroom, was already awake and rolling up their sleeping bags. Manang Lina, the always-smiling, dark-skinned woman with the multi-colored plastic shopping bags, was already collecting aluminum cans from the garbage.

On the sand the Japanese man with the metal detector was again combing the sand for buried treasure with little results. He was wearing a dirty brown T-shirt, that probably should have been white, and an ugly yellow hat with funny flaps in the back that protected his neck from the sun. And near the shore the same wild-haired Polynesian woman, who usually pushed her kids around in a Foodland shopping cart, was washing her baby's okole in the shallow water. Life at the park was definitely in full swing.

The boy quickly dunked his body in the frigid ocean a good distance from the Polynesian lady to avoid swimming in okole water. He changed quickly in the restroom, hung his wet clothes on the tree to dry, and then lurked around the snack shop looking for coins. Sure enough he found a dime and two pennies, all with happy face stickers on one side. It was as if someone was leaving them there deliberately. I can't believe nobody wants to pick 'em up, he thought. Only pennies, but still money! Since he didn't need to buy food, he added the money to his can and brought out Hawaiian's journal in hopes of finding more words of inspiration.

He randomly opened the book somewhere in the middle and admired the scratchy, yet legible handwriting. There were stories about his youth. There were rough sketches of animals and landscape scenes. Several pages contained mere words that were probably just arbitrary thoughts caught on paper. Scrawled haphazardly in the top right corner of one of the pages, were three words separated by down-pointed arrows. He was kind of familiar with the first and last words, but was confused by the second. Whatever it meant it was obviously not good because it ended with disaster:

*DISORGANIZATION**DISHEVELMENT**DISASTER*

Sensing that this was probably some poetic, political message, he continued to read and felt more and more inspired. The whole book was a reflection of his inner thoughts. He was a man contemplating his place in the universe, trying to find understanding for the reasons why things were the way they were. Hawaiian recounted his time in prison and how he had often been harassed and beaten by both the guards and the other inmates. *Prison is dog-eat-dog. If I never change my ways I would be just like the other brothers who don't know better. Some end up repeating the crime for go back for a bed to sleep and 3 hot meals a day!*

One particular passage with four simple words raised the boy's spirits a little: DON'T TAKE IT PERSONAL. The writing, which was imperfect but introspective, spoke about the hardships of life and how the struggles were different for everyone. *Nobody promised life was perfect. If you think life not fair, you right. Nobody said was. But that no mean you get the right for take 'em out on somebody else!*

He stared at the words and his heart trembled. For too long he suppressed his true feelings about Grandma's death. As a child he was taught never to curse God. But with her gone, making him an orphan, then witnessing the murder of Hawaiian, the boy had seriously begun to doubt that God even existed. How could good people die as if their lives were meaningless? So what if food and money magically appeared, or some mentally sick woman spoke to him -- life is confusing. Yet words from the grave showed him how to begin to heal his broken spirit.

*Everybody get struggles in life. It's not for punish us but make us strong.
Whatever choices we make, get consequence. I had to go prison for learn that. If I can
save just one kid from making the same mistake, my life not wasted.*

The boy smiled inwardly and kept the advice close to his heart. The next time snotty people snubbed him, he'd just shrug it off as typical human nature. He would not take it personally.

So much reading had tired him and he stood up to stretch. Gathering his dried clothes, he thought about his Grandma's words from the previous night's dream. *Listen to Grandma before it's too late. Find Mariah Wong.* The name echoed in his head to the point that he couldn't resist heading for the payphones.

He grabbed the phone book, which was hanging underneath the phone attached to a metal wire, and turned to the W section. He was astounded to see six full pages of "Wongs". Which one can it be? he wondered. Don't want to call the "Wong" number. He chuckled at the stupid joke, but was disappointed to find no listing for Mariah Wong although there were a dozen M. Wongs. Tearing out the page he decided to try calling the next time he had enough money. Instinctively he swiped the coin return slot. Someone had forgotten the quarter. So with the dime he had found earlier, he decided to try one of the numbers. With two loud clinkety-clinks of the coins, he chose randomly from the page, dialed the number, and waited patiently for an answer on the opposite end.

"Hello?" growled an angry-sounding man.

The boy could only stutter a reply.

"Hello? Who this?"

"Um... Mariah Wong... I mean, is Mariah Wong there?"

"Who? Mariah? This is the Wong residence but no Mariah here. Eh, this not one crank call, hah?"

"Sorry, I think I called the wrong place."

"Damn kids, no more nothing better to do than play pranks on people!" The phone was slammed down.

What am I doing? the boy asked himself. I just wasted my money all because of a stupid dream. He hung up the phone and walked off to clear his head.

Following the joggers' path, he practiced nodding and smiling at the oncoming pedestrians. The majority nodded and smiled back. See, he thought, most people are good. Yeah, there are some bad apples like the gang members, but the majority of folks are basically kind and helpful. The boy shuddered at the thought of the murderous gang, which suddenly brought back powerful emotions of fear and sadness. Determined to purge such thoughts from his mind, he decided to use his bus pass and take a trip somewhere away from the park.

The boy went back to the covered bus stop where he'd gotten off the day before and saw the same Hawaiian man sleeping on the bench. Besides the two of them, there were no other people there and the man looked as if he hadn't moved an inch since the boy had seen him earlier. If it were not for the loud noise of the man's snoring, the boy would've thought that he was made of clay, like some statue of a reclining man.

The wind was breezy but the air stank and buzzed with flies. The boy saw a bunch of plastic bags alongside the bench that looked like they belonged to the man. A tattered sheet with lots of holes barely covered his midsection. But the boy immediately noticed where the smell and flies were coming from.

The skin on the man's bare feet was black and peeling away, exposing the tender, rotting flesh underneath. Greenish yellow puss oozed from between the bloody crevices of his crackled skin. Raisin-sized flies crawled around the dead meat, laying eggs and infesting it with rice-like maggots. The boy recognized gangrene and gasped with horror. Just like his Grandma, this man was probably a diabetic who did not take care of his health. Because he was homeless, he was not receiving the necessary medical treatment he needed. Remembering his Grandma's refusal to go to the doctor, the boy recalled the shock of her amputation. He knew that if the man didn't get help soon he would most likely get his legs cut off or even die.

Hearing the boy, the man awoke and glowered at him out of yellowed eyes.

"What?" he demanded with a loud fart.

"Nothing," he mumbled.

"So what," the man said and farted again. "What dah fahk you looking at?" The boy cowered, glancing at the man's feet. "Cannot let one guy sleep in peace?" He sat up, his dead feet swinging under him.

"I didn't mean to bother you, it's just that..."

"What?"

"Your feet. They're... I think you should see a doctor."

The man trembled and his yellow eyes watered. "Get... the... fahk... out. I said, **GET THE FAHK OUT!**"

The boy did not budge. "You need help or you might... you might..." He didn't want to use the 'd' word, but he was tired of watching people die.

The man grabbed a soda can and took aim. The boy leaped off the bench, retreating as the can bounced and clattered behind him.

He resolved to leave the man alone and walked along the highway to the next bus stop. Along the way he noticed some crumpled cigarette packs lying on the ground. He recalled that Hawaiian had collected the points to order catalog items. He picked up the different-colored "Marlboro" and "Camel" proof of purchase coupons and discarded the rest in a nearby trashcan. After awhile he instinctively started collecting whatever rubbish he saw. Next time, he decided, I'll bring my own garbage bag!

Rather than taking the bus he wandered into the city, picking up more rubbish along the way. The downtown Honolulu skyscrapers towered high above, and were slowly followed by smaller business buildings, then even lower apartments with only a few floors, and finally single-story houses. He found more cigarette packs strewn about and he carefully tore off the points without damaging them.

The old residential roads were narrow and had skimpy sidewalks, but the rows of houses were fenced and had fruit trees in the yards. His mouth watered as he passed homes with oranges, tangerines, and pomelos. Even the lemons and limes looked good. He figured the houses with rock gardens belonged to local Japanese families and the ones with squash, paria, eggplant, and marungay were probably Filipino.

Another house had a breadfruit tree and pua kenikeni bushes on the side, dripping with fragrance and yellow blossoms. Hawaiians, he thought, and wandered further until he noticed a small patch of fine, bright orangeish vine threaded through the soft green grass. *Kauna 'oa!*

The boy followed the vine and found more of the parasitic netting tangled throughout the bushes and trees like large orange spiderwebs. It was just what he needed to make a poultice for the diabetic man. From Grandma he knew that it usually took five days to heal such a severe case. Five was a powerful number in Hawaiian medicine. If the man was far-gone, the kauna'oa might at least provide him some relief.

Nearby a stream opened up into what looked like a miniature rainforest with large trees and open grassy areas perfect for picnicking. He found some healthy kauna'oa that seemed to call out to him. Breaking the strands with his fingers, careful not to catch too much debris, he coiled the mass into a large rope. Thinking he had more than enough for the old man, he put it in his quilt-bag and glanced around the little park.

The river had a small waterfall and filtered into several pools. He gasped at the sight of watercress growing profusely along the bank. Standing on a rock, he saw an old Filipino man fishing down on one end and a younger Japanese man throwing a Frisbee to his dog on the grass. The branches of strawberry-guava trees were weighted down with fruit. He picked several, checked them for worms, and savored the slightly sour/ slightly sweet juicy pulp. Popping another and another into his mouth, being careful not to chew down on the seeds, he enjoyed the unexpected snack.

He gathered a bundle and then noticed something orange underneath a bush that caught his eye. He recognized the familiar minty-green frilled leaves and small, yellow, star-shaped flowers: cherry tomatoes! He picked one the size of a large marble, tossed it into his mouth and felt it burst as his teeth sunk into the outer skin. The taste made him giggle with excitement. He picked a whole bunch, thinking of the salad dressing packets he'd swiped from the cafeteria. Emptying the Almond Roca can into his pouch, he rinsed

it out in the river, filled it with watercress and tomatoes, then saw the greatest treasure of all: mangoes.

It can't be mango season yet, he deduced. Too early! Healthy clusters of green fruit were starting to turn reddish-orange. Probably still hard, he decided, perfect with salt and pepper. He loved Grandma's green mangoes pickled or with shoyu. To his amazement, the fruit he picked was almost ripe. Still crispy, it was sweeter in the soft parts. He savored its richness and the cherished childhood memories that the familiar taste brought back to him. He stuffed his overflowing bag with fruits for later.

With his hunger temporarily satisfied, he went for a walk through the Hawaiian Botanical Garden. He strolled down the winding pathway, gazing at plants and trees that were endemic plants. Next to each plant was a green sign with names such as "Koa-uka", "Wiliwili", "Dwarf Naupaka", and "Ilima Kolo". Many of the plants were relatives of the Mallow family, consisting of many different varieties of hibiscus-looking plants. Some were white and large and some were yellow and small. Ever since his Grandma taught him *la'au lapa'au*, or the science of medicinal herbs, botany had always interested him. Whenever he was asked in school about what he'd like to do in college, he often replied that he would love to be a botanist. Life science was always his favorite subject and he was good on his Grandma's farm. He had a natural green thumb. Everything he planted always grew and his Grandma's animals received tender loving care. He knew that he'd be returning to spend many more hours at this garden to learn more about the plants unique to his island home.

Crossing the bridge, he approached an open lawn, which was shaded by huge monkey pod trees that were probably over a hundred years old. The boy sat down cross-

legged in the soft grass to rest for a moment before beginning his long return trip home. The moist air was thick and seemed to cling to everything. The looming trees formed a massive dome, which brightly echoed the happy sounds of the numerous birds chatting with one another, the barking dog chasing after his master, and the gushing water that was overflowing due to a heavy *mauka* rain shower from the previous night. The boy gazed upward and daydreamed that he was in some Gothic cathedral in medieval France, with multicolored stained glass mosaics of exploding blossoms casting kaleidoscope reflections everywhere the sun light shone. He once saw a picture of one in an art book, and envisioned that was probably what God's palace might look like. He wondered what it would be like if he found himself perched at the great footstool of the sacred throne of God and began composing a prayer of what to say should he ever be sitting face-to-face with Him.

He leaned back and closed his eyes, picturing a beam of light streaming down from the center of the dome, penetrating his entire being. Through spirit eyes, the boy envisioned a pillar of light streaming down, beckoning him to enter. Before long the light surrounded him and the greenery of the trees dissolved into milky whiteness.

"Ikau. Ikauikalani," the familiar voice sang. "You must not stay, you have to go." But I don't want to, I yell in protest. I'm tired. "You must carry on, Hawaiian!" The voice was now deeper, but also familiar. This is my dream, I tell them, I don't want it to end. "No, you must wake up," another unknown voice sounds, smooth as chocolate. "There is still time. Go!" And like the rush of flapping wings, I blinked awake.

After what couldn't have been more than a nanosecond, he came to, feeling greatly confused. The light of the day had mysteriously slipped away and the park people

had long departed. His surroundings swirled and undulated around him and he swooned in the temporary turbulence. What happened? he wondered. I gotta get back to the park.

The boy retraced his footsteps back through the city lights, hearing the cars roaring by to his side. He reluctantly breathed in the exhaust and made his way to the same bus stop where the sleeping diabetic was laying. No one was around so the boy worked quickly, being careful not to wake the man.

He plucked out the rubbish from the orange vine, then softened the medicine between his fingers with some salt from the packets he had from the college cafeteria. He gently placed the poultice on the decaying feet, one of the black toes falling off. Gritting his teeth, he stifled a gasp as he tried to tie the orange-yellow mash on with a stray plastic shopping bag. The man remained motionless and the boy walked back to his bridge mumbling a simple prayer.

Off in the yellowing sunset, the boy's eyes scanned for an answer. He recalled that he had not heard any loud snoring coming from the man's still body. Out at sea a dark lizard cloud swam low to the horizon. A westerly wind detached its head from the body, which began to dissipate. Fearing the worst, the boy clutched his fist and wished for the sign to change for the better. From nowhere another breeze severed the animal's tail, allowing the body to reattach itself to the head. The lizard went on in peace.

Knowing exactly what to do, he went to the nearest payphone, and dialed 911. "Send an ambulance to the shaded bus stop across from Ala Moana," he said. "There's a man dying."

Home is right up the road

Days went by and the boy heard nothing of the old diabetic. In a strange way he knew he was okay, but also that if no one had cared enough to call for help the man would probably have died.

In the park the same joggers jogged, more tourists toured, local families still picnicked and the number of squatters increased. One mainland haole man from cold Seattle, Washington confided that in the middle of January he was given a free one-way trip to Honolulu, to rid his city's streets of more dying homeless. Because the climate was harsher there, street vermin were often sent to warmer locations where they were out of sight and could fare better. Unbelievable! the boy thought. People were thrown out like last night's trash for someone else to pick up.

His dove friends Pegleg and Two-Toe always hovered nearby, scratching for handouts. He would feed them his leftover scraps, which was a small sacrifice for him, but so highly prized by his winged companions. He would take a bite from the cookie, crumble a piece between his fingers, and sprinkle it as if salting the earth. Although he would have preferred to eat the entire cookie, the crumbs only made up less than 1/8 of it, and he enjoyed sharing the blessings. Not only was his stomach full, but so was his spirit.

The food he had gathered lasted for days. The first night he returned from the secret garden, he ate the watercress and cherry tomato salad with a packet of Creamy Italian dressing. For breakfast he had some juicy guavas with shoyu, and strawberry *waiawi* with Tabasco sauce and black pepper. He rationed his cookies and ate up the

mangoes as they ripened faster than he could eat them. It was after the last mango was eaten, that he ventured up the road again to do some more shopping at the garden.

Seeing so much rubbish left about depressed him. So close to the trash can, and people were too lazy to throw it inside. But he was amazed at how many smokers threw the packs away without keeping the points. Maybe the foreign tourists bought the stuff and threw it away without thinking. Suddenly remembering the doves, he chuckled at the analogy of the birds scavenging for food and his scavenging for cigarette points, free McDonald's food, fruits from the garden, and so forth. In many ways, he was just like a bird, pecking around for scraps and preparing for the day he would fly away. There were hidden treasures found in excess waste. By now he had probably collected enough points to maybe order a thermos or a baseball cap.

Pulling out one of the empty garbage bags he picked up from the restroom days earlier, he collected soda and water bottles, aluminum cans, and cigarette packs. The boy noticed that even the junk food companies offered free prizes for accumulated points printed on the wrappers. All of the empty potato chip bags, chocolate candy wrappers and plastic soda bottles were no longer rubbish, but cash merchandise. Making this scavenger hunt his new hobby, he kept the rubbish rubbish in the bag tied to his left belt loop, and the treasure rubbish in the bag tied on his right.

He already knew what he would do with his cache. The cans, he would give to Manang Lina. Probably only add her a few cents more than her usual. To cash in the Pepsi, Doritos, and M&M points, he would log on to the website at the University library computer. The only thing now was finding an address to ship the items. He decided not to worry about that for the moment, and he lost himself again in the cleanup.

The boy found stuff strewn about the street that was tossed out of speeding car windows and lazy hands: plastic bento boxes, with nothing inside but used wooden chopsticks and lip-smearred napkins; clear glass wine bottles labeled "Strawberry Field's" and "Apple Orchard's", probably left behind by the winos; green and brown beer bottles; and smashed white and brown cigarette butts by the millions.

Passing cars honked their horns at him. At first, the boy thought they were harassing him but people hollered, "Right on, brah!" and "Good job!" He grinned and continued on.

Nearing the residential areas, he waved to several people working busily in their gardens. Most were gray-haired. One Japanese man asked if he was doing time for mandatory community service. He said he was just bored and wanted to do something to beautify the neighborhood. "Such a good boy," said the blue-haired Japanese woman. "Thanks," called a sweaty man, mowing his lawn.

One particular house was attractive to him. It was guarded by a beautiful stone wall covered with sprays of white Stephanotis blossoms. Fruit trees seemed to groan under the weight of overripe oranges and jabong, many starting to rot on the branches. More fallen fruits were fermenting under the unraked leaves below. The house looked neglected.

"Hello there!" A tiny voice tinkled softly from the front porch. "Are you lost?" The boy squinted, not realizing that he was staring at a person hidden behind pots and pots of overgrown orchids.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "I didn't see you there. I don't mean to bother you..."

"Oh no, dear, you are not bothering me at all. I just wondered if you need some help. I've never seen you around here. Do you live nearby?" A frail Chinese woman struggled to pull herself up from her chair and leaned on a walker.

"Yes, I stay not far from here," laughed the boy, not exactly line.

"You look exhausted, would you like something to drink? Have some lemonade, dear. But you have to come help yourself, my leg, kind of *lolo*, you know? Ever since my stroke last year, I can't do much for myself. Just open the gate and sit down with me. I was just waiting for someone."

Also eager for company, the boy timidly joined her. A pitcher of ice-cold lemonade and glasses were on a tray at a nearby coffee table. "Thank you very much," he said after taking a long drink.

"You're welcome, dear. You're also very polite. I can tell you were raised properly. You must have a good mother to have such a well-mannered son."

Awkwardly he replied, "Yes, I suppose she is."

"My name is Gladys Lu. What is yours?"

He hesitated then said, "Ikau. It's short for Ikauikalani."

"My, that's a pretty name. Do you know what it means?"

Embarrassed, he admitted, "No, I don't."

"Ikau-I-Ikau ka Lenny," the woman stuttered. He started feeling ashamed, but the woman smiled pleasantly. "Please forgive me. I was born in Hawaii, but I still have a hard time with Hawaiian names."

"It's okay," he said. "Ikau is fine."

"Your name must have a beautiful meaning, Ikau."

"Yes," he said. Changing the subject he asked, "Who are you waiting for?"

"A friend usually comes to help clean my yard. I haven't been able to do it since I was released from the hospital."

"Well, if you like, I could get things started, and leave when your friend arrives."

"No, you don't have to, my friend is a little late but very dependable. Sit down for a while and relax."

"I really don't mind," the boy assured her. "You have any tools? A rake?"

"Yes, around the corner." She gestured, murmuring to herself, "Such a good boy..."

He put aside his bag and started raking under the lychee tree. Overgrown weeds tangled the long, unkempt grass.

"Some of that fruit's still good," Mrs. Lu called from the porch. "Here, use these." She waved some plastic shopping bags at him. "But even the old fruit, don't throw it away. I usually put 'em in a jar with plenty of rock salt. Or I make dried lemon peel. I'll show you later."

An hour passed and there was still no sign of the yard man. After another hour of trimming and raking, the boy had picked up all the fruit from the ground and given it to Mrs. Lu for final sorting. He took breaks and after an entire afternoon of hard work that reminded him of working on Grandma's farm, the yard was greatly improved.

He got ready to leave. "Well, I'm sorry your friend never showed up," said the boy, wiping up his sweaty, dirty face.

"Yes, he's never done this before," Mrs. Lu whispered sadly.

"Maybe he'll still come." The boy fiddled around in his bag, trying to arrange the contents, and pulled out Hawaiian's journal.

She gasped. "Where did you get that book?"

"All Hawaiian man gave it to me."

"Why do you have his book? What happened to him?" Her hand started to tremble.

Softly the boy answered, "He died a few days ago. A gang of punks beat him up at the park."

The silence that followed was the saddest he'd ever heard. Mrs. Lu stared off toward the mountain as if honoring a dear friend. After awhile she said, "That's who was supposed to come clean my yard. You sure you saw him die?"

"They hurt him bad. He wasn't moving when the ambulance took him away. I haven't seen him since."

Smiling slightly, she chuckled. "I thought I heard his voice call out to me when you arrived at the gate. I think you were sent for a reason."

Suddenly remembering a previous journal entry, he asked, "Did he call you, 'Gladness'?"

Amazed, she clapped, "Yes! How did you know?"

The boy smiled and simply replied, "He told me. If you like, I can help you with your yard from now on."

"Of course, that would be nice." She accepted graciously. "Then I can have some company. I get rather lonesome at times. Anyway," she added, wiping her eyes, "please

take this fruit with you. The Hawaiian man usually took it to the park for the homeless. I want you to share with your neighbors."

"Thanks," said the boy, wide-eyed.

"Oh my, I almost forgot. There's some mail for him. Go in and take those two packages on the dining table. Since you inherited his book, you might as well take those also."

The boy retrieved the packages, sat on the top step, and unwrapped two boxes: the first contained a Camel's T-shirt, a beach towel, and some lighters; the second held a black Marlboro cooler bag, and a bright-red, solar-powered AM/FM radio/handheld flashlight. He could not believe his eyes.

"He would use my address to order from the cigarette catalogs. If you like, just order whatever you want. I'll hold them for you next time you come."

"Cool," the boy mumbled softly, leafing through the latest catalogs, eyeing the newest items and mentally calculating up the points. "This is so awesome. Thanks, Gladness!"

"Wait! I usually paid him for yardwork. It's not much." She handed him a crumpled 10-dollar bill, and a few ones, the most money he could recall having for himself. "I'm glad you came by today," she mentioned.

"You know," he said, "this is the first place that felt like home to me."

"Come back anytime!"

He waved goodbye. Even Christmas was never this good.

Chasing a Dream

The days following his visit to Gladys Lu's house were sheer bliss. The boy felt like a king with all the riches of the world. Not only did he have more money than he knew what to do with, but also the radio/flashlight, more clothes to wash, and almost more food than he could carry. In several shopping bags were papayas, starfruit, mountain apples, Hawaiian oranges, juicy tangerines, sour lemons, mouth-sized kumquats and head-sized yellow jabong. The lychees and mangos would be ready in a few weeks. Although he gave much away, it lasted him for days. Everybody remarked about the juiciness of the fruit, and he made a family out of the many friendless people living in the park.

Eloise, the wild-haired shopping cart lady who wouldn't stop talking once you got her started, loved the tangerines; Manang Lina enjoyed popping whole kumquats into her mouth, skin and all; and Mr. Lam, the elderly Chinese man who did *Dai Chi* on the sand every morning, was thankful for the jabong. Even the silent grizzled man who dug in the garbage can warmed up with a glance now and then. Rather than just leaving the fruit on a nearby bench, the boy handed it to him and got an acknowledging nod.

The dreams of his grandmother continued. Each time she asked if he had found Mariah Wong yet. And each time he told her "No," she cried and told him to hurry. The strangest thing about the dreams was in each of them his grandmother seemed to be getting progressively worse. He understood that time was running out. Whenever he found happy-faced coins on the ground, which mysteriously became more and more plentiful, he called more numbers off the list. Where are all these places? he wondered,

wishing he could decipher each prefix. 949, 235, 671, 676, 677, 689, 685, I know 235 is Kane'ohe... 842,582.

But no matter how many numbers he called, they were leading him nowhere, with no Mariah Wong. His stomach twisted as he worried about what to do next. Maybe she lived with relatives, or under an unlisted number. There was little hope of contact.

When the fruit finally ran out, the boy went to McDonald's, went right up to the same Filipino cashier who had snubbed him earlier, ordered a supersized Big Mac value meal, and proudly handed his \$10 bill. He didn't care if he was splurging. The look on the woman's face, as she inspected the validity of the money, was worth it. He deposited the change into his pink can, ate lavishly, and rubbed off the game pieces, ecstatic that he scored a free fish sandwich. That he would save for later.

There was still no sign of the friendly manager, and the boy worried that she could have lost her job. But just as he was leaving, he noticed the Polynesian woman rush in with a regular worker's uniform. "I thought you lost your job!" the boy remarked.

"Almos tid, tey give me won more chance!" The boy apologized and she went behind the counter, taking orders from the same Filipino woman.

Feeling content, the boy decided to go back to visit Gladness and see how she was doing, taking fresh watercress from the river on his way. Also he decided to pick up rubbish again, which was more and more fun with all the cigarette packs and recyclable garbage. Besides, it was nice to see a friendly face and hear his name again.

This time Gladys Lu was perched in front of the TV, watching soap operas. From outside the boy could hear her screaming at the screen, like scolding actual people who were refusing to listen to her. "Bo, you idiot, can't you see Billy is lying? No Marlana,

it's all Stefano's fault!" When he rapped on her screen door, he apologized for interrupting her, but she thanked him for rescuing her from watching the trash, as she happily shut off the tube to visit with him. "Soap operas pass the time, but company is much better!"

Gladness hobbled over to her sink with her walker to wash the watercress. She would add it to her corned beef sandwiches with cream cheese. They chatted as she prepared the food, and the boy told her how many of his friends at the park enjoyed her fruit. She was glad that he then shared with people who were less fortunate, and he told her more about them, since he was becoming attached to them.

Although one of her hands lost some movement, she was still able to put together a decent meal. On toasted whole-wheat bread, Gladness served the corned beef/cream cheese spread, with fresh, crispy watercress. To drink they had cold lemonade-ginger iced tea, a family Chinese recipe, good for sore throat. And for dessert they had candied coconut, pickled mango, and banana bread with butter. "I love to cook," she told him. "Since Mr. Lu died, I just never had any reason to cook. I usually eat boiled egg sandwich. But if you promise to visit more often, I'll bake us a turkey. I know the secret. Always come out tender!" In so many ways she reminded him of Grandma!

Gladness attempted to carry the dishes to the sink, but the boy intercepted. "Thank you, Ikau. Such a good boy!" He didn't mind cleaning up her kitchen. He secretly enjoyed hearing his name again. They settled back down on her porch after the last dish was put away, picked their teeth, and burped themselves. Realizing that he could save money at the payphones by using Gladness' phone, he asked permission to knock off more numbers on his list, to find the elusive Mariah Wong.

"Can I make a quick call?" he asked. "I promise, it's not long distance."

"Must be important. Go ahead, dear, it's in the kitchen."

He entered through the screen door and noticed rows of jars along the windowsill with either fruit packed in rock salt, or dried, or pickled. On a high shelf were jars of guava jelly, guava jam, pineapple-papaya marmalade, and mango chutney. Plastic boxes held crispy-fried banana chips and dried papaya slices dusted with leading powder. He stared, momentarily distracted, and found the phone and called the remaining numbers.

"No Mariah here!" spat out one impatient man.

"Didn't you call here yesterday?" scolded another lady.

At the last number on his list, someone answered only to slam the phone down. Frustrated, he did something he hadn't done in a longtime. Without thinking, he impulsively punched in his old phone number. Of course his grandmother had died and he no longer lived there, but he was amazed to hear it ring. Rather than hanging up immediately, he stayed on the line out of curiosity. Something deep inside him was hoping that his grandmother would answer and tell him to get home.

"Hello?" asked the woman with a kind voice that had an unusual twang.

"Uh, yeah, is this the Kealahale residence?"

"No, this is not," she drawled.

"Oh, I was looking for... uh..."

"Yes?"

He froze and blurted, "I'm trying to get a hold of Mariah Wong."

"I'm sorry, sweetie," she replied sympathetically. "Can't help you there."

"I know. This used to be my old number. I don't know what got into me."

"You know, we've been getting calls from people asking for a Leilani. Would that be y'all?"

"Yes! Leilani is my Grandma, but she died."

"Oh, sweetie, sorry to hear that. Anyway, it sounded urgent."

"Did they leave any messages?"

"No, they didn't, hon. But if they call again, maybe I could give them a number to get back to you."

He hesitated, wondering if he should give Gladness' home number to a total stranger, then read off the worn numbers on the bright-green telephone and said his name was Ikau.

"Sure thing, Carl," the woman assured him. "Let y'all know when I hear something."

"I was curious," the boy blurted out before the woman could hang up the phone.

"Yes?"

"How long have you had this number?"

"Only a few weeks. We're from Georgia, but my husband's in the military. Why?"

The boy smiled. "It's just that I was taught to live the Aloha spirit, and you were the only nice person that I've talked to today, who didn't slam the phone on me!"

There was a pause, and he sensed a smile on the other end of the phone. "That was the nicest thing anyone has told me. My parents also raised me to be respectful of others, and that's how I raise my kids."

"Okay, thanks again."

"Sure thing, Carl!" They hung up and he went back to join Gladness once again on her porch.

"So did you get your business done?" she asked. "That must have been some important phone call!"

"Well, kind of."

"I'm glad. Whenever you need, just use my phone."

He remembered that he gave her number out, so he mentioned it to her. "I hope it doesn't bother you, but someone might call here to leave me a message."

"That's all right, dear, it must be very important."

He looked down at his feet and asked, "Gladness, do you believe that dreams have meanings?"

She looked a bit surprised. "Sometimes, I guess. If the dream is strong, something inside of you might be trying to tell you something important. Why do you ask?"

Everything spilled out of him as if the torrents of his life had been unleashed for the first time. He told her about Mariah Wong and how he didn't recognize her name, and how his grandmother kept getting worse and worse in each dream, and how he missed her so much and wished she was still alive, and he wanted to please her by finding this woman Mariah Wong but was so frustrated from calling and calling all these different numbers and getting the phone slammed down on him, or wasting thirty-five cents each time, not knowing who to call or what to do and was getting more scared and worried he was going crazy, and had nowhere to go and no family and was sick to death of living at the park, of living at all, for that matter.

Gladness frowned. "I didn't know."

The boy continued, heaving in dry sobs. After catching a breath he apologized for giving out her telephone number to a total stranger, but didn't know what came over him or what made him call his old home, but he hoped somehow that miraculously his grandmother would pick up the phone and tell him to stop fooling around and get home already, but some nice lady from Georgia answered and said to leave a number just in case some distant relative left a message for him, so if anybody called for Carl, that's him and, again, he was so sorry for causing any trouble for her.

"No, dear, it's no trouble really."

And then he told her about the old diabetic man dying at the bus stop, and how much it reminded him of his Grandma dying in the hospital, and how tired he was of seeing good people suffering through life, and how unfair life seemed but he just didn't know what else to do, and he was afraid of what might happen to him if he told anyone about what he had witnessed in the park concerning Hawaiian's murder.

"I see," she said with an understanding nod.

But if he didn't solve the mystery of the woman, and figure out where to find her, his grandmother would never rest in peace and he wouldn't be able to live with himself, haunted forever in his dreams by his grandmother's ghost.

"Of course, dear." She blinked down at her walker, ran her knobbed fingers along the handlebar, and said, "Did you say this woman's name was Wong?"

"Yeah, Mariah Wong."

"You know," she started. "A few weeks after my stroke, I was sent to REHAB hospital for physical therapy, where I learned to walk and talk again."

"Yeah?"

"And if I'm not mistaken... there was a Hawaiian lady there who had no family. I remember her name was Mrs. Wong."

"Really?" He didn't think she was serious. "Was her first name Mariah?"

Squinting her eyes, she concentrated intensely, straining to recall. "You know, I believe her name was something like Malia or Maria. I think it could have been Mariah."

He couldn't believe the coincidence. "Why was she there?"

"She had a stroke around the same time I did. I recovered, but poor Mrs. Wong wasn't so lucky."

"You mean she died?" Gladness shook her head vigorously. "Is she still at REHAB?"

"Last I heard, they put her in a nursing home. Let me see if I remember the name... I almost went there, I might have to sooner or later... oh yes, ALOHA KUPUNA nursing home. Should we call?"

The boy shrugged and helped her up into the kitchen. "It's free isn't it?"

Chapter 14

The Gift of a Name

With hardly any fuss, Gladness had found the number of ALOHA KUPUNA and inquired if there was a Mariah Wong living there. Within moments the boy was stepping off the #13 Liliha bus several blocks away from the nursing home. Following the directions given to him, he soon found himself standing in the lobby, asking the front-desk lady where to find his long-lost relative.

The old woman sat in silence in her manual wheelchair under the shade of the kukui tree. Her wispy hair resembled fine spider's silk that was spun into a neat bun in the back of her head. Her withered fingers were clenched in uncontrollable fists and tipped with yellowing nails that needed clipping badly. Her hollow eyes flew across the sky, reading the clouds like blind fingers on Braille, searching for an answer to her constant stream of internal prayers. Why am I still here? She seemed to ask God. A single tear escaped and rolled down her stony, motionless cheek as she silently begged for mercy.

"Mrs. Wong," the Filipino nurse said gently, kneeling down next to the old woman and wiping her cheek with a tissue. "You have a visitor. Mrs. Wong, this is... I'm sorry my dear, what was your name?"

"Ikau. It's Ikauikalani."

The pretty nurse spoke close to the woman's ear saying, "Ikau. He says you know his grandmother Leilani. Mrs. Wong?" The woman just stared ahead with a blank. Memories flashed in the boy's mind and he was swept to another familiar time and place not too far away from the present.

"Ikau... Ikauikalani, come closer."

"Grandma?" Her skin was pale with dark purple and black patches covering large areas of her bruised skin. Her frail body looked more like a loose bag of bones and bloodied puss and she breathed in stacatto weezes. No longer the once virile, wave-surfing, mountain-hiking, tree-climbing, Hawaiian medicine healer respected by so many. All that was left was a decaying shell of the woman he knew. "Are you in pain? "

"Ikau, I'm so sorry," she whispered.

"For what? It's not your fault you have diabetes and cancer."

"I know. I'm sorry I'm hardhead." She tried her best to convince him that she was okay, but he knew her too well.

"No, Grandma, don't speak. You'll be fine. Everything's going to be okay."

"Hold me, Ikaui." For the first time in her life, fear flooded the woman's eyes as the realization of her impending departure became more imminent. As if clinging to a life raft in a tossing sea, the two held tightly, resisting the downward drag of the pull of death.

"Everything will be like it's supposed to be, Grandma, you'll see."

"I should have gone doctor sooner. I'm so sorry." She began to wail, "I'm so sorry..."

"Grandma," the nurse sang softly, patting the shriveled woman's atrophied hand. "Sometimes I call her Grandma," she addressed the boy without looking at him. She wiped the woman's face as if polishing a precious porcelain doll. "Mrs. Wong?"

The old woman's watery eyes tore away from the cloud pictures and gazed at the boy without recognition. "Hah?" she said. Only one squinted eye inspected him, and spoke from the corner of her lip.

"Mrs. Wong, this is I-cow... Eye-cow-..."

"Ikaui Kalani," the boy called out from a distance.

"Hee-cow-E.-Kalani," she copied in her foreign intonation. "That's a pretty name."

The old woman's eyes widened in disbelief. "I... know... that... name," the woman articulated clumsily in the way her speech therapist had taught her. "I... know..."

"Ikauikalani?"

"Yes, Grandma?"

"I want you to listen carefully. When I die..."

"Don't talk like that!"

"Ikau, I don't have much longer. When I die... oh, God please help us, I don't know what to do... I have family on Kaua'i, the Kealohas. Maybe you could stay with them... or else, there is my aunt, Auntie Mariah... but we haven't talked in years..."

"Grandma, I don't understand what you're saying."

"Grandma?" the nurse said. "I don't understand. What do you say?"

The withered woman looked the boy up and down and spoke with slurred speech.

"Ikau... was... my father's... name. Who are... you, boy?"

"My Grandma named me Ikauikalani. She said it was a family name."

The woman craned her ear, and the nurse called the boy to come closer. "Come son, she will not bite you. I have other patients, but you can keep her company. Besides, she's lonely. I'll let you talk story." The nurse left and the boy kneeled beside the woman, held her gnarled hand, and spoke into her ear.

"My Grandma Leilani named me after a family member."

"Leilani? I... have... a... niece, Leilani."

"Kealahahele? Leilani Kealahahele is my Grandma. You know her?"

"Leilani. She... don't... visit me. We... don't... talk anymore. Where she?"

The boy looked into her eyes and told her slowly, "She died. Grandma 's gone."

Mariah Wong bowed to her head and began to cry. The boy stood back and let her have a moment of silent reflection. After sometime he offered her a napkin from his

bundle and softly sopped up the tears from her paralyzed eye, which was unable to blink properly. She gripped his hand with her good hand and he wiped the mucous dripping down her nose. She spoke again, somewhat clearer this time.

"We had a... fight... years ago, and we... never... spoke since. I ... should not have... said those words... and now... too late."

"She wanted to see you," he said. "She wanted me to find you."

"We were... like sisters. My sister... had her so young... my father... adopted her. She was... his favorite. But she was... my baby doll, Leilani." She spoke slowly, but her speech seemed to improve the longer he stayed at her side.

"I can't picture her as a baby," he laughed.

"Baby... yes," she said, blinking her good eye at him, recognizing the boy from a time not too distant in her clouded memories. "She brought a baby... to my house... at Nu'uanu once. I think... that was you! She named... her grandson... after my father, Ikau... I... k-kalani."

"Sorry, I don't remember." He wanted to, but there was no memory of Mariah Wong.

"Yes, you were... just a baby. You were named after your... great-grand... no, great-great-grandfather. He was... one of the last... of the true k-ka... huna."

"Kahuna?"

"Yes, he was a... des-s-cendant of priests... who used la'au lapa'au... to heal people."

"Really? My Grandma could heal people, and sometimes I think, I mean, I sometimes believe that I can heal people too."

"Yes, you have a powerful name. You know... what it means, yes?"

"No," he said eagerly. "Can you tell me?"

"She never told you?" Her speech was gradually getting clearer with each word and there was a noticeable change in her facial appearance. She slowly sat up in her chair as a soft white light grew around them. The rest of the world seemed to become frozen in time: not one leaf shook on the trees, not a car drove by honking, and not one person moved or spoke around them. Without distractions the woman's spirit spoke directly to deepest part of his soul with eloquence and purity.

"My father 'Ikauikalani was named after his grandfather Lono-'I-kau-i-kalewalani, a descendant of the 'I family of chiefs from Hilo. His ancestors were *mo'ō Lono* who were priests dedicated to the god Lono. One of his *kinolau*, or alternate forms, was Lono-'opua-kau, a god who spoke daily to his priests by placing omens in the clouds."

"You mean these priests would see pictures in the clouds?"

"More than pictures, they saw predictions. They were some of the most impressive men. They commanded great presence in ancient Hawaiian society."

As she spoke the boy envisioned a time and place far different from the world of the present day. Isolated from the advances of the rest of the globe, humans struggled to find harmony in a fragile island home that was constantly changing. Taboos governed society and political power was ever shifting between rival factions.

The boy pictured the Lono priests as formidable men who commanded great responsibility in bringing order to the cosmos, making things *pono*. Dressed in their ceremonial apparel they performed rituals meant to bring healing between wartime. In a

land ravaged by death, Lono's influence countered Ku's. Life was that way. Man and woman, heaven and earth, chief and commoner, death and birth. For everything there was a balance.

Devotion to the priesthood was sacred and a life-long commitment. It required strong powers of concentration to wield the proper magic. But it was foretold that the old order would cease. Increasing contact with outsiders brought more infectious diseases, desires and designs. One by one the priests fell, clutching tightly to their traditions through wave after wave of societal change, and their vast knowledge died with them. His vision faded as the woman spoke again.

"My father would sit on the porch every morning with his pipe and tobacco and an angel would tell him what to expect during the day. Whenever anyone came riding up on horseback, my father would call out to them in Hawaiian and tell them what the angel told him: whether they would live or die. He would call '*E ho'i aku, e ola ana,*' when they would live, and '*e ho'i aku, ua hala no,*' when they would not. And that was the meaning of his name, Ikauiakalani: the answers are perched in the heavens."

The boy mouthed the words mechanically. The answers are perched? he questioned internally.

As if reading his mind, she answered, "Kau means 'to place', or 'to perch, like a bird landing on a branch'. The answers are placed there. If you have a pure heart and a sincere desire for truth, you will find it..."

"... in the heavens," the boy said completing her sentence.

"And where does God live, Ikaui?"

"I-ka-lani. In the heavens," they both said in unison. The boy understood. He took one last look behind:

"Ikaikalani," she whispered in a raspy voice. "When I die I hope I go to heaven..."

"Don't talk like that!" I tell her.

"Ika, you're not listening to me. Let me speak."

I don't want to let her. I think if I just wish really hard I can make everything go back to how it's supposed to be: me and Grandma on our homestead and mom home for good.

"I hope I go to heaven so that I can watch over you. I'm going to ask God if I could be your guardian angel..."

"Please don't Grandma!"

"... so that you won't be alone!"

"Grandma, no!" I shake her gently trying to keep her awake. "What medicine you need? I can get 'em for you. Just tell me how to heal you! Grandma?" She was fading quickly.

Her eyes strained open. "I have nothing to give."

"I have your quilt," I tell her while folding up the only colorful thing brightening up her dreary hospital room. It was the last reminder of who she really was: not just another dying corpse but a strong Hawaiian woman.

I breathed in her smell, trying to capture it bottled in my memory. I knew at that moment I would live the rest of my life without it. So I just held her, feeling her slowly

slip away. In one last burst of energy, her eyes fluttered open and she spoke in choppy heaves.

"Ikau, give me... my... Almond Roca can."

"Grandma, how can you eat candy at a time like this?" I laughed hysterically and she ignored me.

"Go look... for scissors. I know... check in the medical... supplies."

"What for? I don't want to."

"Get the scissors," she commanded, and I found some near the gauze and paper tape. I obediently placed them in her fingers. Her once expert hands now struggled to move, as she held her braided hair shakily and began cutting it off.

"What are you doing?" I cried in horror. She got halfway through and began to faint.

"My hair. Help me cut... my hair."

I took the scissors. With her hands holding mine we cut off the rest. It fell free, spilling through my fingers like water, still braided and held on by the rubber band.

"These strands hold... my thoughts. My... memories... of what I know. Of happy times... with you."

She uncovered the pink can, a gift from a visitor, and placed her hair inside. She gave it to me whispering, "Look... for me... in the heavens. The answer... is there." Outside the window I saw a dove with only a stump for a leg flap its wings wildly and fly away. I left the hospital that day never looking back.

Not until now. Since Grandma's death he had been unable to cry. But now his heart began to rid itself of the bottled anger he had held within for too long. He barely

noticed the two waterfalls on both of his cheeks because his face was struck numb. *Hi'uwai*, he thought he heard someone whisper from afar. His eyes streamed so uncontrollably that he didn't realize he had been all cried out and his face had almost completely dried up. But somehow the pain that had been burning in his chest simply vaporized and drifted away. As if witnessing the vision of his grandmother, Mariah Wong thanked him and spoke again.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you, Matthew 6: 33. We are all the divine creations of a living God, *Ikauikalani*. As long as you seek God first, your prayers will be answered and you're never alone. God is love. So where love dwells, there you will find Him."

"So that's how I could see those pictures in the sky and help those people. I'm not going crazy."

"*Ikauikalani*... great-great-great-great grandson of Lono-'I-kau-i-ka-lewalani. I am happy to hear that name spoken again. Bring honor to it, *Ikauikalani*. Do not be afraid to use it." He promised.

Out of curiosity he asked, "Why did you stop talking to each other?"

Once again she gazed at the sky. "I thought my Christian beliefs opposed her ways. She would not change. But I would not change. I told her if she did not abandon her practice, she would never be welcome in my house." Her eyes wilted and her voice fluttered as she talked more.

"I told her that if she did not give it up she would be damned to hell. I cursed her! My own family. If I could only take it back!"

Ikau comforted her until her sobs decreased. He internalized her words. From somewhere deep inside, a voice validated everything she had said.

"But Auntie," he said when she regained composure. "I know Grandma wasn't evil. What she did was help people. And she always prayed to God every day, sometimes twice or more. And she brought me here to you. And she still helps me whenever I need help because she is inside of me wherever I go. And something deep inside of me tells me that she is somewhere in the heavens near God. And I know that she loved you very much because she told me all about you. She told me about how the owl helped you and, believe it or not, the owl helps me too."

"Yes, that's true."

"And I remember she told me about the time you were saved by the shark while picking 'opihi. You almost drowned and you were saved. That was you, right?"

"Yes, that's me."

"I remember. But most of all I believe God is there. I believe He was there in ancient times, just like I believe He was there for my Grandma, and He is still there for us if we only look. That's what I believe." And nothing anybody could tell him would change that fact.

"Yes," she said with a relieved sigh. "Pololei 'oe. Ikauikalani."

A rushing wind blew by and again the leaves shook on the trees, the car horns honked from the street, and people walked and talked around them. And once again Mariah Wong hunched in her wheelchair unable to move half of her body and speaking in unintelligible slurs.

"I... feel... tired."

"I'm glad I found you. Thank you."

"Thanks... for what?"

"For helping me find myself."

Another older Filipino nurse interrupted them to return Auntie Mariah to her hospital room. He promised to come back and visit, but somehow Ikau knew that would probably be the last time he would see her alive.

Chapter 15

Closure

Ikauikalani got off the bus at the mauka side of the mall and thought about the events he had witnessed those past few weeks. Miracles did happen. What an amazing journey life can turn out to be. Although there was much to be sad about, such as the deaths of his loved ones, there was much to be happy about. Ikau appreciated having Gladness as a friend, as well as all the other compassionate people who helped him as he struggled his way through life. He learned that good things could still come out of tragedies.

He thanked God that he finally found Mariah Wong and remembered all she had shared with him that afternoon. Visiting her not only brought him a sense of closure with his grandmother's death, but also helped him to find inner peace with his own self-worth. For once he was not just the gawky kid that everybody teased and made fun of at school. He wasn't just the boy with the funny name. He was Ikauikalani, a direct descendant of ancient Hawaiian chiefs and powerful priests. And no matter what anybody said or did to him it wouldn't change that fact. As long as he lived, they lived. And as a descendant of

chiefs he had a responsibility to care for those around him who were in need. Internally he accepted his calling and decided to honor his legacy.

He wandered without aim about the mall, shopping the store windows with his eyes and ignoring the stares of wary tourists. He wondered about Peaches, the woman who used to talk to invisible people. Was she reunited with her family? Was she back with her kids? Then he thought about the diabetic man who was sleeping in the covered bus stop, and he wondered how the man was doing and whether he had survived or passed away. Then for some reason he thought about his mother just when he heard a deep gravelly voice behind his shoulder.

"Eh brah, you get change?"

Glancing up at the reflection in the glass, Ikau saw the image of a ghostly woman with disheveled, sun-bleached hair standing behind him. She wore a muddied, tattered sweater and she had one arm extended, begging for a handout. Her facial features were hidden beneath heavy layers of mud, sweat, and sadness. Startled, Ikau studied the familiar-looking image. Could it be that he found his mother after all this time? He spoke to the glass without turning around.

"Mom?"

The woman's eyes were unseen in the shiny surface but her hair resembled his 'ehu color, like his Grandma used to call it. Wishing it was really his long-lost mom, Ikau spun around and faced the woman.

"You get what one dollar? I hungry!"

At first glance, Ikau was positive this was his mother. She'd been absent for half of his lifetime so she probably wouldn't recognize him at first glance. He looked much

older and more mature than he was at seven. All his life he had prepared for this moment. When he found her. Over and over he had fixed her features in his mind. His memory was crystal clear.

"Mommy, where are you going?" he asked in the dark.

She bustled around the room throwing clothes haphazardly in a large purse while her military friends waited outside. "Go back to sleep, Ikau, I don't want you to wake up Grandma."

"But where are you going? Don't leave..."

Drunkenly she plopped onto the bed next to him and brushed his hair aside with tenderness. "Mommy has to leave now."

"No, don't go."

Even in the dark, with nothing but the soft light of the moon illuminating the side of her face, he saw genuine love in her hazy eyes as she bent down and kissed him. He somehow knew that was the last time he would see her.

"Mommy loves you."

"Don't go."

"Mom?" Ikau gazed hard at the woman and realized soon after that he was sorely mistaken.

Like his mother, she spoke with a heavy pidgin accent and a baritone timbre as evidence of long years of smoking cigarettes, crystal meth, marijuana and anything else that burned in a glass pipe. Like his mother's, her sallow cheeks caved in on the sides, her eyes and forehead creased at the corners. Her sun-chapped lips peeled. Like his mother's, her arms were pockmarked along the veins and large areas of skin were bruised

reddish-purple either from drug abuse or from being beaten by sadistic Johns. Like his mother's hair, hers had been left to tangle and fester with fleas, when at one time it probably bounced like threads of gold sunshine. And though both of their empty eyes lacked spirit, and both had become blind to hope and love, they were different. Unlike his mother's toffee eyes, hers were the color of ice.

"Come on, a dollar for the homeless!" the woman insisted.

"Okay," he said, looking through his bag and pulling out a tangerine. "Want something to eat? I even have starfruit."

"No," she waved at him, becoming irritated. "I want change. Don't you have any change?"

Ikau remembered how he had been able to help Peaches and he was determined to help this woman. He thought hard about what it was exactly that he had gone to her, how he did it, and how he could possibly do it again this time.

He pretended to put money in her hand. Then when she closed her palm, he held it tightly and prayed to God. Please help this woman. I know you did it before and I know you can do it again, he thought really hard. He summed up all the magic he believed he possessed and tried to heal her as she struggled to tear her hand free.

"Leave me alone!"

"Wait, I can help you!" He reached for her but she pulled away.

"Fine, jerk! Be that way. Keep your damn change!"

"Wait!"

"Mommy, don't go..."

"Don't go," Ikau called after her, waving the few dollars he had left. "Please take this."

She turned around and took the money. And without even a word of thanks, she approached another couple asking, "Do you have any money? I need change." Turning away one last time from both the tattered woman and his mother's memory, Ikau left the mall and crossed Kapi'olani Boulevard to go back to his beach park.

It was past sunset and the sky had darkened without him. He sauntered back through the landscape of his newfound home and waved at the familiar faces he regarded as his adopted family. Mom and Pops, the old Hawaiian couple behind the park restrooms, invited him to sleep with them but he declined. Eloise, the wild-haired purple lady, asked if he had any more oranges and he gave her some he had picked earlier from Gladness' trees. The bird lady had gone home already, the Polynesian lady was bathing her baby in the showers, and the drunken man was under his tree again opening up a new bottle of wine. Picnickers and barbecuers were packing up for home and late joggers were getting a few more laps around the park before calling it a day.

Nighttime in the city was good for contemplation. Ikau gazed at the reflection of the city lights on the harbor waters and watched the stars poke out at him one by one. The Evening Star was bright in the West and the hunter was approaching the horizon. The park had a perfect view of the Southern Sky and he saw a bunch of stars that formed an S-shaped. *Manaiakalani*. Some people saw a scorpion's tail but the ancient Hawaiians called it "Maui's fishhook".

"Hey fag," said a smoky voice drifting in the dark. "Remember me?"

Ikau turned and spied that familiar orange cigarette glow emanating from the shadows. With each puff Ikau clearly saw the face of the man who had entered his nightmares. Behind him three gang members were carrying the same baseball bats from that fateful night. Ikau was face-to-face with the very people who murdered his friend Hawaiian. And it looked like they were prepared to kill again.

"I told you. We not pau." The man came closer and his friends followed behind him laughing.

Ikau stood up and faced the three of them, his bag clutched tightly under his arm and adrenaline pulsing through his veins. Normally he'd have run away. But after all he had been through there was nothing to be afraid of but fear itself. Puffing himself up like a blowfish against sharks he stood his ground and spoke with a loud voice.

"What are you doing here? You don't belong here."

"Really, faggot?" The man's face glowed as he inhaled.

"Yeah, really!"

"Nobody tells me where I belong but me. I go wherever I like. It's a public park, right? Faggot?" His gang members laughed and the leader inhaled and exhaled another chain of smoke.

"You belong in jail with the other criminals." The gang laughed louder.

"Oh yeah? I did my time already."

"You killed my friend, you asshole, and I'm gonna make you pay. Then you'll see the real faggot."

"Make me pay?" The man's face soured and his eyes turned a deeper shade of evil. "How can you when you're seriously fucked, huh?"

He took a final drag and flicked the still-lit stub at Ikau's face. Ikau knocked it away without fear and the leader was not impressed. The man reached for one of the baseball bats from one of his thugs and Ikau saw what looked like dried blood still encrusted on it. The man raised the bat and took a practice swing, which was meant to scare him, but Ikau stood his ground though he was deathly afraid.

"You think I'm fucked?" Ikau said loudly. "You're fucked!"

Ikau reached into his pouch and pulled out the flashlight he inherited from Hawaiian. He flicked the switch and shoved the beam of light in his face.

"Help, somebody! These guys killed my friend. They killed Hawaiian!"

"What?" a voice called out. "Who killed Hawaiian?"

At first no one came but Ikau just kept shouting and flashing the light at the murderous gang.

"These guys killed Hawaiian. Somebody call the police! "

"Turn it off," commanded the gang leader. He was momentarily blinded and swung the bat in his direction. "Get him. Get the fucker!"

"Help, they want to kill me. Somebody, help!"

"What's going on?" another woman's voice called out. "You okay, boy? " Ikau recognized the voices belonging to the Hawaiian couple behind the bathrooms. More people followed them and before long a small crowd of the park's inhabitants began to assemble. "Nobody better mess with my boy!"

"What the...?" the gang leader said, trying to stare down the people he was used to terrorizing. More people came and the leader blinked, allowing his eyes to adjust.

"Nobody better make trouble to our boy!"

"What, you want some of this?" the gang leader shouted, swinging his bat at them. The park people gasped and retreated but Ikau stood firm.

"Don't be afraid of him, he can't hurt us if we stick together!"

"Shut up," he cried. "I had enough of you."

The man raised his bat and would have hit the boy's head had it not been for the shopping cart that came slamming into his back. From out of the darkness, Eloise rammed the man with her cart so hard that his bat went flying out of his hands and he was lying on the ground face down. A woman screamed out, "Somebody call 911." And as the crowd began closing in on the other thugs, they dropped their bats and ran off. The crowd cheered and someone nearby grabbed the leader's bat and used it to keep the leader down. Ikau's eyes focused and he realized it was the grizzled man who normally kept silent. Suddenly he was standing there addressing everyone who had assembled.

"Are you okay boy?" For once the man opened up. "Is everybody okay?"

"I'm fine," the boy said.

"I called the police," called out another man's voice. "Make sure that guy doesn't get away!"

"Are you sure this man is guilty?" the grizzled man asked as if he were a judge in a criminal trial.

"I'm positive. I saw him with my own eyes."

"Are you willing to testify to the police?"

Ikau thought hard about what the man had said. Nobody else had witnessed Hawaiian's murder and if he testified he might be questioned about his living situation and could find himself in a foster home.

"I don't know..."

Ikau knew that filing a police report to lock up the man guilty of murdering his friend was the right thing to do, but he was afraid of what it would mean. What would happen to him? Where would he be sent to, a youth detention home? Maybe a social worker would be able to contact his distant relatives. But he could also be sent to live with abusive people only interested in receiving payment in exchange for poor foster care. All these thoughts circulated in his mind and the more he thought about it the more fearful he became of the unknown. In a matter of minutes the familiar sound of police sirens screeched and flashing blue lights pierced the darkness. Ikau panicked.

"I like do the right thing, but I scared! I don't want them to take me away!"

"Don't worry," the Hawaiian woman nicknamed "Mom" said. She stepped forward to comfort him. "But maybe it's for the best. You might find a nice place to live with a family who loves you. The park is a rough place for a kid."

Ikau scanned the faces of the people surrounding him, his newfound family: Eloise, Mom and Pops, the red-faced drunk, the Polynesian woman with her children, the grizzled man, and the many other familiar faces of transients he had grown to love. He also thought about the friends who visited the park during the day: the kind bird lady; Manang Lina, the aluminum can lady; Mr. Lam, the man who did his morning exercises on the sand; even the man with the metal detector. But most of all he thought about Gladness. What would happen if he stopped showing up without being able to notify her? He looked about at the crowd, possibly for the last time.

"HPD here. Did someone call about an emergency?" The officer's deep voice boomed and the crowd made way as their flashlights pierced the night. The grizzled man spoke up.

"This guy murdered the homeless man last week. He always come around and make trouble for us."

"Okay Sir, I want you to drop the bat and step away from the man."

"You don't understand officer," Eloise said, still grasping the handle of her shopping cart. "He's dangerous. He was trying to attack one of our own." Her eyes focused on Ikau who was frantically shaking his head and mouthing the words, No, no!

"Who was he attacking?" The officer followed Eloise's gaze and addressed the old Hawaiian woman who thrust Ikau behind her. "You?"

"Yes, I saw him kill that man last week. He came back to get rid of the witnesses."

"Is this true?" More officers swarmed the park and the crowd did its best to protect Ikau.

"Yes," Eloise spoke up. "This is what they used to kill him. See? It still has Hawaiian's blood on it. They came back to cause more trouble for us."

"Not, they started attacking me! They shouldn't be here, damn homeless scum. You should kick 'em out. The park is for us to enjoy. We shouldn't have to deal with this kind of trash here!" The gang leader was shouting wildly and pointing his finger at them.

"Calm down. Everybody stay right where you are." The officer picked up his handheld radio. "Dispatch, this is Officer Robello requesting backup at Ala Moana

Beach Park. We have an alleged suspect in last week's homeless murder and we're bringing him in for questioning."

The crowd cheered but the officer raised his hand to quiet them as the dispatcher returned his call.

"I copy, Robello. Please state the purpose for backup, over?"

"We need to clear the park. I'm gonna need some help."

"What?" screamed one woman. "We nevah do nothing!"

"Why?" called out another man.

"You people know you don't belong here in the park after-hours. I'm only doing this for your own protection."

"Where else can we go?" said Pops. "We got kicked out of 'A'ala Park and no more room at dah sheltah!"

"Well you can spend the night in jail if you like," said the officer as he and his partners handcuffed the gang leader. "Or you can gather your stuff and clear out on your own. Either way this park is closed until tomorrow morning."

"No, please don't do this," sobbed the Polynesian woman, trying to calm her crying baby. "We won't cause trouble, I promise!"

"Sorry people but it's for your own safety," said the other younger Japanese officer. "We can't have any more deaths here in the park."

"Alright everyone, you heard the man," said the third officer. "Start clearing out. Anyone remaining within the next hour will be arrested."

Ikauikalani hid behind the same tree that had protected him the night Hawaiian died, as he watched the police handcuff the killer and escort the rest of the campers from

the park. He was glad that he didn't have to testify but he was sad to see his friends forced out of their haven. He knew that most of them would be returning the following day, but he felt guilty when he went back to his usual bridge after the commotion ended.

Ikau sat on his bridge for a moment before descending and said a silent prayer. High above several clouds floated away, revealing a bright, full moon that cast a pale blue glow over everything below. Suddenly the moonlight formed a rainbow. He stared at it with wonder, thinking he never knew such a thing could exist. It grew stronger and stronger as more clouds parted and the night rainbow became two arches. He shivered nervously but he knew things were the way they should be.

I'm standing in the forest; the same one I visited with the pueo. I see a beautiful woman standing in front of me with a glow all around her. She smiles and somehow I know deep down inside who she really is. An owl lands on a branch nearby and the light grows brighter. "Thank you, Ikauikalani. Be strong!" She shimmers into an owl and the birds fly away as the light dies. "Be strong."

I will, Auntie. I will.

Chapter 16

Blank pages

Ikauikalani sat on top of his bridge with his radio blaring Hawaiian music on 1420 on the AM dial. Days earlier he returned to the nursing home and discovered that Mariah Wong had indeed passed away soon after his visitation with her. The same Filipino nurse described through teary eyes how peaceful she had looked, as if going to sleep and

forgetting to wake up. Mrs. Wong had often said that an owl would visit her and the night-shift nurse swore that she saw one outside her window the exact moment she passed away. Ikau understood and thanked the nurse for taking care of his kupuna.

Later that same day he stopped at Gladness' house and told her everything that had happened to him: his visit to Mariah Wong's nursing home, the incident at the park involving the man who murdered their friend and even the dream he had the night Mariah Wong died. She offered her consolation but was worried about him living on the streets. She invited him to stay with her but he declined. He didn't want to inconvenience her. And even though she insisted it was no problem, and that she wouldn't mind having a live-in helper, he reassured her that he was satisfied with their present arrangement and would visit and help out whenever possible.

Before he left, she gave him a message from the nice Southern lady that the Kaua'i branch of his family was trying to get a hold of him. They had found out about his grandmother's death too late and were concerned for his welfare. Gladness encouraged him to call and he said that he would think about it. I would, he really thought, but I don't know them.

So he continued sleeping at the park and survived on fruit from Gladness' yard, free McDonald's food, which the Samoan lady continued to smuggle out the back door, and goods he purchased from money earned at his yard job. Gladness eventually referred Ikau to several of her neighbors, many of whom were also aging and in need of yard assistance, and he always had money and lots of leftover fruits for his beach park family. And every day Ikau continued to find more and more of the happy-faced coins that never ceased to appear along the park sidewalks.

Life at the park went on as normal and there was never any sign of the other gang members. Every morning Ikau joined Mr. Lam on the sand as he performed his daily regimen of Dai Chi, every morning Manang Lina collected aluminum cans, and the same Japanese man combed the beach for more hidden treasure.

The number of homeless people fluctuated as several of the inhabitants eventually found work or housing, and many of the runaways went back home. But although there were departures, there were more runaways, drug addicts, welfare recipients and mental patients eager to take their place. The numbers always seemed to remain steady and Ikau always shared with them, creating a sense of family among everyone.

Ikau watched the flocks of different people that daily flooded the park from his bridge. More joggers jogged, more families picnicked and tourists of every color and nationality continued to visit the place that he called home. Children squealed with delight as sand castles formed and crumbled, birds fluttered and danced as crumbs were tossed at them, and canoers splashed in the open ocean and called out words of encouragement to one another as paddles drummed against the side of the boat like the pulse of a racing heartbeat. Although at times he missed the warmth of a real home and the smell of food simmering on the stove, he was presently content to be a part of the busy and bustling existence at Ala Moana Beach Park.

Just the day before, Ikauikalani did something he hadn't done in a longtime. Using the free bus pass he received from Tristan, he boarded the Kane'ohe Circle Island bus from Ala Moana Shopping Center and took a trip over the Wilson tunnel to his Grandma's old homestead up at Kahalu'u. It had been over a year since he had last seen

his old home, but he really wanted to go back and visit one last time before his bus pass expired at the end of the month.

It was sad to see his grandmother's once thriving abode in shambles. Apparently no one had bought it when the bank had foreclosed on it. The yard was terribly overgrown and the house was boarded up. Shingles were falling from the roof and wild cats had made a home under the stairs. It looked like people were raiding the mango and lychee trees and it had become a dump where careless people threw their garbage. Ikau sat on the front porch, which was falling apart, and closed his eyes, recalling happier times when the house echoed with his laughter and his grandma's voice called to him from the kitchen window for supper. He remembered playing ball with his dog and wondered if Poki was together with Grandma in the same place. Did she have her legs again and were they playing ball together in heaven? As he thought about those things a playful breeze kissed his cheek. Gathering his things he stepped off the porches to make one last circuit around the property. He climbed the trees that once towered over him like giant monoliths and gathered whatever fruit he could reach with his bare hands. He tiptoed through the knee-high grass and approached the backside of the house.

That was when he noticed some pots containing several of his Grandma's prized orchids, which were abandoned along the side of the house and overgrown with weeds. Seeing them reminded him of how much his Grandma loved gardening and that gave him an idea. He gathered several clippings to take to Gladness' house before returning to the bus stop and once again leaving Kahalu'u far behind him. Gladness was honored to add the clippings to her own orchid collection.

Ikau's daydream was interrupted when he felt a gentle hand touch his shoulder. He turned and recognized the woman standing behind him with what looked like her family standing close beside her. She had a faint resemblance with a woman Ikau had gotten to know weeks before, only now she was tamer and unbothered by her invisible spirits.

"Boy -- sorry, I forgot your name." She turned to her family: an elderly Asian-looking couple, a young woman holding a baby, and a young man, a few years older than himself, who stepped forward to meet him.

"Peaches! Ikau... my name is Ikau."

"Yes, Ikau. This is the boy I was telling you about." Her family smiled and nodded to each other as the young man, who was probably the son she had mentioned earlier, came forward with tears in his eyes and offered his hand.

"I don't know how you did it, but thank you."

"Thanks for what?"

"For bringing my mom back to us."

"Yes," the old woman said, also stepping forward to kiss him on the cheek. "My daughter is fine as long as she takes her medication. But when she doesn't, then sometimes she wanders off and we don't know what happens to her."

"But she told us that it was you who convinced her to call home," the young man said again. "And we were able to find her and get her help."

Ikau gazed at the faces of those who truly loved this woman, who was so untouchable just weeks earlier. He had never imagined that behind this crazy lady, who was despised by the park visitors because of her conversations with invisible people,

there was a real family missing her. One by one the others stepped forward and each thanked him personally.

"This is my grandson," Peaches said proudly, grabbing the baby from the young woman and holding him up to Ika. "Would you give him your blessing?"

"Blessing?" he asked, holding the baby that was thrust into his arms. His face broke out into a smile as the baby smiled back. "What kind of blessing?" He kissed the baby on his head and the air hummed around them.

"Thank you, Ika." Peaches grabbed the baby again and the family waved as they returned their coolers to their cars, which were parked in the lot. He waved back and felt a sense of relief for them. He missed the feeling of having a family's love. But as he scanned the park and watched his friends: Mom and Pops quietly play cards with another young Hawaiian couple at a picnic table; a dirty man lying under a Banyan tree wrapped up in a cheap, torn, Japanese mat; an older black man sharing his cigarettes with another haole gentleman missing some front teeth; and one of the older Polynesian kids was pushing his younger sibling in the shopping cart, amidst the baby's laughter. There was love there; a real family's love.

From the bridge Ikaikalani stared at the approaching sunset. A bronze horse cloud galloped free in a violet field of golden grain. He smiled, thanking God for his blessings, and stared down at Hawaiian's journal, which he held in his hands. He ran his fingers along the faded letters and remembered the dream he had of his departed friend. He reached into his bag and pulled out a paper bag from one of the shops he visited at the mall, admiring the pens and pencils he had purchased.

Up until that moment he had treated the book delicately and read it from cover to cover. He recalled something he had forgotten when he first had the dream: Hawaiian had pointed to the book and pointed to him thereafter, and he repeated it several times. Although no words were said, Ikau new that Hawaiian intended for him to have the book to keep. It was as if Hawaiian was passing down his authority and Ikau had inherited a legacy that deserved to be continued. Ikau new that Hawaiian wanted him to keep writing where he had left off.

Picking out a sleek and shiny black pen, he meditated on what he should write when he noticed something unusual streak past just outside of his vision.

A soft ching-ching-ching came from farther along the sidewalk. Looking over the bridge in the dimming light he saw the wheelchair man unscrew a glass jar with his teeth and spill coins all over the ground. It'd been weeks since Ikau last saw the man, but he recognized him immediately.

"Hey," Ikau shouted. "Hey, you!"

The paralyzed man didn't seem as helpless as he did when Ikau offer to help him at the vending machine. He simply sat there and emptied his money all over the concrete pavement without anyone noticing besides the boy. Ikau left his things behind, stood up and approached the man, who hadn't really noticed he was being watched until Ikau was only a few paces away.

"What are you doing?" Startled, the paralyzed man placed his jar in the chair to his side, made an awkward-looking military salute with his gnarled hand, and zipped away laughing wildly. "Wait," Ikau called after him. "Don't go!"

Ikauikalani ran over and gathered up the silver disks that glittered like gems from a treasure trove, each bearing a sticker with a happy face on one side. So that's where the happy-faced coins came from, he thought. A man he felt so sorry for was actually filled with joy and determined to spread as much of it as possible with others. Ikau giggled like a child who had just discovered Candyland and blessed the man from afar. Without counting the money he loaded up his Almond Roca can and returned to his bridge.

Ikau settled down in his usual sleeping spot and noticed some movement in the grass. It looked like a miniature red snake with long spiky legs and it moved in an S-shaped motion. Recognizing the centipede, he stepped on it with his sandal and sliced its still-squirming body into two pieces. He tossed the bits to the side just as a peg-legged mynah swooped down from nowhere and devoured the dead insect. Ikau felt a sense of victory and new that he could conquer anything.

Before allowing the pen to touch the paper, Ikau read a short passage Hawaiian had written just before he died. *Every day is a brand-new page waiting to be written.*

With a deep sigh, Ikau uncapped his pen and began writing:

My name is Ikauikalani. My friend gave me this book before he died. Here is my story...

THE END.

For now...