OPIHI TALES

by

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ABSTRACT

Opihi Tales

by

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Opihi Tales began as a geographical and psychological discovery of the Big Island of Hawaii, and has evolved into an internal exploration of the conflicts between my Hawaiian heritage and American culture, including the hypnotic sway of the "American Dream" and the heavy hand of Mormonism. Also, permeating my collection are the influences of Plantation culture. Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Portuguese words and ideas are woven into Opihi Tales as the people themselves have been woven into the lives of the natives they lived and worked beside in the fields. Language is an essential element of Opihi Tales. In order to immerse readers fully in the experiences of my characters, I offer a mix of Hawaiian Pidgin Creole and Standard American English. It is my hope that the reader will see the use of pidgin, not as window dressing, but as a linguistic necessity to my characters' lives and identities.
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Uncle Willy’s Harbor

Dad caught a wild pig up mauka for my sister’s baby luau. I could hear it screaming behind the house. A sweet smell scent blew past me into the mango trees. The pig’s legs were tied with skin rope and I wondered why there was pink toothpaste foam around its mouth. Flies swarmed around the hole that Dad’s gun had made.

Kawika, no worries, it not goin’ hurt you.

They held it down on the plywood he’d put over the sawhorses in the backyard. I watched them slit its throat and blood squirted in the air. It was squealing one minute, quiet the next. Well, as quiet as it can be through the drunk laughter and the talk story of the men.

Eh Kawika, come help us clean da pig.

Uncle Willy’s long hunting knife slid down the pig’s stomach like he was cutting through cooked taro. I wasn’t sure what came out. It wasn’t like cleaning fish. Fish is
easy. You scrape off the scales. You slice through the belly. You pull out the guts. Fish
guts don’t look like food cooking on the stove. There’s no steam rising off the insides.
And, everything isn’t pink and red. I just stood there as they rinsed out the inside with the
hose, the water swirling around their bare feet.

Dad helped Uncle Willy hang the pig on the corner of the house. The fur had been
scraped off and it looked funny with all its fur gone. Like the negatives of pictures. You
know like when my older sister Pi’i had her birthday party and she blew out her candles.
Her hair is black, and when I looked at the negatives, her hair was white. That’s what the
pig looked like. They had wrapped it in a white sheet, so the flies couldn’t get at it. Blood
dripped from the bottom and it looked like a ha’ole woman’s painted fingernail. They
were going to imu the pig in the backyard before taking it down to Uncle Willy’s house
on the beach.

After a couple of hours, Uncle Keala and Uncle Willy took it down and wrapped it in
chicken wire so they could put it in the imu. They had been burning kiawe all day to heat
up the rocks. It smelled so good. They covered the pig with ti leaves and huge banana
leaves. Then, they threw big brown empty sacks over the leaves and buried everything
with dirt. I remembered when my cousin had died and they had stuck her in a fancy white
satin box and then threw dirt on her, too. I wondered if the Obake had eaten her, its
anthurium shaped head pushing through the dirt, digging down to her white coffin. Dad
told me they had to cook the pig for twelve hours so that’s why they had to do it today
instead of tomorrow when the party was supposed to happen. I wondered what it felt like
to be buried, to be underneath all that dirt and leaves. I wondered if the pig felt anything,
whether my cousin felt anything. I think about the movies where the dead people come to
life and start trying to eat the people in the town’s brains. I could just see dead people
digging their way out of their graves in the cemeteries on Mt. Holualoa and then coming

My neighborhood was full of houses that looked the same. They just painted them
different colors and put them facing all kind different directions. Some houses had their
garages facing the ocean. Some had theirs facing the mountain. If you counted them,
you’d see that every fifth house was the same color. You know what was really funny?
How different everyone’s yard was. My house had plenty of fruit trees with no grass. My
Mom had made my Dad go down to the beach to find flat coral stones that she could put
into our yard as walking stones, so, there are big, flat white rocks making a path around
the tangerine tree, up to the mountain apple tree, and down to the starfruit tree. My Mom
has the craziest ideas. She had a little garden under a roofed area, where she grew crab
grass, anthuriums, and ferns, but I never really thought of crab grass as real grass, you
know the kind of grass they have on TV. The kind a kid mows to make money.

The only people who had that kind of grass lived down the street from us—the
Morrises. Mr. Morris had threatened to call the cops on us because he said we had
poisoned his dog. Stupid ha’ole. Why would we poison his dog? It’s not our fault that his
dog wandered into our yard and drank water out of our buckets. None of our dogs do that.
They’re not that stupid. I thought it was really funny that his dog would dig up his lawn
all the time. You never see that on TV. Good dogs don’t dig up nice lawns.

Now, the Kanazawas’ across the street were really nice. Their house was green which
was the same color as the Rodriguez’ down on the corner and they had a rock garden in
their yard. My mom thought it was a waste and that they should have fruit trees in their
yard instead. I think that my mom didn’t like Mr. Kanazawa’s wife because she was a ha’ole, but I thought she was nice. She would always give us kids peanut taro. The sticky sweetness was worth going into their stuffy house. Mrs. Kanazawa collected Japanese dolls. She wouldn’t let us touch them. She said they were Mr. Kanazawa’s family heirlooms because he was an only child and his parents had died in a bombing in Japan. I didn’t really understand but I liked how real the dolls looked. They stood in their little glass cases staring at you with their dark eyes and red lips. They all had really fancy kimonos, even the guys. One time Pi’i told me of this Japanese doll that would come to life and eat people. Its long black hair would whip around its face as its fingernails grew really, really long so it could chop up and eat its owners. And when it was done, it would just go back into its case until it ate its next owner. She told me it was a true story. I didn’t believe her but I didn’t like looking at Mrs. Kanazawa’s dolls after that.

The Kanazawas’ were invited to the luau, which surprised me because I didn’t think my mom would want them there, but parties make people do stupid things to each other. The last party we had, Uncle Willy threw his beer can at Mr. Kanazawa, calling him a slanty-eyed prick. Everyone started laughing but I didn’t know why. I asked Pi’i and she said it had something to do with some war and since Mr. Kanazawa came to Hawai’i after it, then he was just a stinkin’ Jap. I told her that didn’t explain the laughing. She said they were laughing because Uncle Willy was making an ass of himself.

What about Mr. Kanazawa?

No worry ‘bout him. He been here long enough to know Uncle Willy gets stupid wen he stay drinking. No worries, Kawika.

Pi’i rubbed my head.
Uncle Willy was a really old man. He wasn’t even related to us as far as I could tell. I think my parents said he was my grandpa’s hanai cousin or something like that. He lived on a beach off to the right side of the Harbor. The house was built on stilts over the water. To get inside, you had to walk over a wooden plank underneath which the honu liked to swim, their green shells reflecting the sun, flippers pushing against the current. His house didn’t look like any of the houses in my neighborhood. For one thing, it wasn’t only made with wood. There were metal pieces on the sides, on the roof, even on the floor. Uncle Willy even had plastic sheets for windows. I asked my mom why he lived in the house on the beach and she told me he was claiming his rightful place. That this was the land of his family.

Why he no live in a nice house like we do?

He stay on welfare.

What? Like Aunty Mahealani?

Yeah, but don’t you let me catch you saying anything about that in front of her, or else you goin’ get lickins.

Why come, mom? How come I no can talk about it?

Because your Aunty stay shame, that’s why.

But why, it’s free food right?

Yeah. But there stay more reasons than that. Go help Pi’i straighten up the bedrooms.

I thought about what she said. People are ashamed to be on welfare? Then, how come I see people use it all the time at the grocery store? They buy steak and shrimp and lobster. The kids get to buy tons of candy, and it’s not fair. How come we aren’t on
welfare, so I can buy lots of candy, too. Maybe I can get some from Uncle Willy at the baby luau.

When we got down to Honokohau, we set up the picnic tables and put up the decorations. Dad strung up the blue tarp between a couple of coconut trees to keep the sun off the tables and Mom spread out her rainbow of Tupperware, holding all the food that didn’t need to be put in the huge fish coolers. Mom had made squid luau and shoyu chicken and they were sitting in big pots next to the charcoal bbq Uncle Keala was starting. We were going to pulehu some chicken and teri beef. I liked Uncle Keala ‘cause he always took me cruising with him and he never took my sisters.

Sometimes, he’d take me for a cruise down Old A’s. He told me it was the old airport before Keahole Airport was built. I had never ridden on an airplane, but I see plenty of them take off when I’m surfing at Pine Trees because it’s right next door to the airport. There’s nothing cooler than seeing an airplane right over your head, while you’re riding a wave into shore. The sound just goes through your body. Uncle Keala said that the planes that came into Old A’s had propellers. I couldn’t imagine propellers on planes, except in the movies. The red baron flying through the clouds, guns tat-tat-tatting. The planes I’ve seen are huge monsters that scream. Uncle Keala likes to stop down at the end of the strip and talk story with the brahdas that hang out down there. Sometimes they smoke pakalolo. Sometimes they just hang around drinking beer and looking at the cars that drive by and honk. Mom doesn’t like me to go cruising with Uncle Keala. She thinks he smokes too much pakalolo and doesn’t want me with him if he gets caught. Get caught? How can he get caught? What’s wrong with pakalolo? It just like cigarettes, that’s what Uncle Keala says.
Uncle Keala gets the bbq started and everyone’s drinking beer and laughing and joking and talking story. Mom had made Spam Musubi for pupus and there was futomaki sushi and my Uncle Willy had caught some Ahi for sashimi and poke. I couldn’t wait to eat.

And then Mema showed up. She’s so lolo. I don’t like hanging with her. She’s always trying to play house or doctor. I laughed when her mom said that if she doesn’t behave she was going sell her to the old Filipino man who lives on the other side of the bay. She shut up real quick. I don’t blame her. I wouldn’t want to be sold to some old man, either. Mema’s my stupid cousin, so I have to be nice to her, when all I really want to do is take her over to the old Filipino man myself—but I can’t, I have to watch her and now I have to take her boogie boarding with me.

Mema, why you gotta come wit us? Can’t you just stay here and swim wit da other kids?

I no like. I goin’ come with you or I goin’ tell your mada you being kolohe and you never like take me.

Oh sorry, eh tita. No get all lolo. I goin’ take you. No worries beef curry.

Wen you goin’?

Bumbai, wen we pau eat.

Den we go?

Yeah, I tole you already. Now scram before I tell your mada you like play doctor all da time.

She ran off kicking up sand like the roadrunner does when he’s running away from the coyote. Beep. Beep.
Robert finally showed up.

Hey wassup? We goin’ go surf or what?

Garans babarans, but I no can yet. I gotta wait til they pau wit da party. Get one nice break up over there.

I pointed to some lava rocks the tide was trying to break.

Man I knew I shoulda stayed home. I coulda been watchin’ Robotech.

What, you no have to stay. Go home if you like.

Nah, nah, nah, nah, was only jokin’. What you like me do?

We goin’ help Uncle Keala with da chicken.

Shoots, brah.

We walked over to the fire and Uncle Keala was talking to Uncle Willy.

Someone gotta go Taneguchi’s and pick up some moa beer.

I stay go. You like come Kawika?

Uncle Willy drove an old blue Datsun pick up truck. He let me ride in the back and I stood up the whole way into town to the grocery store. I jumped off the back and begged him for some money for ice cream. He smelled like beer and salt and he had dark red skin. You know like how you would imagine Indians looked like long ago. Skin darkened and tanned, sunburned so long that it had no other choice but to be red all the time. Mom said he was a fisherman. He took his canoe out and he caught fish, like ahi and aku, without any poles. He caught them like the Ancient Hawaiians did, by hand. Using just line and handmade hooks to reel them in.

His hair looked like an aborigine. I saw a picture of one in my class one time and I thought they were brothers. Sometimes I wonder if Uncle Willy came from there. You
know, crossed the ocean in his canoe, landed on the beach and got adopted into our
family. I can imagine him like Momotaro, the peachboy, drifting along until a nice old
couple takes him in.

Well, ah dunno Kawika your mada not goin’ like if I give you money for buy ice
cream.

Please Uncle, I can go help you later with da kine fish, if you like.

Ah guess you can have one dollah food stamp, but no tell your mada and you betta eat
em before we get back to da baby luau.

Garans Uncle, much mahalo.

He smiled at me and gave a wrinkled brown slip of paper that almost looked like a
real dollar. I walked over to the ice cream case. There were so many choices and I had a
whole dollar to spend. I picked out a Neapolitan ice cream sandwich, which was forty
cents, and a drumstick since I had enough left over for it. Uncle Willy was already at the
cashier with a couple of cases of Budweiser. I remember the first time I ever had it. We
were at Aunty Mahealani’s wedding and Uncle Keala gave me a sip of it and it tasted
yucky. It tasted like how he smelled. Kind of how Uncle Willy smells now. Uncle Willy
looked really tired and I asked him if he was okay.

Eh, I stay fine, no worries. Da kine ice cream looks ono.

You like one?

Nah, nah, I get beer. No worry ‘bout me.

The cashier recognized me and asked about my Dad and how he was doing and I said
we were celebrating my sister Kahealani’s first birthday and we were having the baby
luau down at the Harbor.
You should come when you pau work.

Sounds good. Mahalo nui loa Kawika.

Mahalo.

I hopped up front with Uncle Willy on the way back to the Harbor so I could eat my ice cream. Uncle Willy was shaking out his arm, his hand flapping.

You alright Uncle?

I tole you no worries Kawika, I just neva eat yet.

Okay Uncle, mahalo for the ice cream.

He smiled at me and started the truck. I tried not to get the brown stuff from the ice cream sandwich all over my fingers.

Uncle Willy, how come you live on da beach?

Coz.

Coz what?

I live on da kine beach cause dat’s my family’s aina.

But how come your house stay so kapakahi? It looks so hamajang.

It no stay hamajang. One house is one house. Why for you askin’?

Ah dunno, I was just askin’.

Why you so ni’ele?

I not ni’ele. I was just wondering why you stay live at da beach, dat’s all.

He looked at me. His red face was dripping with sweat. He looked like he was really hot. He lifted his Budweiser up to his mouth and drank his beer. I wished I had bought a soda instead of that second ice cream. I was so thirsty. If my house was just like Uncle Willy’s, would I one day have dark red skin and white hair like him?
Bumbai, you goin’ come fishing with me?

Shoots Uncle, I goin’ come. Come get me when you stay ready.

We got back to the luau and all the family had shown up. Uncle Willy had a little trouble carrying the cases; his arm kept giving him problems and he was having trouble breathing. He put the cases near the coolers and sat down near the bbq, that’s where Mom’s side was and Dad’s side was by the coolers. Someone passed Uncle Willy another beer and he cracked it open. I always thought the sound of a beer can opening sounded like bones breaking. I wondered if every time a beer opened someone broke a bone. You know like how an angel gets its wings every time a bell rings. If that’s true, then there must be a lot of bones broken in the world because my family drinks a lot of beer.

Mom’s family had brought their ukuleles and guitars and had started a kanikapila. Uncle Keala was singing Pua Hone with Aunty Mahealani. She was a really good falsetto and Uncle Keala wasn’t too bad himself. Dad’s family was talking story and drinking all the beer. Lucky Uncle Willy and I went to the store.

Robert came up to me.

We going go surfing or what? And how come you neva take me to da store wit you. Cause we was jus getting beer. Why bada you? You know we no can go surf till we pau eat, so jus’ cool your jets.

Shoots brah. I neva like go anyway, your sister Pi’i is one sweet honey girl.

Eh, no talk about my sistah dat way! She way too old for you.

What she one junior right?

Yeah, and you stay in da fifth grade! What you think, she one cradle robba. You lolo.

Eh, I can handle da ladies.
Yeah whateva. Let’s go grinds.

We sat down at one of the tables near the bbq. My Dad started talking. Everyone stood up and Uncle Willy began to pule, thanking God for all the wonderful food and for having us all together to celebrate Kahealani’s first birthday. I peeked out over my fingers and saw that everyone had their heads bowed.

I never understood the whole praying thing. I know there’s a God and a son named Jesus Christ who died for our sins, but I never felt anything and I knew I was supposed to. Sometimes I think that God is like the Emperor’s new clothes. Everyone says they can see it, but they’re just lying because they don’t want to be the only ones who can’t see. That’s how I feel sometimes about God, and yet I pray every night for my Mother and my Father and my sisters and the whole world in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

My Dad finished and everyone started lining up at the end of the food table. Since we’re the kids we got to go first. I was so hungry even after eating ice cream and the Spam Musubi. You know I did feel kind of bad that Robert didn’t get any, but oh well, you snooze, you lose. The smell was so ono. I couldn’t wait to eat the kalua pig Dad had pulled out of the imu this morning. I piled my plate with rice, potato salad, kalua pig, pulehu chicken, teri beef. I wanted to put more on top but I didn’t have any room. So I got a second plate and put some squid luau, and shoyu chicken on it. Me and Robert sat down on the sand away from the other kids so we could talk story about school and surfing. Mema wanted to come and sit next to us but I stuck my tongue out at her and she sat down with my sisters and some of my other cousins. We could hear the older folks laughing and joking. Aunty Mahealani was still singing and my sister Pi’i was dancing the hula. I think the song was He Aloha Mele. My sister was always dancing that song at
parties. She liked the attention. She looked really pretty with her black hair blowing around her waist as she swayed to the rhythm. Someone was yelling we should've brought some pahus and ipus and someone yelled out, that's too much work, then someone started a beat on the back of a guitar. Oom pa oom pa pa. Oom pa oom pa pa.

Robert started tapping his feet to the beat. I knew he was part of a halau.

You should go dance.

Nah, I stay shame. Surf first. Nah, nah, nah, eat first, then surf.

Alright brah, sounds good.

I could hear Uncle Willy laughing and talking to my Dad.

So, Kawika said he like go out with me on the canoe today.

Really?

Yeah he wen promise he going come out with me for catch fish for eat later on.

I thought he was going surf.

Ah dunno. He said he was goin’ come wit me. Eh, Kawika? You goin’ come fishing wit me later on?

I like go, but I wen promise Robert we was goin’ surfing after we pau eat. Maybe bumbai we can go.

If das what you like do. We can go bumbai wen you pau surf.

He turned back towards my Dad and took a big drink of his beer.

I felt really bad, but I didn’t really want to go fishin’ with him.

Man, you almost had to go fishin’ with your Uncle, shoot dat was close.

Nah, I wanted for go, but I said I was goin’ surf wit you too.

Whateva.
We finished eating and sat around listening to the old folks drinking and singing. I watched my little sister being passed around as everyone kissed and bounced her. I think mom was surprised she wasn’t crying. I couldn’t remember my first baby luau, but my Mom said that I cried so much that they ended up giving me some whiskey in my milk to shut me up. She said I knocked right out after that.

We walked over to Mema. She was giggling with some of my other cousins and pointing at Robert.

You pau eat or what? We goin’ go show you where we goin’ surf.

We went to the edge of the sand where the lava rocks started and I pointed to the break.

You guys lolo. I wouldn’t surf dat if you paid me. No way, Jose. You guys can go by yourselves. I not lolo, I not goin’.

What? You stay chicken?

No, I not crazy.

We neva like you come anyway.

I goin’ tell your mada you wen say that.

So. Go. I no care.

I goin’ tell on you Kawika, den your mada not goin’ let you surf.

You betta not or I goin’ give you dirty lickins.

You and what army, uku boy.

I lifted my fist and she ran. Beep. Beep.
Robert laughed and we started climbing over the lava rocks, heading toward the short break. The sun was burning my neck but it felt really good to be away from the family. All that pinching and groping and kissing. I just wanted to eat and surf.

We jumped off the rocks into the water, careful not to put our feet down on the coral, didn’t want to get cut up or have to pee on our legs because of the wana. I duck dived under the first wave, swimming out to behind the break. I pushed myself up on my boogie board to look at where the wave was breaking so I wouldn’t end up crashing into the lava. Robert was right next to me pushed up on his board looking for his first wave. Robert was a pretty good boarder. He could do a couple of 360 spins before he came into shore. I wasn’t too good with the 360 but I could shred through any wave and still be able to pull out before wiping out.

He paddled into the first wave of the set but didn’t paddle fast enough so he dropped off and came back towards me. There was no one else out at this spot so we pretty much had the whole break to ourselves. I hit the third wave of the set, paddling hard to get on it. I barrel rolled, flipping off the lip, getting ahead of the barrel before it closed off. I finished carving up what was left of the wave and flipped over the top, dropping down on the backside.

You wen shred, brah.

No joke? Phew, I thought my ‘olos was gone fo shuah.

Nah, not you. You stay cool as a cucumber.

We floated there waiting for the next swell to come in. I stared at the reef below me. I saw the manini picking at the limu on the coral and the rocks and the yellow tang darting from rock to rock.
Eh brah, that’s not your Uncle Willy’s outrigger out there, is it?

Looks like it. I wonder where he stay? He no dive and there’s a one mile drop right outside da bay.

Maybe he wen drink too much.

Nah, he no go out like dat. We betta swim in and see if he stay on shore.

Man, we just got out hea.

You can stay if you like, I no care.

Brah no be like dat. I stay comin’.

We paddled back to shore. We walked quickly over the hot lava rocks back to the party. I couldn’t see Uncle Willy, so I went up to my Dad and asked him where he was.

You know he wen go out to catch some more fish for da party.

But I thought he wasn’t goin’ go if I neva go.

Well he wen go.

He no stay on da canoe.

What you said?

Me and Robert wen go surfing and we wen see Uncle Willy’s canoe way out past the bay markers. We thought someone wen let his canoe loose.

We betta go check em.

My dad pushed himself up from the picnic table.

Eh brahda Keala come get the other canoe. We gotta go check on Willy.

They pulled the other canoe into the open water. I watched them paddle out to the markers. We couldn’t see Uncle Willy’s canoe from the beach, but we saw my dad and Uncle Keala pull to the left of the markers and soon they were behind the lava rocks
where me and Robert were surfing. We all waited. I hoped nothing was wrong with
Uncle Willy. Robert put his arm around my shoulder.

No worries, brah. He stay all right. No worries.

We saw my Dad and Uncle Keala come back from behind the lava rocks towing
Uncle Willy’s canoe and paddling as fast as they could. They were shouting. I saw one of
my other Uncles run off to the pay phone near the dock. Mom started shouting. Aunty
Mahealani put her arms around my Mom who started to cry. I started to get scared. Why
was everyone so worried? This was Uncle Willy. The guy who looks like an Aborigine
and an ancient Indian and threw beer cans at Mr. Kanazawa. There was nothing wrong
with him.

My Dad dragged his canoe onto the beach while Uncle Keala pulled Uncle Willy’s
canoe on to the sand next to Dad. Inside the canoe was Uncle Willy, just laying there. He
didn’t look so much like an Indian. He looked like spilled fruit punch wiped up with a
paper towel. Dad pulled him out of the canoe and I could hear Mom and the Aunties
crying. Dad laid him on the sand next to the plank that leads to his house. Nobody
touched him after that, not until the ambulance came. Even the men’s cheeks were wet. I
didn’t know how to feel. I even saw Mema crying and I wondered why. She didn’t even
like Uncle Willy because he liked to hug her a lot. I wondered what happened. Was he
sleeping? Was he dead like my cousin? Were we going to have to bury him, too? I should
have gone fishing with him. I said I would go. He could have waited for me.

The ambulance showed up. The whirring sirens and flashing lights reminded me of
TV cop shows. A shoot out at a bank, the crooks’ bodies being taken by the ambulance.
The guys in the ambulance came out carrying bags, running up to Uncle Willy. They
were asking questions and I didn’t really understand what they were saying. Uncle Willy was still just lying there in the sand. I couldn’t see the sweat on his face. I could still hear my mother crying. I could see my father holding her.

The men from the ambulance were pushing Uncle Willy’s chest and hooking him up to something. One of the guys went to the back of the ambulance and got a stretcher. The guy near Uncle Willy looked mad, like my Uncle had done something bad. Uncle Willy was like the crooks at the bank shootout. They did something wrong and they got to ride in an ambulance, and now it was Uncle Willy’s turn to ride in the ambulance, his red skin covered in a white sheet as they put him into the back. Wee ooh. Wee ooh. Wee ooh.
Dirty Lickins

Sherri and I were walking home from school when we saw Roger playing in the street. We always walked through Kaimalino Housing. That’s where all the people on food stamps lived. Kaimalino was old with paint that looked like black lines dripping down to the concrete and skinny louvered windows that stared down at us. Roger was in Mr. Chee’s class with us, but we knew he was lolo because he went to a special room for lolo kids. His hair was always dirty, he probably had ukus, and his clothes were always ripped up and holey. Even his slippahs had holes in them. Kaimalino had a huge monkey pod tree that dropped pods all down the slanting street, getting squished by cars, and sometimes we would throw the pods at some of the kids that lived there because they were on food stamps and my mom said that people on food stamps were lazy.

Teri, dea stay Rogah. Let’s go make fun of him, let’s try make him cry.

Nah, I no like.
How come? You chicken?

I no stay chicken. I just like go home watch She-Ra. Let's just throw some monkey pods at him and go home. I still gotta cook rice and clean da bathroom before I get dirty lickins.

Shoots, we go.

I liked Sherri. She lived two streets up from me, and she was in the same Ward. We played together at school and sometimes at church, if we could get away with it, and told people that we were calabash cousins, even though we really wanted to be sisters. Walking over to where Roger was playing with his Transformers, I wondered where he got them because his mom was on Welfare and both my parents worked, and I never got toys to play with. I didn't even have a Barbie doll. Sherri bent down and picked up a pod from the ground. It looked like a long curving claw that belonged to one of those monsters we read about in school during story time. She started to sing Rogah is lolo, Rogah is lolo, and she threw the pod at his face. She missed, but Roger looked up and smiled.

Why you stay smiling? Stupid ha'ole. Don't you know when people stay making fun of you?

I picked up a pod, the sap sticking to my fingers and threw it at his head. I didn't miss, and he started crying.

Rogah is lolo. Rogah is lolo.

Why for you stay crying, ha'ole? Stop crying, or else we going beef you. You like me give you something to cry about? I going, you know if you no stop crying.
He just kept crying. Hanabata was hanging down his nose, and he wasn’t even wiping it off. I just wanted to keep throwing monkey pods until he knew how stupid he looked. I bent down to pick up another pod, but my hand grabbed a rock. It felt sharp in my hands and the gray dirt stuck to the sap between my fingers and on my palm. I saw Roger’s head, and all I wanted to do was throw that rock as hard as I could. Maybe then he would stop being so lolo and I would stop wanting to hurt him.

Rogah is lolo. Rogah is lolo.

And, all I wanted to do was stop her and stop him. I knew if I threw it hard enough, they would both shut up. I just wanted to throw and throw. Stop crying, stop crying, stop crying. I lifted my arm over my head and let fly.

Rogah is lolo. Rogah is lolo. Rogah is lolo.

The rock hit him right in the face and Sherri shut up. He just sat there, not crying, and I wanted to tell him, what, one rock finally shut you up, but I didn’t. Then, he started to cry, but it wasn’t the loud cry from before, it was a quiet cry. His body just shook, and I didn’t like it. I wanted the loud cry back. I wanted to hear him really cry. Sherri touched my arm. We started walking, and I could just barely hear Roger crying, and I wasn’t mad at him for being lolo anymore and for having Transformers when I couldn’t even have a Barbie. I just wanted to go home and watch cartoons.

I got home and cleaned the bathroom and straightened up my room and cooked the rice and did my homework in front of the TV. He-Man was fighting the evil Skeletor and She-Ra was lost and the SDF-1 was stranded out towards Pluto and had to fight its way back through the Zentradi fleet to Earth. I heard my mom’s car in the garage. She was home early. I quickly turned off the TV and sat at the kitchen table, pretending I was
doing my homework. 9 times 9 is 81. 8 times 9 is 72. I hated the times tables, but we got
gold stars, if we finished the fastest. My mom came in; I got up and gave her a kiss. She
smelled like the bank she worked at, like money, or, how I thought money smelled like.

How was your day, mom?

Teri-girl, how come you didn’t change out of your school clothes? Didn’t you clean
the bathroom today? I thought I told you to clean the bathroom.

I did clean it.

Don’t you talk back to me.

She turned me around and pulled at my school clothes. Then, she walked into the
bathroom and lifted the seat.

I see you did clean it. Well as long as you didn’t ruin your school clothes. Go change
right now, and come help me with dinner.

Yes, mom.

After I changed clothes, I walked back into the kitchen and my mom was standing by
the sink, washing lettuce.

Teri-girl, where’s the Tupperware you took your lunch in?

In my backpack.

You never clean them out yet?

No, I neva.

You come here, right now.

Why?

Don’t you make me ask you again.
I walked over to her at the kitchen sink and she had the big wooden spoon in her hand. I knew I was going to get it, because I forgot to clean out her Tupperware when I got home. She hit me on the head real hard because I have a real hard head, at least that’s what she says, and I start crying.

No cry or I going really give you something to cry about.

She raised the spoon above my head. I tried to stop crying, but my head really hurt. I rubbed my nose on my shirtsleeve and she hit me on the head again. Damn that spoon hurt. I was grateful that was the first thing she grabbed to hit me with. Could’ve been my dad’s army belt. One time she got so mad at me and my baby sister because we ate all her Oreos that she made us pull down our pants and she had my dad give us lickins with his army belt. That belt had ridges on its buckle to keep the belt in place and when my dad whacked me with that part of it, it would catch and yank skin off. My ‘okole was sore for weeks. I even had to go to a slumber party, where all the girls showered together, and I couldn’t because I didn’t want them to see the bruises and scabs. So I was pretty happy it was just the wooden spoon and not the belt, or the vacuum cord, or the cast iron frying pan, or the back of a knife. I rubbed my face on my sleeve again.

Go get it, now.

She hit me on my ‘okole as I walked to my backpack by the kitchen table. I pulled out the yellow square as big as my hands. There was still food inside and I knew my mom would know that I ate school lunch instead of home lunch, and I was really going to get it, but it was hamburger day and that beats mushy canned corn beef any day.
You kids, you neva appreciate anything. Dad and I, we work all day. Your dad, he gets up four o’clock in the morning to work at the hotel and for what? So his kids no appreciate what he works so hard for buy?

She raised the spoon again. I tried to duck out of the way when I gave her the Tupperware, but she pulled on one of my braids, yanking me back towards the sink. I almost yelled out, but I knew if I did she would pop me one in the mouth.

What is this? You neva eat your lunch?

I didn’t want to say anything, but I knew that she would whack me if I didn’t.

I neva like eat em, was hambaga day at school, so I when eat that.

I was crying. Her hand was still pulling my hair. I wondered if my older sister hadn’t braided my hair, would mom have been able to grab me so easily? I hated my sister. This was all her fault. She should never have braided my hair. I wouldn’t be getting lickins from my mom, if it wasn’t for her.

So you when eat that, huh? You when waste good food, so you can eat hamburger? Well you going eat it now.

She opened up the container, a stinky sweet smell reached out to my nose. She shoved the Tupperware in my face.

Eat it, eat it now. I want you to lick it clean.

I don’t want to.

She hit me across the back and then on the head again.

If you don’t, I’m getting the belt. Eat it.

The smell made me want to throw up, and I didn’t want to eat it, but I knew that if I didn’t, she would really give me dirty dirty lickins, so I lifted the mushy sandwich to my
mouth and shoved it in because I really didn’t want it in my mouth, and I held my breath as I chewed and my mother just stared at me with that look. I swear she just wanted to break me into little pieces and dump me in the ocean. I was trying so hard not to cry and I wanted to really throw up because I had to breathe and the mushy sandwich was so gross, but if I spit it out, she would get the belt. I swallowed and she hit me on the head again, and I ran to the bathroom and threw up. She came running after me.

Why are you throwing up? Don’t you dare throw up!

I couldn’t stop. I just kept throwing up and crying, and I was glad I did change into my home clothes because there was hanabata and mushy corn beef and Roman Meal bread down the front of my t-shirt. I couldn’t breathe. I tried to put my hands over my head, but she just kept hitting me again and again, and I couldn’t stop heaving. I wanted her to stop. I wanted her to be a good mother. I wanted her to bake cookies. My hands felt broken as she hit them out of the way. Finally, she stop hitting me and sat down next to me.

I’m sorry. Sometimes you kids make me so mad.

She rubbed my back right where she hit me and I tried not to move.

Why don’t you go ‘au ‘au, and then go to bed. I’ll bring you some milk to settle your stomach.

She got up and walked out. I tried to stand, but my legs wouldn’t hold me up. I crawled into the shower and took off my home clothes and tried to clean myself up. I couldn’t stop crying. On TV, parents don’t make their kids eat rotten food. I wiped myself off and picked up my throw up clothes. I put on my sleeping clothes and knelt down by my bed.
Dear Heavenly Father, please forgive my mother and father for what they have done to me, and please forgive my mother for making me eat rotten food, and please bless my sisters and Sherri, and also please bless Roger. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. Stop crying.

Stop crying.
Our mango tree died the day Tita was born. It was not the slow death of starvation, but a quick moment of green, turned to scorched leaves and rotting fruit. Pulp blackened as foul waves filled the yard, strangling the soft, sweet perfume of tuberose. We believed the tree had died from blight, festering deep before bursting forth. As its neighbors, the tangerine and mountain apple, did not suffer a similar fate.

A source of comfort, our tree had provided many a May Day pickle, filling bazaar tables with mayonnaise jars of green and pink. The time spent creating these pre-summer delicacies reinforced family bonds, smiles and laughter filling the warm air. Children climbed outstretched limbs. Less adventurous adults grabbed branches with hooks on long bamboo poles. Each reached for clusters of unripened fruit. “Watch out! Don’t fall! Don’t break the branch. Pull gently.” Branches shook as clusters quivered and fell,
crashing to the dirt. Kids too small to climb dodged plummeting fruit. “Be careful! Stop running around! Help pick the mangoes off the ground.”

Overflowing sacks sprawled on clean linoleum floors as we washed, peeled, and sliced. We treated ourselves to a quick bite of shoyu and vinegar soaked pieces, the tart saltiness filling our mouths. Jars and their blue lids waited, still hot from the stove. A gallon jug that once held sticky red syrup now carried pink vinegar, which we poured into mango-filled bottles, as stained fingers pressed down firm green slices. We’d line them up in the icebox out back, “Now, make sure you don’t touch any of the pickle mango.”

After a few days, we would pack them up and bring them to the school’s playground. Our table sat next to the royal court’s stages. Each stage, an island decorated in its royal color: red for Hawaii, yellow for Oahu, white for Niihau, upon which princesses sat, adorned in lehua, mokihana, and hinahina blossoms, their escorts dripping in maile leis, fragrant green vines brushing against knees. With people lining up to buy our family specialty, we prided ourselves on selling all of our pickles every year.

Tita’s birth overshadowed our loss, for a little while. When she came into the world, she was a bundle of stillness, and she did not greet us with a hearty cry to prove her existence. When we took her home from the hospital, the nurses admired her silence, “What a good baby.” She never smiled. She didn’t even cry, her pink limbs flailing to be comforted. We could not bring ourselves to admit, to pierce the air around her with a suggestion of abnormality. We wanted a giggle, a gurgle, a goo. We searched for any sign of the ordinary.

In her crib, she would stare beyond her tropical fish mobile, lazily spinning in the afternoon breeze, out the louvered window at some imperceptible point. We could sense
her concentration, a palpable entity next to her once thoroughly examined, now unused and unloved toys. We wondered, and we waited. We hoped she would respond to our attempts at cajolery, distorted faces and high-pitched noises “Look at daddy. Smile at mommy. Who’s got cute little feet? Auntie’s going to eat those cute little feet,” all competing with an alien indifference.

She did not acknowledge her bodily discomforts. She accepted our ministrations without compliance or complaint. When we changed her diaper, decorated in ducks and butterflies, she would shift her eyes and meet ours, briefly, no kicking legs, wandering hands, or urine-discharging arcs, just a simple lack of acknowledgement. We never knew when she was hungry. A cry never woke us in the middle of the night. There were no struggles for who gets to sleep and who has to wake up. When she did eat, we saw her tongue, methodically exploring the bottle’s nipple, her hands moving over smooth sides. We wanted her to take pleasure in phenomena, in consumption and excretion, but she gave us nothing.

Finally, we took her out into the world, her fine dark hair in pink bows. Her little feet in white frilly socks and black mary janes. Anxiously, we awaited some signal, a message of appreciation from her. Passersby would coo and tickle as we walked through a store. She would give each admirer a cursory scan, never consenting to demean herself with the expected giggle or hand grasp. “Isn’t she a cute baby? How many months? Is she alright?” We hoped.

We began to avoid her. We didn’t want to hold her. We would walk past her room, denying her existence. No peek-a-boo. No sweet lullabies. No make-believe. We were afraid.
Then, one day, Tita began to walk.

She picked herself up and walked out of her room. No wobbles. No suddenly swift sit downs. Just her little legs walking as if it were the easiest thing in the world, as if man had never once walked hunched over, knuckles dragging through the dirt. She strode along the hallway, through the bedrooms, intently examining each item. Her hands were not the clumsy tools of an infant but skillful instruments sliding along edges and around corners. They did not linger or pause. We thought what an exceptional child and welcomed her genius as if her actions were a result of our own manufacture. Deftly, she lifted and replaced the substances of our lives as if their nature were fleeting. “What is she doing? What is she looking for?”

At last, she walked into the kitchen, her bare feet slapping against the floor and her hands gliding along cabinets and the icebox door. She stopped when she saw the screen door to our backyard. She stared. We could hear her breathing, deep and slow. We could not remember the last time we heard her breath, and we embraced its deliberate passage. We followed her gaze to the darkened remnants of our mango tree. The sickly sweet smell of ruptured fruit, littering the sparsely green ground, drifted in on the trades. We pushed the screen door open. “Do you want to go outside? Do you want to play? What do you want?”

She turned around, went back to her room, and stopped walking, altogether.

Her silence infected our lives. Still afraid to voice our fears, words drifted through our minds: aberrant, unnatural, odd. We needed her to be more than a confirmation of our genius. So, we began to question our own desires as we observed her. It was as if a
bubble had formed around her, pushing outward from her being, encroaching on our lives. Unknowingly, we welcomed its empty embrace.

In the night, an aroma floated through our house, and we followed its trail back to Tita’s room. As she lay in her crib, we stepped closer to discover that the smell came from her little body. Immediately, we identified the scent of mango flowers. We picked her up, but touching her released a stronger fragrance as if we had rubbed our thumb against a tiny petal, bruising it. Her eyes were closed and she did not open them when we placed her back in her crib. We prayed.

Tita died the day our mango tree was born. It was immediate. One moment of careful consideration transformed into a release of pressure confined too long. Our mango tree sprung back to life the minute Tita took her last breath, spreading branches and flowering fruit, sprouting back into our existence.
Ulu’s Gift

A cool breeze danced across my skin as I sat on the lanai waiting for my sister to come home. I searched for her dark hair through the branches of the coffee trees, but I couldn’t find her. Legs swinging, my bare feet bumping the railing, I thought about how she had promises to take me out to look for menehune tonight. I’d heard that menehune were like the dancing leprechaun on the Lucky Charms commercial. When I asked Ulu what she thought, she said leprechauns were silly because they were always trying to hide their pot of gold, but menehune were useful and hardworking because they built stuff we could use. I imagined a secret army, in one night, making stonewalls, fishponds, and taro patches.

I decided to walk through the coffee field, hoping to meet up with Ulu before she got home. The rows towered over me and I was glad it was still day time. I wasn’t scared but you can never be too safe from the Obake. I could see that the leafy branches were half
full of red beans, and I knew we would have to start picking soon. I hated coffee picking season. You walk around all day with a basket strapped to your stomach and you have to pick only the red beans, because if you pick the green beans you get dirty lickins. If you talk too much or fight with your sister, you had to keep the sticky beans in your mouth, or else. But, I rather pick coffee than mac nuts. That’s much worse. You have to bend over and run your hands through the fallen macadamia leaves searching for nuts. You can’t use gloves because you might miss the nuts and those leaves are sharp and pointy.

I found Ulu reading under the breadfruit tree. She was always reading. She didn’t really watch TV. She said you learned more from books. I didn’t like learning and I sure didn’t like reading. One time, I picked up one of her books, My Life in the Land of Milu, and started reading:

I was six before I learned the meaning of bad and good, because at that time my father decided he preferred me over my other sisters and the attention was not unwanted. When no one else was home, he would pull me towards him and make me kneel, petting my hair and calling me a good girl. So it was here that I understood the meaning of good because I did as my father asked and did not yet know the meaning of bad.

My father was a fisherman. Well, that’s what he thought of himself, but really he worked in a hotel kitchen at one of the resorts. He wasn’t happy about waking up at three in the morning to cook breakfast and lunch for tourists, but you don’t make money as a fisherman, at least that’s what my mother said. My mother was a teller who handled money all day long and came home later than my father. This left plenty of opportunities for my father to spend time with me as all of my sisters were older and did not come home from school until much later.
In those days, my parents fought many battles and some of them were as follows: money wars, housework wars, marijuana wars, porn wars and cheating wars. Cheating wars were more common than any other war in our house. This was very bad luck for us because that meant we may have to a) watch my mother run around the house with a meat cleaver chasing my father, b) pack up the car with all of our belongings and sleep in a parking lot for the night, or c) get locked in my parents’ bedroom as my mother cuts all her underwear into tiny little shreds. On any given night, it could be all three or any combination of the three. The first time I saw my mother chase my father with a meat cleaver I was four and I thought it was normal. My sisters would try to leave the house when this happened, but my mother always found a way to keep them with her.

When my mother thought my father was cheating, she would throw his clothes out of the closet, searching for the porn she knew would be hiding there. Whatever she found, she would show us what a disgusting man our father was and I would see naked people: men and women, women and women, sometimes there would be two men and one woman. My mother would take all these magazines outside and burn them in our fire pit and an eerie high-pitched shriek would travel up through the smoke. I always imagined it to be the ghosts of the people trapped in the magazines, caught forever, burning in the flames.

Since I was the youngest, no one paid much attention to me, so I would hide in the hallway closet. My friend Rose would join me. She never came when anyone else was there. I never minded. She was a good friend. Sometimes we would play hide and seek, but she would always win because I could never find her. Once, out of the corner of my eye, I saw her peeking out from the kitchen when I was alone with my father. She shook
her head and popped back behind the wall before I could stop what I was doing. I was surprised, since she never showed herself to anyone but me.

Rose said she lived next door and that she was bored. So, she had decided to come over and play with me. I didn’t mind. I didn’t have anything else to do except watch TV and I wasn’t always allowed to do that. She told me that there wasn’t anyone at home most of the time. I asked her what her parents did, but she always wanted to play, instead of talking. She was good at keeping me company when I was lonely. I always wondered why she never came around when anyone else was home and I never saw her at school. What did she do all day long before I saw her? She would show up when I got home from school and leave when my sisters came home. She didn’t like to come over on the weekends. She told me that she didn’t like my family very much and that she preferred to play just with me. I never really asked her why she was always disappearing.

One weekend, because my father was a fisherman, we went camping. My mother hated to camp. She said it was dirty and she had better things to do then sit around in the shade waiting to cook food for everybody. I guess she didn’t like swimming or lying in the sun. She said that all the spots on her face were from the sun when she was a child. So, instead of enjoying herself, she sat and grumbled.

The great thing about camping was the beach, because we got to stay in our bathing suits the whole time. We swam. We tanned. We ate. It usually was great as long as my parents didn’t have any of their wars. At night, we would sit around the cooking fire and watch the flames jump and spark and the ashes float away. Sometimes on these camping trips, when my mother had been drinking, my father would spend time with me. This time was no different. He pulled me to the back of the tent when I saw my mother out of
the corner of my eye. She saw what my father was doing and started to swear at me. She pulled me away by the strap of my bathing suit, tearing it. She screamed at me. Telling me I was a bad girl because I did as my father asked. And here I thought I had learned the meaning of bad. On and on my mother screamed as she dragged me across the sand by my bathing suit. No one stopped her and no one helped me, and I couldn’t see my father. She stopped at the edge of the water still screaming about how disgusting I was and what a bad girl I was and how I didn’t deserve the roof over my head that she provided. I cried, but she did not hear me.

Then, my mother tossed me into the sea.

When I finished reading, I felt really sad and I wondered what kind mother throws her daughter into the sea, and what kind father does that kind stuff. Why would anybody want to read this? I just didn’t get it.

After that, I stopped trying to read anything my sister had in her room. It just was a waste of time. Plus, I would much rather watch TV. You could see the whole world on the television, the jungles of Africa, the skyscrapers of New York, the North Pole, and outer space, too. There were no children being hurt or killed by their parents.

Ulu looked up at me as I walked out of the coffee field and smiled. I always thought it was funny to be named after a tree. She told me that the ulu tree was great. You could make poi, stew and even dessert from the fruit and bowls and utensils from the wood. I really didn’t like ulu poi. It’s yellow and smells like BO. I like the dark purple color and sour taste of taro poi. If you look at the taro plant, you can see that it looks like a person. The leaf looks like a big head, the stalk like a long neck and the taro root like a big roly
polly body. The ancient Hawaiians believed that humans were created from the taro plant and that the taro is our brother.

So, we goin’ go look for menehune tonight?

Yeah, yeah. We goin’ stay at Aunty Hau’s house coz she not going baddah us.

Shoots. Wen we goin’?

Wen I pau read dis chapter.

Watchu reading?

None of your beeswax!

No get all futless. I was jus askin’. You not still reading that Milu book.

What Milu book?

You know the one with the girl getting thrown into the ocean by her mada?

Whatchu was doing, reading my books? You know you not supposed to be in my room.

I wasn’t being ni’ele. I just wanted to see what was so great about reading, das all.

Well, dat kine book not good for you. It’s for adults.

You not one adult.

So, I can read like one adult. Anyway, I pau with dat book already.

Oh yeah? What happened to the girl?

She wen go to the underworld and she had to work hard as a slave in the house of a ghost and her friend would visit her but wouldn’t help her escape.

What? That no make sense.

That’s why I told you not to read my books! They not for you. Just kule kule and let me pau reading this chapter.
So, I sat down next to her. I really didn’t care what she was reading. She’s just weird. All I wanted to do was find some menehune. Ulu is the only person I know who can see menehune. Weird stuff is always happening to her, especially the last time we went camping. We were all sleeping, and all of a sudden my dad woke me up. Before I could say anything, he shook his head and pointed at Ulu sleeping next to me. I could see that Ulu’s hair was moving but there was no wind. It was so still I couldn’t even hear the ocean. We just sat there watching as her long hair moved around her shoulders. I looked at my dad and he didn’t seem scared. Then, the smell of maile leaf drifted over us and I got major chicken skin and all I wanted to do was hide under the blanket. I couldn’t believe she hadn’t woken up yet. I know I would definitely get up if someone was touching my hair. Then, the smell was gone and Ulu’s hair just dropped back onto her shoulders. My dad walked over to her and woke her up. He asked if everything was okay. She told us she had the nicest dream. She was sitting in the rainforest reading when she met some girls. They told her how much they loved her hair and ran their fingers through it. Then, she watched them gather maile leaf and lehua blossoms to weave a lei po’o and they put it on her head. Ulu said she didn’t mind and that it was very nice. They had to leave, but asked if they could visit again, and that’s when daddy woke her up. Dad told her that every time we go camping, he saw her hair moving at night, but he always thought it was just the wind. This time there wasn’t any kind wind and Ulu’s hair was still moving. Dad said he wasn’t surprised because this stuff happened to his mom, too. I knew there was something different about Grandma, but I never thought she was like Ulu.

All pau. You ready?

Watchu think?
No act. I not goin’ take you to find menehune if you keep it up.

Sorrys. I just like go already.

They no come out ‘til night time, so stop being so kolohe.

I followed Ulu through the coffee fields. I just wanted to run, like running would make the sun go down any faster. Ulu told me that the ancient Hawaiians used to have men who ran around the island delivering messages for the Ali‘i. There were runners’ trails all over. I imagined that I was running to save the kingdom from evil invaders.

As we walked to Aunty Hau’s house, Ulu and I talked story about school. Ulu said her teacher Mr. Chee was going let her tutor her classmates because she was such a good student. Sometimes Ulu can be high maka maka. Most of the time I don’t mind, but when she starts bragging about it, I just want her to shut it. I guess it’s because I’m not doing so well in school. It’s just so boring. I don’t mind ukulele class. That’s fun, making your fingers dance like ukus over the strings. I’m getting pretty good, but you don’t see me bragging about winning an award for best ukulele player in my class.

How come you read so much?

I learn all kind stuff and I can travel all over.

What? You just reading some words, you not going anywhere.

You so lolo. Of course, I no go someplace for reals, but my mind can go anywhere the books take me. You know like that Milu book you read.

I never like that book. It made me sad and I only read the first chapter. How come you like read that kind stuff? You want to see children get hurt and killed by their parents?
No, that’s not why I read it. I read it because the girl goes to the underworld. She gets away from her bad parents and she lives a whole new life. She learns from all kinds of people. She’d never have done that if her mother hadn’t thrown her in the ocean.

I don’t get it. So she was killed and you okay with that?

I not okay with that, but she wasn’t really happy was she?

No, why didn’t she tell somebody what was happening?

That’s not really the story, is it?

I thought about that as we got to Aunty Hau’s house, she had just finished making dinner, my favorite beef stew with rice. Aunty Hau was easy. She always asked how school was going and I would let Ulu do all the talking. They always liked Ulu. I think it’s because she’s so smart and she always listened to the adults. I mean really listened not pretend listen, when you just nod your head and say oh yeah now and then. Ulu says that’s how you get them to do stuff for you. I tried listening to Aunty Hau, but after she talked about her sore back and how much she needed a massage from the tutu kahuna for the third time, I just couldn’t. I kept staring at the taro on her neck, hoping that I’d never grow taro on my neck. After we pau eat, we watched the sunset from the lanai. I love watching the sunset. I always look for the green flash. Sometimes, I think I see the green flash because I’ve been staring at the sun for too long.

I strummed Aunty Hau’s ukulele. It’s the only time outside of school I get to play. My fingers danced over the strings, picking a C here and a G there. I really wanted an ukulele, but my parents said that it was useless and that I should learn to play the piano, instead. Nobody cared if you played the ukulele. Ulu played the piano since she was four. My parents made me take lessons, but I hated the metronome. Every time I heard it tick
tocking, I wanted to throw it at the teacher’s head. Of course, that’s not what good little girls do. I would never practice and my parents finally said it was a waste of money and stopped paying the piano teacher for my lessons, but Ulu, always being the good girl, still had lessons every week. I would tease her and say that she was a kiss ass, and she would say that I was so lolo and one hard head. I don’t care what she says. I going buy my own ukulele when I get older and no one’s going to tell me that I can’t. I looked over at Ulu and saw that she was reading again. Always reading. Sometimes, she read so much I think her brain going get so big her head going pop! I started playing a song about centipedes, trying to get her to laugh, but she was so into her book, she didn’t even look up.

We waited for the quiet snores from the living room. When the stars started to come out, Ulu got the flashlights we had brought from our house.

You stay ready?

Yeah.

You stay scared?

No way jose.

We walked across the road and into the rainforest. We really didn’t need the flashlight, the moon was so bright and I wasn’t scared. I didn’t know where Ulu was taking me, but I was wondering if hunting for menehune was such a great idea. I started to imagine that the boogeyman was following me and I grabbed Ulu’s hand. She just looked down at me and smiled.

So, you no stay scared?

I let go and walked ahead of her. I didn’t want her to know how scared I was getting.
No worries. I know think you stay chicken.

I no care if you think I stay chicken, coz I’m not. Why I gotta be scared of some little menchune’s? What they going do to me?

Kule kule. I think I stay hear something.

I wanted to tell her to kule kule, but that’s when we heard drums. I didn’t really think it was anything, but Ulu got major chicken skin. I looked around and all I could see was the full moon shining through the trees. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky. The drums got louder. I tried to figure out where the sound was coming from. I looked up at the moon and there was a huge white circle around it.

You, stay close.

Why come?

I think the Night Marchers stay coming.

What? You stay joking.

Kule kule.

I no believe in the Night Marchers. What they going do?

If we stay out here, they going take us with them.

What? Not even.

The only stories I’d heard were about the Night Marchers walking where nobody lived like on the lava flows down south, and if you happened to be in their way, they would carry you off with them. The drums started to get louder and I saw a row of fire coming down the mountain. Ulu started to pull me back to Aunty Hau’s, but I couldn’t move. I didn’t want to go to the underworld. I didn’t want to be the slave of some ghost.
The sound kept getting louder. I think it was way too late to try and get back to the house, so she told me lay on the ground face down.

No try look!

As I tried to lay on the ground, making myself as flat as possible, I could hear water hitting the dirt and I remembered what you’re supposed to do when the Night Marchers come. I knew I shouldn’t laugh, but I couldn’t help it. I started to giggle as I thought about how the same thing that protects you from the Night Marchers also helps when a wana needle gets stuck in your foot. Then, all of a sudden I didn’t feel like laughing anymore. Although I couldn’t see what she was doing, I knew she was trying to save me. Then, she lay down next to me and we waited. I was so scared, but she just kept telling me to keep my eyes closed as the drums started to sound like they were ready to pound us into the ground. I could feel something walking very near us. I couldn’t hear feet on the dirt or the leaves on the trees moving, but I knew something was there. I just kept my eyes closed and hoped that they wouldn’t touch us. I really didn’t want to die.

Finally, the drums started to get softer, but Ulu kept my head down and told me to wait. I listened because I still had chicken skin, and there was no way I wanted to become a Night Marcher. Ulu told me I could lift my head, but I didn’t see anything except for this big wet circle around us. There were no footprints. You’d think they’d leave footprints.

We stood up and I didn’t care if there was pee on me and I hugged Ulu.

You okay?

I shook my head and I thought about that stupid book. I thought about that poor girl and how no one had really loved her, and I hugged Ulu again, really hard. I didn’t think I
wanted to look for Menehune anymore, and we walked quickly to Aunty Hau’s and we didn’t look back.
Pele’s Daughter

The ocean. I can hear it, even here in the church. I want to be out there, but Aunty Haole is dead. I try to peek at her through the pukas between the heads of the aunties and uncles I haven’t met. She is lying in a white coffin, her ehu hair spread over a white satin pillow and she is wearing a white mu’umu’u I’ve never seen before. I shift my sore okole on the hard wooden seat and try to hear what the bishop is saying, but all I can make out is Heavenly Father this and Heavenly Father that. “Stop being ni’ele or I going pinch you,” my sister Ui whispers to me. So, I try to sit still.

Yesterday, we drove all the way from Kona to Naalehu. We had to stay with my Uncle Eddie Boy’s family. I hate staying with them. My cousins are so lolo. I wanted to stay at Aunty Haole’s house, but because of the funeral, Aunty Noe and Uncle Junior were staying there instead. The funeral is at the Mormon Church closest to Aunty Haole’s house. We’re Mormons, or that’s what my mom says. On the wall of our dining room is a
little picture with two hands in prayer. It says the family that prays together stays together.

I don’t get that. We pule all the time. We pule at breakfast, at lunch, and at dinner. I even have to pule before bed. All I want to do while I’m puleing is run away, but I can’t.

Where would I go? It’s an island, and I can’t swim to the mainland.

I hate the mu’umu’u my mom made me wear. I’m itchy. It’s hot and I feel trapped. Ui gives me the stink eye. She’s three years older than me, and she thinks she can boss me around. I give her the stink eye back and shift my okole away from her pinching fingers and wonder why Aunty Haole is dead.

“What stay Leukemia?” I ask her.

“When one evil spirit entahs da body and stay make you real sick and den sometimes da evil spirit stay very strong and you end up dead.”

“How come get one evil spirit dat do dat?”

“How should I know! I not one Kahuna. How come you asking all kind questions? Kule kule or I going tell mom you stay making any kind.”

I’m not making any kind but I don’t say anything because I know if I talk back, she’s going to tell on me, and then I really going get dirty lickins for being kolohe in church. I don’t know if an evil spirit caused my Aunty to die, but I know plenty people who have problems with evil spirits and they don’t make. What about New Year’s Eve when we light the thousand firecrackers at the front door to our house. Isn’t that to make sure the evil spirits don’t get in? And every time we general clean the house, mom goes around blessing everything with ti leaves and Hawaiian salt water. Did Aunty Haole not bless her house or light firecrackers to scare off the evil spirits?
The Bishop pules and we all say Amene and then people start getting up from their seats. I think they are going to look at Aunty Haole. I hate having to wear this ugly mu’umu’u and the haku on my head. The damn bougainvillea flowers keep falling out and the little branches keep poking me. At least Ui has to wear them, too. I hope she’s just as hot and itchy as I am. I give her the stink eye again, but she doesn’t see me. I wish I didn’t have to sit next to her. She pulls my hand away from where I am scratching under my bra strap. I just had to start wearing them and they’re so annoying. Ui pulls me up from my seat and drags my brother by his elbow. He doesn’t want to go, but she pinches him under his upper arm just like mom does and he moves. She drags us out into the aisle, “Hayaku! Move it or you goin’ lose it.”

As we walk, I remember when we used to visit her during the summer. She would let me play Pac Man and Pong on her Atari. She had cable, too, HBO, while all we got back home was The Movie Channel. She used to take me horseback riding around the ranch where she lived. It was on the edge of a cliff. There were huge pastures and little lava hills. I always wondered why the cows never ran off the edge. Aunty Haole used to let us sleep in. My mom never lets us do that. We always get up early, even if we didn’t have school, because we had to clean house or do yard work. I hate yard work. Aunty Haole, she let us sleep in and then she would French braid our hair. She would let us eat the good cereal with marshmallows or the chocolate cereal that made chocolate milk while we watched cartoons. My mom would never let us watch TV while we ate, and she would never buy us good cereal. One time, mom ran out of milk and she made us eat corn flakes with evaporated powdered milk. I never want to do that again. I remember, one time, Aunty Haole made us taro pancakes. They were big, purple and fluffy. I spread plenty
butter all over the top and then drowned them in coconut syrup. They was so ono. I ate like ten.

When she took me horseback riding, she would tell me stories about Pele, the fire goddess. She said that Pele wasn't really one of the original Hawaiian gods. She came from somewhere else and tried to settle on each of the Hawaiian Islands. First, she tried Kauai, but it was too wet. Then, she moved over to Maui, but she got bored too quickly. Finally, she settled for the Big Island. That always reminded me of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, not too wet, not too boring, but just right! Some say she was a beautiful pale woman with bright fire hair, brighter than Aunty Haole's. Some of the people around Kau believe that they are her children. I bet Pele looks just like Aunty Haole. She would talk about Pele's many lovers, like Kamapua'a, the pig god. There's a place in Puna, south of Naalehu, that's all kapakahi called Ka lua o Pele. This is where Kamapua'a finally caught her. Aunty Haole told me that Pele would kill most of her lovers, because they couldn't survive her anger when she'd throw her lava at them. Kamapua'a was the only one who could call on the rain to stop her. He also had power over the plants and the wild boars. Every time Pele tried to cover the land with lava, he would make everything grow again.

Aunty Haole stopped our horses to look at the horizon. Even with the wind blowing so hard that you'd think you'd huli off your horse, seeing where the ocean touches the sky, the dark meeting the light, somehow makes you just want to be quiet without being told to.

"Whachu you smell?" She asked.

I took a breath and all I smelled was cow doo doo.

"Besides that, you kolohe kid."

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"I dunno."

"Try think!"

So, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I thought about the ocean and the horses and the grasses we were riding in. I felt the wind and heard the surf. I opened my eyes and looked over at her. I wanted to tell her that I really didn’t know what I was smelling, but she looked so peaceful. Her eyes were closed and her ehu hair blew across her pale smile.

“No worries,” she said as she opened her eyes. “Just remember, you can always stop to smell the cow doo doo.” She laughed. You know she’s got a pretty laugh, not like my other aunties, whose whole bodies shake when they laugh. Aunty Haole’s laugh floats in the air, falling on your ear, soft as plumeria petals.

We continued riding back to the stable as she told me about a Maui Ali’i named ‘Ai’wohi ku pua, who was very handsome. While on his way to the Big Island to visit his lover Laie, he met Pele. Of course, he didn’t realize it was her, because she was in one of her very beautiful human forms. He watched her surfing and he just had to have her. They made love that evening and he left her the very next morning. When he reached the Big Island, he was seduced by Polihau, the goddess of the snowcapped mountains. He took Polihau to Kauai with him, but Pele followed them. Being very jealous, she chased them until she got him back. When ‘Ai’wohi ku pua dumped Polihau, she threw snow all over him and Pele until they separated. Then poor ‘Ai wohi ku pua was all alone. Aunty Haole said that’s what you get when you mess with the gods. I think the stories are funny because gods act just like they’re in soap operas. I told Aunty Haole that Pele sounds like she belongs on TV, on As the Ahupua’a Turns.
Even though we are Mormons, we still pay attention to the rules, especially Pele’s. Always pick up the old lady in white if you see her walking by the side of the road. Don’t carry pork over Saddle Road. Don’t remove any lava rocks from the island. We laugh at this rule because tourists think that they can get away with it and, yet, every year, they mail all the rocks back to Volcanoes National Park. They don’t believe us when we say that it’s bad luck to take lava. But they do it anyway. I giggle and my sister gives me the stink eye. Man, I going get it now. I look around and see that everyone is crying. Why am I not crying? I don’t really want to see Aunty Haole in her coffin. Should I start crying? It’s our turn and I see she has makeup on. She never wears makeup. She has too much blush on and there’s a light brown smudge on the short lace collar of her mu’umu’u. I want to wipe it off, but I’m afraid to touch her. We move past the coffin and turn around, and I see Aunty Noe, Aunty Haole’s mom, and she’s crying. She’s crying so much that her mascara is running down her face. Uncle Junior is trying to help her but he is crying, too. I’ve never really seen adults cry, and to see Uncle Junior crying makes me start crying, too. It hurts to cry. We walk past my mom, her brothers and sisters. I hug Aunty Noe and Uncle Junior. My hanabata starts to drip down to my mouth and I rub it on Uncle Junior’s dark aloha shirt. It’s rough against my nose. I don’t mean to do it, and the people behind him stare at me. I move away and follow Ui back to our seat.

I need Kleenex, but there isn’t any. I try to rub off the hanabata onto my mu’umu’u sleeve, but I know that if I do, I’m going to get it for messing it up. I try to stop crying, but I keep thinking about Uncle Junior’s face when I finished hugging him. I heard that they had a son, too, but I’ve never met him. I think they said that he was in prison. I try to ask my sister if she has Kleenex but she says to kule kule as she pinches my brother to...
make him sit still. I wipe the hanabata with the back of my hand. We have to drive to the cemetery after the service. Where are they going to put all the bodies on the island when there is no more room? I guess they can dump them in the ocean. I wonder why they don’t do that now.

The funeral was pau in the morning, so that the luau could be in the evening. That, of course, means more work for us kids as the adults sit around drinking Budweiser. One time, they let me try a sip. It tasted like shi shi, not that I ever drank my own shi shi, but it sure tasted like what I thought shi shi should taste like. I never understood why they drank so much. Most of the time it was okay, because they would talk story and kanikapila, singing about the stars, the wind, the ocean, the land. Sometimes, they would beef over stupid things, like when tutu died and no one helped pay for the funeral except for Aunty Noe and my mom, and dad would get so mad when Uncle Kainoa, mom’s little brother, would say dad’s not family just because he married my mom and that helping to pay for my tutu’s funeral didn’t make him part of the family either. They would almost throw blows, but some of the uncles, the ones who hadn’t drank too much, would stop them. I don’t understand why Uncle Kainoa said that. He’s always coming around our house, asking for money, at least that’s what mom says.

After we get back from the cemetery, Aunty Mamo makes me sit next to a big ice chest and scoop opihi. I don’t mind it so much. Their shells look like little black Chinaman’s hats. I just don’t like it when they curl up to grip my finger. Scooping opihi is easy, getting them is hard. Sometimes people died trying to pick opihi off the lava rocks. To get the really big ones, you have to climb out and hope the tide doesn’t drag you out. My mom says that the best opihi comes from our side of the island. I pick up a
spoon and start scooping the little buggahs out of their shells, dumping the opiihi into one bucket and the shells into another. Sometimes the aunties would dry out the bigger shells for jewelry. When I was looking through my mom’s jewelry Tupperware container, I found an opiihi shell as big as my hand. It was all white and I wondered how they got a black opiihi shell to turn white. I asked my mom and she said that they bleach in the sun. I never understood how people get red, brown, or black in the sun, but black opiihi shells turn white. I want to change out of my mu’umu’u but the aunties won’t let me because it’s still a party and girls needed to look pretty. I can’t even take off my haku and I am still itchy.

When I am done with the opiihi, Aunty Mamo makes me scrape coconuts for the haupia. She brings out a board that looks like a broken canoe paddle with a metal scraper on its end. Taking one of the open coconuts from the pile next to me, I bring the white meat to the sharp edge and start to scoop out the inside. My hand feels the loose hairs and rough texture of the shell. My haku shifts to the side as I lean forward to get a better grip. Little red petals drift down into the coconut meat. I’m gonna get it if I mess up the haupia. The petals turn see-through and I see Aunty Haole’s pale cheeks covered with blush and her still too pale skin turning it from red to pink. We all stood by the grave. It was deep. I couldn’t imagine putting her beautiful white coffin in all that muddy dirt. What will she do when she has to get out of it? Her beautiful white mu’umu’u will be stained and so will her white, white skin. I have always thought it was funny that we called her Aunty Haole, even though she wasn’t. I try to get the petals out of the wet coconut meat, but I feel something move and I can’t breathe and I’m not sure I want to. As I stood above her hole in the ground, I wanted to be riding with her out in the pasture, listening to her
stories, smelling her scent. I cry into the haupia and I know that I will get it, but I just keep scraping the soft white meat from its hard brown shell, while red petals fall.
Ku's Aina

The kanakas from the Fire Department drove my Uncle Ku through town. I could just see him, sitting high on top of the truck, two big blalahs, one on each side, drinking beer and waving to everybody on Ali’i Drive, his thin hair waving along with them. They had picked him up early in the morning and dressed him in his favorite aloha shirt before I had gotten out of bed.

When I was younger, Uncle Ku told me I was named after him and that we had a long tradition of passing this name from one generation to the next. He said that our name had powerful mana and that we were the heart of the land. I always imagined that mana was a superpower that Hawaiians have like Superman’s flying or The Flash’s super speed. I wish I had superpowers. I would be the Super Kanak, able to eat twenty lau laus in one sitting. At Sunday School, I learned about how mana fell from heaven to feed these
people who were wandering through the desert, but I don’t think it was the same thing.

How can mana be powerful and be food?

When I went into the kitchen for some cereal, mom was crying at the table. I wondered what was wrong, but I was afraid to ask, since I don’t really see her crying, not really. There are times when there’s a sad movie on tv and I hear her on the couch behind me, but I don’t think that this was the same kind of crying.

I remembered one time we was up on the North side of the island. Uncle said we was paying respect to our amakua, the one we was named after. We placed a rock wrapped in green ti leaf on the altar of the heiau. I don’t know what ancient heiaus looked like, but this one is in a large field of yellow grass growing along rock walls that are as tall as me. It’s a huge rectangle and when you stand by the altar you can see the ocean. Uncle said that in the old days, our amakua would have preferred a human sacrifice. It reminded me of the movie Blue Lagoon, the part where they go to the other side of the island and they see a large black statue with an altar covered in blood. I feel weird about it, but I don’t know why. He said that the heiau was built near the favorite hunting grounds of our amakua. He said that they used to throw enemy warriors and kapu breakers into the waters and all kinds of sharks would eat them. I don’t think I’d liked to be eaten by a shark and I’m glad we don’t make those kinds of offerings anymore. I wondered if the Ali‘i were ever sacrificed.

I liked him. He always talked to me like one grownup. One day, I was offered to lick a plastic toy ring. I don’t remember why? It was red and covered in Hawaiian chili pepper, but I didn’t know it at the time. They told me to lick it and like one dumb kid, I did. The burning was so bad that I ran all way to my house screaming for help. Uncle was
home, he was always home, and he kept asking me what happened and all I could say
was that my tongue was burning.

“What’s wrong Ku Boy?” He asked.

“They made me eat chili pepper.” At least that’s what I was trying to say, but it really
came out like “They may me ee ili peppah” as I tried not to breathe as that seemed to
make it burn even more. He just started laughing at me. I didn’t think it was funny.
Finally, he gave me a spoon full of sugar, not in the nice Mary Poppins way, and my
mouth felt so much better. Then he gave me some juice to drink.

“So, what really happened?” He asked as he poured more juice into the cup.

“I was playing in the back and a couple of kids told me to lick this ring, and I did.”

“Did they make you do it? Did they dare you?

“No. I didn’t even think about it”

“See that’s your problem. You never think about what you doing.” He gave me some
bread to eat. “You remember that time you wanted some papaya in the tree and your
friends told you to throw one rock at it? What did you do?”

“I threw one rock at the tree.”

“You threw the biggest rock you could handle, didn’t you?” I nodded, my eyes still
watering from the chili peppers. “And what happened?”

“It hit the car windshield.”

“Who’s car windshield?”

“Yours,” I answered, scared he was going finally give me lickins for it.

“And, what happened?” He poured me more juice.

“Everybody ran away and I got dirty lickins from mom.”
“Did you get the papaya?”

“No.”

“You missed right?”

“I didn’t miss your windshield.” He started laughing again.

“True, but how come you got in trouble?”

“Coz, I broke your windshield?”

“No, because you never think before you act. If you had just thought about what you was doing, maybe you wouldn’t have thrown that rock at the papaya, and maybe you wouldn’t have broken my windshield and gotten dirty lickins from your mom.”

“I guess so.”

“You think you going learn your lesson this time?”

“Yeah.”

But it wasn’t the last time someone told me to do something and I got dirty lickins. We were doing laundry down at the Hele Mai Laundromat and I was really bored, so I started playing with the other kids on the outside patio. There was plenty cigarette butts on the ground and one of the kids picked one up and started to pretend to smoke. He looked really cool. I picked one up and pretended that I was smoking, too. My mom caught me and made me eat fives butts off the ground, and told me I was lucky we wasn’t home or else she would have given me dirty lickins. I think I would rather have had dirty lickins. Uncle just shook his head as I sat next to him.

“What did I tell you about thinking before you act?”

“I know. I know.”
“Then, how come you got busted pretending to smoke cigarettes? You know that your mom hates smoking?”

“I know. I know. Sheesh.”

“Don’t you sheesh me! This is the last time I going tell you stop doing stupid shit!”

He was right. I sure didn’t like that chili pepper or the cigarette butts or the dirty lickins. I just didn’t know why I couldn’t think stuff through.

When my dad found out that they took uncle out on the fire truck, he looked really pissed off. I thought he was going give me dirty lickins for sure, but I think he was more mad at mom because she called uncle’s friends for come pick him up. Mom told dad that uncle had pulled her aside a couple days ago and asked her to call his holoholo gang down at the firehouse to come get him. Dad started yelling at her, saying it’s illegal and we going get arrested. Illegal for taking uncle out on the fire truck? Don’t worry, he stay friends with the police, they no mind. I wasn’t quite sure what was going on. Then, we heard the sirens. They had brought uncle back. It wasn’t looking to good and the kanakas on the truck looked like they was crying. I looked over at my dad. I knew he was going let ‘em have it, but he was crying, too.
Hard Skin

She rubs the raw meat against her wart and looks into the setting sun. Her grandmother says if she counts to ten, the wart would disappear. So, she stares as hard as she can, all the time counting and praying for her wart to be gone. Green and blue spots begin to appear and she blinks rapidly to shake them loose. It never crosses her mind to question the wisdom of staring into the sunset or of rubbing a piece of sirloin on her hand. She knows that this is the truth and that tomorrow, when she wakes up, she will no longer have this ugly wart on her finger. She imagines the wart sinking beneath her skin as the sun sinks beneath the water and wonders what happens to warts and where do they go? Not really wanting to know the answers, she lets those questions float away.

She stops rubbing, kneeling down in the dirt of her backyard. She is directly in line of the sunset between the tall and slender papaya trees her grandpa had planted when they had first moved to this house. She must continue to stare at the sun as she digs a small
hole. Grandmother says she must bury the meat, and when she’s done, she’s to turn and walk back to the house without looking back or it won’t work and she’ll still have the wart in the morning. She doesn’t want that to happen, so she digs diligently. The feel of the earth is soothing as her fingers pull out rocks, making room for her offering. As she walks back to the house, she wonders what would happen if she looks back. Would she turn to a pillar of salt like Lot’s wife? Her mother is waiting at the screen door.

“Did you look back?”

“No.”

“Good, good. Dust off your jeans and go wash your hands in the laundry room before you come in my house.”

She walks around the yard to the laundry room, next to the garage, dusting herself off as she goes. She’s afraid to look anywhere than in front of her. She remembers the first time she saw the wart. She was playing Chase Master with the other kids at school. She was It and she was running, pumping her arms, her legs crossing the distances between predator and prey. As she reaches out her hand to touch the pony-tailed girl in front of her, she spots the tiny, white bump on the forefinger of her right hand. She marvels at its sudden alien appearance. She tries to recall if she’d missed it while brushing her teeth that morning. She is so distracted that she fails to touch the pony-tailed girl, who is able to evade her and make it to Safe, a set of monkey bars at the far end of the playground. She sees that almost everyone has made it back, but she can’t seem to concentrate on anything but the wart. She knows it is a wart. She’s read the fairytales of wart-nosed witches and she thinks maybe she is destined to become one, but she doesn’t want to eat children or poison princesses. The bell rings and recess is over. Everybody laughs and
tells the pony-tailed girl they couldn't believe she hadn't been caught. Should she go to
the nurse's office? Would anyone notice the fleshy growth on her finger? Would they
make fun of her? She jabs her hands into her pockets and thinks of ways to hide it.

At first, she puts a band aid on it, hoping everyone would think it was just a cut or a
scratch, but band aids are expensive and she knows her mother will start to notice that
they were running low. Then, it started to grow, and since she felt she could no longer use
the family's supply of band aids, she began to draw on it, anything to hide its strangeness.
The wart became the hub of petals, sprouting in a ring, an eye on the wings of a monarch
butterfly in flight, or hidden at the center of an ornamental cross. At night, when her
hands had been washed clean, she'd stare at it. At eye-level, it looked like the top of
Mauna Loa, smooth with touches of crusted snow. She felt its hard, but pliant peak.

Pushing on it didn’t hurt. The only sensation she received was from her fingertips
running across its summit. It was not smooth and it was not rough. She couldn’t really
describe what she felt. It was not like any other part of her body. It was and was not her
flesh. In the mornings, as she day dreamed of far off lands, she would again hide it all
under dancing fairies, bloated mushrooms, smiling cats.

Then, one day over a dinner of leftover spaghetti, her mother noticed a strange
symbol on her daughter's hand, “What is that Lei?” She looked at where she had drawn
an ankh after an inspirational section on Egyptian Mythology in class. She didn't think
anything of it at the time. It was just another cool way to cover up her wart, but now she
sensed that drawing symbols of other religions may not have been such a smart idea and
she was suddenly afraid. Her mother got up from the table, walked over to her, and lifted
up the offending hand, “Is that Satanic? That better not be a symbol of Satan on your
body!” She pulled Lei from the table and dragged her to the kitchen sink. “Wash that off right now, or else!” Quickly, Lei did as she was told. She didn’t think it was a symbol of Satan, but wasn’t going to argue with her mother about it, especially not with her pinching her arm the way she did when she didn’t want everyone to see how angry she was. “If I ever catch you drawing Evil symbols on your body again, you going really get it!” As Lei was washing the black ink off her hand, her mother spotted it. “What the hell is that?”

She had a feeling her mother already knew what it was, so she wasn’t sure if she should answer. “I think it’s a wart.”

“Let me see,” she lifted her arm up to let her mother have a closer look.

“How long you’ve had it?”

“I don’t know. A couple of months?”

“You must have done something. What did you do?” She pulled hard on Lei’s arm.

“You tell me, girl.” Lei didn’t think she had done anything wrong, done anything to deserve this growing mound of foreign flesh on her finger, but what could she say to her mother? What could she do to quiet her anger?

“Maybe the Obake touched me when I didn’t clean my room? Or, maybe I got it from that girl with the ukus and dirty feet?” Her mother laughed at this, and Lei could feel that the moment had passed and she was safe.

“Yeah, maybe the Obake did touch you when you didn’t clean your room. How many times I told you not to hide stuff under the bed? You know the Obake loves to live under messy beds.” Lei nodded at her mother’s wisdom. She would definitely clean under her bed, but in the back of her mind, she didn’t think that the wart was caused by a messy bed.
As Lei continued to wash her hands at the laundry room sink, trying to remove the
dirt from beneath her fingernails, she thought again to her mother’s original theory of
how the wart came to be. Unfortunately, the wart slowly grew, each day, conquering the
smooth back of her finger, spreading towards each of her knuckles, and no matter how
much she kept her room clean, it didn’t stop. Drawings could no longer hide its growth
and the kids began to tease her as kids are wont to do. “Pop it! It looks like a big zit! Did
you uff a frog? You look like you going have a baby out your finger that thing is so big!”
She didn’t think their taunts were so great, which is probably why she wasn’t hurt by
them. She was sad because no one would eat lunch with her or play with her because they
were afraid they were going to catch it. Who really wants to have warts all over their
body? Sometimes, in frustration, she’d rush the worst kid, the one that teased her about
uffing a frog and she’d hold her hand right next to his face and dare him to say it one
more time. In those moments, she felt its power. She knew that the kids were afraid. That
they thought the warts were contagious, but until she stopped drawing on her hand, she’d
played and ate with all of these kids and not a single one had gotten a wart from her. She
loved to see the fear in their eyes when she came near them. It didn’t make up for being
teased and laughed at, but it helped to ease the pain a little.

Once, at church, she learned about Job. She listened to the Sunday School teacher, a
haole girl from Utah, talking about how God wanted to prove to Satan that his servant
Job, a very wealthy man, would never renounce God, no matter what happened to him.
Satan told him that the moment Job lost his money he would immediately stop loving
him. God told Satan he could do whatever he wanted, so Satan had all of Job’s animals
stolen and his servants slaughtered. Then, he had all of Job’s children killed. Did Job give
up on God? No. Satan told God that if he hurt Job, Job would definitely curse him, and God said do you what you want, so Satan covered Job in sores and Job cursed the day he was born, but did not curse God. Everyone blamed Job. They believed he was being punished for some kind of wickedness. Through it all, not once did Job curse God. As a reward for his unwavering faith, God gave him twice as much wealth and many sons and daughters.

Lei had never considered the possibility that God could actually let Satan test the faithfulness of his servants, hurting them or their families. That just didn’t seem fair. No one said anything to her about her wart at church. Even though it was on display for everyone to see as she picked up the sacrament of water and bread during her Ward’s time in the chapel. Not even the other kids. She did wonder if her Sunday School teacher was trying to tell her something. She didn’t really consider herself a servant of God and maybe this is why God was letting her be punished. She never really thought much about God. She imagines he’s a really tall haole with a long white beard, wearing really white robes, floating in the clouds above. Is she being taught a lesson? She’s not sure what that lesson could be and she doesn’t talk to anyone about it, especially her Sunday School teacher. Lei smiles at the end of the story as the class sings “Popcorn Popping on the Apricot Tree.” It’s a fun song, but Lei begins to wonder why they sing it. There are no apricot trees in Hawaii and what does popcorn have to do with God?

Lei loves to sing. It’s one of the only reasons she doesn’t mind church. She reads the hymnal as the Bishop drones on, trying to guess what songs are going to be sung next. They never sing in Hawaiian, but she doesn’t mind. Most of the songs were originally in English, anyway. Her favorite is “How Great Thou Art.” It reminds her of a love song.
Not the kind of sappy love song on the radio like “Endless Love,” but a true love song. Not that she knows what true love is, but she imagines it to be something pure and golden and light. She thinks about Job in this instance and realizes that love may not be what she imagines, but this thought is gone in an instant as the first notes of “How Great Thou Art” carries across the chapel from the organ’s pipes, “O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy hands have made; I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed.” She notices that most people don’t really know the melody of the first verse and the voices are subdued, but when her favorite part comes, she can feel the rising voices like the waves at high tide crashing against the walls and splashing back against her, “Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee, How great Thou art, How great Thou art. Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee, How great Thou art, How great Thou art!” As the words pour out of her, she feels something inside of her opening up and moving out of her, flowing with the notes into the wave of sound around her. As each wave pushes its way to the wall, another forms behind it, a continuous flow vibrating through her whole being and she can hear at the very top of all that sound, even higher notes reaching to the ceiling and she wonders if that’s what God sounds like. At these moments, she forgets about the wart on her finger, the malicious teasing, the playground power struggles, the weird looks from her mother, and she swoops and dives in and out until the last powerful chord crescendos and all is silent. She sits but feels disconnected as her insides soar. Then, the bishop drones on firmly settling her back inside her body.

Drying her hands on her jeans, she remembers that feeling and wonders if she could feel like that all the time. She doesn’t think that it’s a good thing. If you feel like that all
the time, how could you tell the difference between how you should feel versus how you
do feel? She wishes that singing could remove her wart, but she knows that is foolish as
she’s been singing every Sunday since she could remember and every Sunday since her
wart came to be and nothing had changed. At least she didn’t think anything had changed.
So, she decides that as beautiful as her singing is, this was neither the cause nor the
solution to her problem, no matter how much she wishes it to be, and she knows this to be
the truth.

As she walks back to the kitchen’s screen door, she recalls the luau they went to for
her cousin’s wedding. She wanted to hide her wart, but the band aids were too small now,
and she couldn’t draw on her hand. She asked her mother what she should do. “No
worries. No one’s going to notice.” Except right off the bat, everyone started making fun
of her. The aunties just laughed and told her she better clean herself better or it going
spread all over her body and grow like taro along her arm and up to her neck. Lei didn’t
really believe them, especially since she bathed twice a day. And, what did they know
about bathing? She could see taro growing all over their necks, too. She didn’t say
anything to them as she knew better. The uncles just drank their beers and laughed along.
The other kids called her hamajang girl, and told everyone to stay away from her before
she bachi them and give them all warts. She sat in the corner near the stage and sang
along to the band, playing “He Aloha Mele,” a love song about stars and brown eyes, and
wished she didn’t have that stupid wart. Her grandmother saw her sitting by herself and
called her over. Lei loved the smell of her grandmother. It was soft and sweet like
gardenia after the rain.
“What’s wrong?” She asked her wrinkled hands brushing Lei’s hair away from her face.

“Nothing, I just want to sit by myself.” She didn’t really want to bother anyone with her problems.

“You know that’s not true.” Lei nodded but did not say anything. “Do you know what our ancestors called a wart?”

“No.”

“‘Ilikona, or hard skin. Do you know why you have an ‘ilikona on your finger?’”

Lei shook her head, “I don’t know why. I thought it was because I didn’t clean under my bed, or that I caught it from someone at school. Then, I thought maybe I was being punished for something bad I did, but I couldn’t think of what I had done wrong. I just think it is because it is, you know what I mean?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Really?”

“Sometimes, tita, our bodies show us what our minds cannot. Do you know what your body is trying to tell you?”

“That I have a big ugly wart?” Her eyes crinkle as her lips spread into a smile.

“You are so kolohe, sometimes. Yes, you have a big ugly wart, but why do you think you have a big ugly wart?” Lei wanted to tell her she had already thought about all of this, and she didn’t think that she needed to do it all over again. “Yes, yes. You think you know everything. Your mind can play tricks on you; just think about when you first saw your wart. What were you doing?”
She thought about the game of Chase Master she had been playing that day she saw the wart for the first time. She had been running behind the pony-tailed girl and she was thinking about how much fun it would be to pull on her hair rather than touching her shoulder, and the more she thought about that, the more she began to realize that the pony-tailed girl wasn't the only person she had really wanted to hurt. She had really wanted to slam that kid's face into the ground who kept teasing her about uffing the frog, and she really didn't have kind thoughts about her Sunday School teacher, either. And, when she was singing in church, she really wanted to shove a hymnal into the bishop's mouth to shut him up, wishing that church was all about singing and less about preaching. She didn't think she had thought about anything when she was singing along to the band, but she realized, at that moment, she had been dreaming of all the ways she was going to get those other kids.

"I was playing." She said as these thoughts sped past.

"I see." And, maybe she did. "Let me tell you a story." And, Lei listened. "Once, there was a man, who was full of ideas of how people should be and how everyone would be happier if they just listened to what he had to say. Now, not everyone wanted to listen, but the man didn't care if they did. This bothered them, and so they decided that maybe he had something to say after all. He told them that love is unconditional. Now, no one believed this. You can't get something for nothing, they said. And, he said that is not true. Love is easy. It's who you love that can be hard. If a man hurts you, do you love him? Of course not, they answered. And, he said that is not true. You must love that man even more because he does not understand that love is easy. Do you punish this man who hurt you? Of course you do, they answered. And, he said that is not true. You must not punish
this man but love him for his flaws and with your love teach him to love. And they told
him he was crazy. Why would we do that? He will never learn they told him. And, he
said that is not true. He will learn that to hurt others is to hurt himself and to love others
is to love himself. But they did not believe him or understand. But, he never gave up and
even on the day he died, he professed his love for all, never wavering as they nailed him
to the cross on a lonely hill.” Lei let the words wash over her, soothing that hidden spot
she could now see.

“I see, Tutu.” And, Lei learned how to get rid of the wart on her finger.

She enters the kitchen, walking past her mother, who thankfully says nothing. She
closes her bedroom door and kneels beside her bed. She knows she should thank God for
everything, and that she shouldn’t ask Him for anything, but she does so anyway, “Dear
Heavenly Father, please forgive me and please take my wart away.” As her forehead
presses hard into her clasped hands, she dreams of waking up free in the morning.
Every summer, we’d pack up our camping gear and head to Opihihale. Grandpa and Dad would sit in the front of Dad’s beat up truck with me in the back, holding on tightly as we swung around the windy road down south. We’d leave Kona behind as we drove along Queen K highway, heading towards Mamalahoa. After we’d pass Honaunau, the rainforest would rise up on both sides of the highway, and I’d pretend that I was Indiana Jones, riding through caves in a mining cart, trying to beat a wall of water. Sometimes, I wondered if Indiana Jones could surf. Wouldn’t that be something? Catching that wall of water right out of the mountain? Dad loved to take the road a little fast, especially when Mom wasn’t around. I’d always know that the turn off to Opihihale was coming up when Dad started to slow down. It was just a little driveway with a gate. If you didn’t know it was there, you’d probably miss it. As we pulled up to the gate, Dad would hop out and
open the lock, swinging the gate open as he did. Then, he’d set his tires to 4WD, so we could make it down the bumpy road to the beach.

Opihihale is our family’s land. Although, bits and pieces were sold as I was growing up to help pay for the property taxes and such. Ironically, because we could not afford to pay the family lawyer, he and his family owned the beach. Luckily, my family retained the right to go there any time we wanted. To protect his investment, he installed another gate where his piece met ours, just in case someone had made it past the first gate. I had always found it interesting that a lawyer would own the very land, where, supposedly, my ancestors are buried.

As we drove slowly down the mountain, the truck rattling as it was jostled by the unpaved road, we passed through a rainforest filled with guava, papaya, and mango trees before passing through a field of scrub grass. I hadn’t envied the person who’d have to clean that mess up. Once, we’d cleaned an acre of it, bending down in the hot sun, trying to pull that crap up by its roots. When we’d cleared the grass field, I could see our campsite. There were tables and coconut trees and the outhouse seemed to be standing, which was good. The last time we had come down, a couple of drunk cousins decided they wanted to see if they could move it and it ended up rolling down the hill and breaking against the lava rocks. Dad had to build a new one and he wasn’t too happy about it. I could see the whole coast. I had imagined I could see all the way to Kona on one side and Kau on the other. There were no boats on the water as the nearest harbor was in Kealakekua. Although, I knew that come nightfall divers would be trolling our waters, trying to swim up to our shores, searching for spiny lobster. Sometimes, we would throw rocks into the water to try and scare them off, since they always caused the
fish to disappear, disturbing their natural feeding grounds. I had always wondered what they thought as they made their way back to their boats. “Damn crazy Hawaiians!” Our campsite wasn’t a traditional campsite, at least not in the way most people expect. Even though it was a beach, there wasn’t any sand. Not really. It was mainly crushed lava rocks and gravel that had been trucked down to make the ground even. At least that was one good thing the lawyer did.

We’d spread out a tarp high over the tables and string it up between the coconut trees and the truck. I could see Dad and Grandpa scanning the tide to see when it would be a good time to go fishing. I loved going fishing with them, especially at night. We’d sit out on the point with our poles dangling bait in the water, waiting for the schools of menpachi and ‘aweoweo to start feeding. As we sat, Dad and Grandpa would take turns talking story. They’d always talk about work or fishing: who was getting a promotion, who was getting fired, what season was the best for which fish, whether it was good to use fresh, real, or fake bait. They seemed to always have something to talk about. Yet, sometimes, they would just sit. I wasn’t sure which I liked better, but quiet can be nice. I could hear the water lapping against the rocks, or forever flowing in and out of the caves to our left. We’d been lost in our own thoughts as the stars passed overhead when Grandpa asked, “You see that light out over the ocean?”

“Yeah. What stay that?” I asked.

“That’s a fireball from one evil kahuna.”

“There’s no such thing. That’s probably an airplane.”

“Airplanes don’t fly that low.” Dad said.

“Maybe it’s a star.” I’d hoped.
"When I was one keiki, I saw three right at this spot." I wanted to laugh, but I knew that he was serious because he wasn’t looking at me. He was staring at the horizon.

He was just a few years younger than me, when it happened. He talked about how you have to be very careful. You never know when someone will curse you. He was raised to never cut his hair or fingernails at night and that he must always burn them when he did. He was taught that if you didn’t, the Kahuna ‘ana ‘ana would use the pieces to cast an evil spell on him. He really didn’t believe it, but some superstitions are hard to break.

“One night, I went fishing with my father, your Great Tutu Kane. We were throwing nets into the water over a school of menpachi when three big, green fireballs went right over our heads.” His free arm cut the air above him.

“What happened?” I leaned forward.

“I thought for sure we was going get it, but Tutu, he told me not to look up, so, I closed my eyes really tight, and I prayed.”

“So, what did it look like?” I was trying not to rush him.

“You’d think that it was really hot, being one fireball, but it wasn’t. It felt like we were up on Mauna Kea. It got real cold, real fast. It never even look like fire, not really, but I wasn’t sure what else for call ‘em.” He took a swig off his beer. “Even though I wasn’t supposed to, I looked up real fast and the fireballs were hovering right above us.” His hands went to his crotch, “I really thought my olos was gone for sure, but Tutu just yelled ‘Auwe! Don’t you think you can scare us! I know who you stay, and I going find you in the morning!’ Then, one funny thing wen happen. The fireballs went straight up, turned mauka, and disappeared.”
"What? How come there was fireballs after you?"

"I never know this at the time, but Tutu had one girlfriend in Miloli’i and he wen try break it off with her because he was married and he knew if Tutu Wahine found out, he was going lose his olos for sure. Anyway, his Miloli’i girlfriend never like listen. She told him that he was hers and her father was one Kahuna and he was going make sure that Tutu would never leave her, and if he tried, she was going make sure he ended up make.” I could see my Dad nodding his head. I wasn’t s sure, but I think he had heard this story before.

“How you wen find out about all of this?” I had never heard about Great Tutu having girlfriends before, and I had wondered what else they’d never told me.

“When I was a little older than you stay now, Great Tutu wen sit me down and told me what really happened with the fireballs. He said he had thought he wen fall in love with one pretty wahine in Miloli’i. Her family was fishermen, too. He came down to her village one time to get some opelu for Tutu Wahine, who was pregnant and craving dried opelu. He said she had the prettiest smile he had ever seen and he couldn’t resist, so he spent the night with her. He left her the next day and went back to Tutu.” Grandpa looked over at Dad, but Dad was staring into the surf below.

“Did she know?” I couldn’t imagine Dad trying to have a girlfriend. Mom would’ve probably cut his olos off with the meat cleaver.

“He never tell her nothing, but you know how it is. Everyone knows everyone’s business. Plus that crazy wahine started talking to everybody about how they was going get married and have one big family. Wen he heard all of this, he was so afraid that Tutu was going kill him, but she told him to go and make sure this wahine knew that he was
married and that she better stop telling stories, or else. So, he went down to Miloli’i again to tell her that it was over and she just went lolo. She started screaming, trying to scratch and throw blows. Then, her father came out and looked at him, and he knew that it wasn’t over. He wasn’t afraid, but he was worried. He knew the father was going be trouble. He went home and told Tutu everything. Then, Tutu told him in that voice, you know the one your mother use on you when you being kolohe?”

Of course, I knew what he was talking about. He looked over at me and smiled, but it was a strange smile, one that didn’t travel up his face.

“She said, ‘I will take care of this and bless the house and the kids, but if you ever do this again, you going wish she had killed you.’ And he knew this was no joke.”

“I don’t get it. How did the fireballs find you?”

Tutu leaned over to me and whispered, “She kept one piece of him.” I had shaken my head trying to wrap my mind around what he was saying.

“So, he had left some hair or toenails behind?”

My Dad had laughed, “Hey, maybe we shouldn’t be talking about that kind stuff.” Tutu had shrugged his shoulders, and I waited for the rest of the story.

He cleared his throat, “She had a piece of him and she had given it to her father. He could not help her because Tutu Wahine had blessed us all, so he waited. He knew Tutu Kane would be alone, especially on a moonless night as that was the best time to fish for menpachi.”

“So, he waited until he knew Tutu would be going fishing again? Not even.” I just couldn’t believe it.
“Oh yeah. He waited and that’s when those fireballs came after Great Tutu and me, but Tutu knew what it was when he saw it and he wasn’t scared.”

“I would have been shitting my pants.” I had said this before I realized what had come out of my mouth. Dad and Grandpa had laughed, their eyes watering, their bodies doubling over.

Grandpa had wiped his eyes with his shoulder. “True. True. I felt that too.” He sipped his beer. I think he was trying to decide what to say next. “The very next morning he went back to Miloli’i and told that lolo wahine and her Kahuna father that his family was Ali’i and that their mana was more powerful. If they ever tried to hurt him or his family again, he would burn down their home and he didn’t care if they were in it.” I had been very shocked by this. I never really thought that our family was very violent, but I could see that my Grandpa believed that his father had meant it, and sometimes, I think I did, too. I had never really believed in evil kahunas or evil spirits, no matter how many times my mother threatened that the obake would get me if I didn’t clean my room, or do my chores, but I realized that maybe there was some truth to all of it after all. Maybe, I shouldn’t discount a thousand years of beliefs. I mean I don’t really cut my hair or toenails at night even though I know that nothing will happen to me. I had preferred to be in a blessed house, especially after a thorough cleaning. I can still remember my mother whispering as she walked through the house, a ti leaf doused in Hawaiian salt water sprinkling, “Send this back sevenfold. Leave our house evil spirits. Send this back sevenfold.”

“You know that they buried King Kamehameha here?” Grandpa asked.
“Not even. He no stay here.” Like anyone that important would be buried in Opiihale I had thought to myself.

“No joke. A part of him stay in one of the caves here. We don’t know where he is because the chief that wen bury him never told where exactly he stay.” He cast his line out again.

“No worry. He no stay believe you, but you can still tell him how you wen find out.” Dad said, baiting another hook.

So, Grandpa opened another can of Bud and settled into his chair and started telling us about when he used to sit with his uncles listening to their stories about how all of their fathers were warriors in King Kamehameha’s army as they chewed on awa root.

“I really didn’t believe them, but it was still good talk story.”

One of the uncles brought out a club with shark teeth, which was given to him by his father. His father told him that this club had killed many warriors and to keep it safe. And as he promised to, his father began to whisper to him about the story of how King Kamehameha’s body was hidden away. As was tradition in Old Hawaii, special family members would hide the body, so that no one could steal its mana, but because he was so important, they decided to split up his body. They took some of his bones to the place of his birth. Some were kept near a Temple of Ku, although Queen Kaahumanu would not have been very happy to hear that her husband still believed in the Old Ways as she had forced everyone to become Christian by eating bananas with her son, Prince Liholiho. The last place was kept a secret from everyone but the person who hid it. The uncle told Tutu that it was his father who had the responsibility of hiding the bones of Kamehameha at Opiihale. He didn’t help prepare the body as that was the job of the Kahunas, but he
had heard of what they did. They would boil off the meat because the mana was stored in
the bones. So, when Tutu’s uncle’s father received a part of the king, it had already been
wrapped in a white kapa cloth. He was told not to open or look at it, and if he did, the
worst evil would visit him. When he heard this, he became afraid. He did not dare open it
and he hid the bones away in a sack so no one would know what he was doing. He began
to walk on the King’s Trail to Opihihale. When he got there, he searched for a sign of
where to put him and a mist fell over the area and he heard a voice tell him quietly to
follow it, and he did. He followed the vice because he had become blinded by the mist
and finally he came to an opening in the cliff. All his life he had walked along his
family’s land and had never noticed this particular cave. He didn’t question it, but quietly
walked as far as he could to the back of the cave, searching for a puka to place the bones
into. Then, the voice whispered “Look to your right,” and he saw an opening hidden by a
boulder that protruded slightly from the face. “Put it in there,” the voice whispered, and
he did. He walked back to the light of the cave opening, trying to find his way back to the
trail, when the mist lifted and the sun shone as hot and bright as if there were no mist. And,
when he looked back the way he had come, there was nothing but a field of smooth
pahoehoe lava. He tried to find the cave on several occasions, but no matter how hard he
tried, he could not.

“So that’s why no one knows where it is? Some mystical mist came down and he
found some weird cave? How is that true?”

“I know. I know. This is just one story I heard. You like hear the rest of it, or not?”

“Sure, sure, I was just asking.”
So, everyday for a month he searched for the cave. He didn’t tell anybody about what happened, not even the Kahunas. He was just curious about where the bones were. He walked up and down the King’s Trail, searching for a cave in the cliff that can be entered without climbing but he never finds it. He starts walking home, defeated, when the mists fall again. He knows what’s going to happen and he stops and calmly waits for the voice, but it is not the woman’s voice from before, but the strong low voice of an Ali’i, and he immediately puts his forehead to the ground. He can’t look up but he senses a powerful presence.

“I know that you have been looking for me, but you must stop. Our family must protect our mana and if anyone should find the places where I rest, they will have our mana and power over us.”

He wept to hear those words and knew that what he had been doing was wrong. No one should look for the dead once they have gone. And his searching had cause Kamehameha’s spirit to awaken.

“There will be many lives lost and many lives given and one day we will be a great people again. Stop looking for me and you will be found.”

I had looked at Grandpa and wondered why he was telling me all of this.

“All the uncles started to laugh. ‘You lolo. Kamehameha never speak to your father. He jus wen drink too much awa and wen scramble his head.’ He looked up at them in silence, his eyes burning as he shifted the club in his hands. The other uncles quieted down and shifted uncomfortably in their seats.

‘I never say you had to believe me, but this is what my father told me, and you know what? I carried his bones along the trail, too. The mists came for me and I placed him in
the same cave as Kamehameha. I walked out and never look back. I have never looked for that cave and I never going.”

Grandpa stopped talking and looked over at my Dad. “I have never looked for that cave either, and even though we cannot bury our dead as our ancestors did, I think that I would like for what’s left of my body to be placed here. I would like to join the many relatives that have passed here. I would like to join my son.”

“Son? What son?” Again, I had wondered what there weren’t telling me.

“My brother,” Dad sighed. “You weren’t born yet and we were both barely teenagers.” He sat back. I could see that his eyes had closed and I wasn’t sure if I wanted to hear what he had to say. “It was the baby luau for your Aunty and we were in charge of getting the opihi for the party. We walked down the mountain to the point, where we knew there would be plenty of opihi, really big ones. Your uncle wasn’t afraid, but he knew that I was. We scrambled out over the rocks, our opihi bags hanging from our belts, knives strapped to our legs. We had come down at low tide and we had a couple of hours to scrape them off the rocks before high tide started to come in. We knew that the further out we went, the better the pickings. We tried to outdo each other, hanging by one hand, our toes clinging to little pukas in the slimy lava rock. Soon, our first and second bags were filled, but we needed at least 10 bags total to feed all the people at the baby luau. So, out we went again, each time coming back with a full bag as the tide slowly came in. The crashing waves didn’t seem to bother him. He kept going further and further out. I hung back trying to see if I had missed anything closer. I wasn’t being chicken. I just didn’t want to get slammed by the waves or get caught in a blowhole, my body forever trapped in its pockets, the water pushing my body in and out, no family even able to get me out. I
just couldn’t handle that. I just stayed close to the shore, but my brother just kept going lower and lower, below the tide line, scraping off every bigger opiihi as if it mattered what size those little fuckers were. All anyone would do was eat it and what was that worth? I think it was his pride that pushed him to go out to the edge of the point, to brave the incoming tide. As he reached down to grab an opiihi sticking to the pink underbelly of a limu crusted lava rock, a massive wave crashed him into the rock he was clinging to and I saw just his hair as the water dragged him under. The very thing I feared for myself was happening to him. I wished I could have saved him but I knew that if I tried to save him, I would be caught in the same blowhole. I was so afraid, I couldn’t move. I started crying because I knew that I could do nothing to save him. I have always carried that with me.”

Grandpa had looked at Dad with what I think now was sadness and regret. I had thought at that moment that Grandpa would hate Dad for letting his son die, but I realized that death is just a part of our lives. As we fished and took the lives to feed ourselves, sacrificed our lives to protect our families, risked our lives to get that perfect opiihi, I wondered if our trips to go fishing was a way to connect to my uncle and for me to know that maybe one day I too would be talking story to my children and grandchildren, letting them know the strength of our history and the convictions of our beliefs.. I knew that one day I, like my father before me, would spread my father’s ashes hoping that the mist will come, letting me carry my father to the place of my ancestors.
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