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Portraits of Strangers

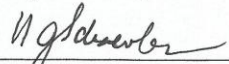
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

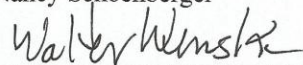
by

Dana Lotito

Accepted for Highest Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)


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Portraits of Strangers

Dana Lotito

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For Mom and Dad – with all the love words cannot express

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Arabesque

AMERICA'S RICHEST GIRL GETS \$30M ON 21ST BIRTHDAY: DORIS DUKE, LEAST PUBLICIZED HEIRESS, RECEIVES PALTRY \$10M ON FIRST INSTALLMENT

- *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, November 22, 1933

Doris married James at twenty-three, among a select, important clump of people bound tightly in suits and dresses, topped with hats, dotted with gloves, carefully preserved dolls in jewels, in the privacy of her New York mansion on 78th street. In the photo, her eyebrows seemed particularly low and dark that day as they stretched over her wide forehead. Her yellow hair was pinned to the side and everyone stared at her cheekbones. And though the papers said the once divorced thirty-nine year old James had a particular palate for wealthy heiresses, for royalty, it didn't matter; Doris would be free.

The two left on an ocean liner. On a magnificent steamer with deck games, mini golf, luxurious dining halls, and the ship's painted bottom like a grim, black smile cutting through the water, they left to sail round the world. They clinked champagne and Doris snuck off her shoes. She wanted to dive in, just to see how far, how wide, how deep she could swim. At night she dreamed of walking off the boat and across the water.

Egypt. India. Indonesia. China. Morocco. They toured and drank and Doris walked with bare feet on the cool marble of the Taj Mahal, electrified, shocked in the heart with this new love.

"Oh James," she breathed. The little tiles glittered and bounced in the light. The deep red of the flowers, the exquisite forest green stems, the rose pink of the buds, how they bent and moved through the tile, she wanted to trace them with her fingers.

"Yes, Doris?" He looked up to the hot, blue sky.

She put her hands on one of the marble pillars of the tomb; she stared out at the perfectly trimmed trees and long glass mirror of water where an even more beautiful Taj Mahal lay still, shimmering, almost solid. “I want it.”

“What do you want?” He took her by the waist, his arms hot around her middle. “How could you want anything?”

“I can want things.” Doris inhaled. “I’m in love with it.”

“You want a tomb? Already?” He laughed.

“I don’t want to have to wait until I’m dead to have it.” She pointed up to the tiles and the flowers. “Let’s have a bedroom and bathroom suite just like this. All marble, inlaid stone. It would work fine for El Mirasol,” she said. “Wouldn’t it?”

“Whatever you’d like, dear, you’re the richest girl in the world,” James said, then kissed her cheek.

She stiffened and pulled away from him. “You know I don’t like that.”

Doris immediately purchased a matching bedroom and bath suite for El Mirasol, the home in Palm Beach they would occupy every once in a while, when James Cromwell and Company (Vanderbilt, Morgan, Astors) deemed it fashionable to move locales, to flit between paradises like fanned peacocks moving between spacious gilded cages.

She wanted carved marble doorways, the *jalīs*, the wall and floor panels. There would be lapis lazuli, jade, malachite in the stones. Doris would have the best white, yellow, and green marble, solid and smooth, a rooftop garden where earth touched sky at the tips. To have it all for her own would be like capturing the stencil line of the kabash

ledge against the sea and sky in Morocco, the white washed façades, and that moment at Café Maure before lunching and swimming at the villa in the afternoon heat. Then she could set it free in her own space and like seeds it would bloom.

If, Doris thought, she must live under scrutiny at all times, she would build her own Taj Mahal, thread the lattice screens of *jalis* and Moroccan *mashrabiyya* along a house so that only shadows and pockets of light seeped through; she would build it all up and around her, and lock herself inside.

The richest girl in the world and her husband with his strong hairline, in a lei and a floral shirt, his hair slicked back, dimples creased with ease, made a final stop: the Hawai‘i territory, the chain of emerald jewels, floating alone at sea.

She saw herself, tall and thin and watched, standing at the center of the universe. Industry roared, clanked, belched, scratched, stomped, and printed stacks of money for Doris. America watched her, one of the Gold Dust twins; one of the fascinations the newspapers wrote into America’s daily dinner table conversation. (*Did you see what Doris spent her money on now?*) But here she was far from Duke Farms, from her mansion on 78th, from all the world, who peered at those legs of hers. (*They are so ungainly*). Doris laid a rather large foot on the pier just warmed by the sun. *Oh James*, she thought. *Let’s stay*.

Her father, before he died and left her his tobacco and his gold, had told her to “develop into the grandest lady in the world” but also to “trust no one” and so when the

cool isolation settled on her, she decided to stay on the islands, on this nook at sea, for four months.

Doris found friends.

The Kahanamoku family, the elite beach boys and Olympic swimmers, let her unravel before them, dive into the sea, and surf. The boys bared their arms, their flowing hair full of sea salt, and she and James never left their swimsuits. Doris put on her goggles and swam. One of the first ladies of her status to strip down to her bathing suit, she became an elegant *haole* fish, a foreigner by nature, but one who found a home in the natives' sea.

In the region of Ka'alawai, "the water basalt," Doris picnicked with the clawed out ridges of Diamond Head and a soft wind in the monkey pod trees. The glittery, white speckled sweep of water was the same color as the storybook prints. She liked the outdoors, its intimacy, its privacy, and she decided she would never live anywhere else (she would, of course, "live" elsewhere, but she told herself this).

It was Sam Kahanamoku she bonded with, his large nose and curly mop of hair, his shining chest. They went on outings, paddled in canoes, sang, danced, took pictures of their heads in the crevices of enormous 'ape leaves and smiled. Just her head was visible, the leaf a heart-shaped drape. She smiled.

She almost always kept her legs bare to bake like bread in the sun. And she smiled easily, her cheeks round and warm. Sam was part of her team; they were famous around the hotels and restaurants of Waikiki.

“What’d you say, Doris, should we surf today?” Sam asked her one lazy morning. The black clouds were caught behind the other side of the mountains and the sun blurred gold in the sky.

“Waikiki is waiting for us,” Doris said, pulling on her sailing cap.

Sam laughed. “From what you’ve told me, *everyone* is waiting for you.” He pulled on his matching sailor hat, rubbed his fingers through his thick hair.

“Everyone outside of Waikiki, everyone who isn’t on a surfboard, wait, better yet, anyone who isn’t a fat blue wave – can keep waiting.” She pulled on her round black sunglasses and struck a pose.

When they entered the water, for a moment Doris just floated on her back, the only white body in the water, a lone pale fleck on the surface. Sam folded on his belly across his board and drifted next to her. “How will you ever leave here?” he asked her.

“I just won’t,” Doris said, and the idea spread inside her like a bolt of sunshine. She wanted to keep it. She could hear the shouts of other surfers, the other laughs, some birds, could smell the rich salt of the water, Sam’s lotion. It was always easy to get what she wanted.

“Because everyone will just keep waiting, huh?”

“That’s right.” Just a small giggle, then she couldn’t contain herself, laughing, choked on some water, the salt stinging, and she clung to Sam as he helped her regain her composure, laughing and laughing. He dunked her underneath, she swallowed more water, they rolled and wrestled and swam and almost let the surfboard get away.

Doris planned her home while picnicking in The Water Basalt of Honolulu. She had no need for a movie theater, a bowling alley, a large reading room, a parlor, she had the earth, the sand, the dirt, the air, and the Diamond slathered with green fuzz. Hawai'i was a playground, far, far away from Palm Beach and Newport, and this playground could be *crafted*. She wanted a swimming pool, a playhouse, a yacht basin, a tennis court, somewhere to fish lazily, to sit in her splendor with Sam and James. She shut her eyes and arabesques looped freely on tiles, fountains, gardens, her precious white marble bathroom, and a room for Sam and her to play music.

A banyan tree would guard the door.

Doris and James moved into the house, Shangri La, on Christmas Day, 1938. The blinding white walls and tower vibrated against the blue sky and Doris breathed.

She collected in a spiritual daze, in confusion, in a search of in and out (she did not feel as though she could block out the sun and air, she could not ignore the definitive pulse of the land, sweet, low, tingling, she wanted this option sometimes). A view of the trees and the walking iris plants were as beautiful as her vases and bowls. She filled up her house, her spirit, dressed herself in floral, stared at black and white pictures of old men painting her ceiling tiles in Iran, bathed in white marble, and continued to collect.

Cyprus trees. Citrus trees. Mango trees for shade. Monkey houses. Cages for small green parrots. Walking iris plants. Lavender. Green. Turquoise. Blue. Burnt red. Tiles. Leaves. Fountains. Cushions. Colored glass windows. Fluorescent tube lights.

Cloak of ocean. Twelve German Shepherd dogs. Pet camels. Damascus panels and ceilings. Thirteenth century Persian tiles. Spanish carpet with no seams hand knit by one single family. Oak floor from a French chateau. Compressed lava stone floors. A moving elevator glass wall. Diving boards. Tents from India and Egypt. Yacht. Fishing net. Jade bottles. Rosewater sprinkler. Ivory and ebony chair. Glass and silver ewers. Jewels. Grass. Shade. Drapes. Blazing red. Natural salt-water pump into the cascading fountain into the pool back into her ocean. Pair of doors from India. Billiards room. Lanai. Mihrab from the tomb of Imamzada Yahya at Veramin, Iran. Hanging chandeliers. The phoenix. The bird. White walls. Vases. Swords. *Jalis*. Koi pond. Lotus-shaped fountains. Light. Cover. Air. Salt. Spice. Inlaid gold. Dark spring green. Cerulean blue. Human image. Calligraphy. Geometry. The stars. Flowers. Lamps. Books. Chinese dish from Turkey. Twelfth century bowl from Iran. Bureaus with inlaid pearl. Tropical. Elegance. Mirrors. Hand-painted glass cups of Hawaiian scenes. A bed. Land. Shimmering lights. Soft breeze. Security in the arabesque.

There was always music time with Sam in the Turkish room. Time seemed to stretch when Doris sat on the lanai beneath the peace of the cobalt yellow and sea blue and brilliant white of the tiles, their intersecting lines, the stars, and the passage way beneath to palm trees and grass. She could always hear the ocean on the rocks, see the power of the water, how it moved. Sam strummed along on his guitar, his legs folded in two on the couch.

Her daughter Arden only lived in paradise for one day. Doris lay in Queen's Hospital of Honolulu tears running down her face, wishing she had a *jali* screen to block out all the nurses and doctors. James turned away from her. "It wasn't even *mine*," he would say later.

"*She*," Doris seethed. "Not *it*."

"She, it, he, I don't give a damn," James said, waving his hand. "It wasn't *mine*. Nothing was ever mine with you."

"Except my money," Doris said.

James's face darkened. "Barely even then."

And so, after eight years, after funding his political campaigns, after traveling back and forth between all the houses, after putting on fur coats and ridiculous hats, he tried to divorce her from New Jersey; she tried to divorce him from Reno. She talked to Sam and to her dogs and let the newspapers roar.

The US used Shangri La during World War II for officers' rest and relaxation. Doris rotated her collection, sat in front of her mihrab while the officers swam; she went back to New Jersey. Doris joined the American Seaman's Club, she joined the International News Service, she joined the Harper's Bazaar staff in Paris, she donated thousands and thousands of dollars. She shopped her way through Paris.

Before her divorce with James was finalized, she married the scandalous DR diplomat, Rubirosa. After less than a year, she divorced him too, and gave him some things (a car, a 17th century house in Paris). There were other loves, but never ties, knots, endings. Never like what the papers said.

She donated more. She became “Princess Charity” of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, enrolled officially as a member. She donated even more. She opened up gardens. She bought a penthouse on Park Avenue. She collected and spent lavishly.

She retreated. On one particularly hard night, one of her dogs nuzzled her foot and a cool wind blew, it was dusk and the sky dimmed.

“I don’t know anymore,” she said to her dog, pulling the red wrap closer to her face and neck. It felt sweet to speak aloud to the land; she imagined she was speaking to Hawai‘i. “But I think I have done a lot of good for others.” The dog’s body was warm and fluffy against her tired legs. She sat down, legs crossed in loose blue cotton pants. Gold earrings brushed her cheek. “I wonder what it would’ve been like to have Arden with me.” She had tried ceaselessly to contact Arden with psychics, incense, and prayers. Maybe the dog next to her was Arden reincarnated. Her heart fluttered. She looked deeply into the dog’s eyes; tears swarmed her eyes, face, chest. “Arden, are you here with me? I want you back.” The dog yawned and shut his eyes. And though she didn’t say it out loud, she wondered what it would’ve been like to still have James with her, even after everything. “Yes, I think I have done a lot of good for others. I think it’s what father would’ve wanted.” Her dog laid its heavy head in her lap. She thought about her newest vase, her newest order from Damascus, her failed attempt to build a Thai village replica in Hawai‘i. “But I don’t know if I am the grandest lady in the world.”

The sea turned and rolled.

As Doris continued to care for horticulture, for animals, for Islamic art, for whatever or whoever peaked her interest, for whatever set her apart in the newspapers

from her Manhattan mogul company, it was her Shangri La that continually shifted. The trimmings changed, the essence changed, a tank of tropical fish was removed and replaced by a shock of royal blue tent. Doris knew, looking out to the Diamond, the sea, the palm trees bending like the curve of a spoon, it would never be finished. It was not like the houses in Beverly Hills, Newport, New York, or New Jersey. She knew her hand would never sleep, she would live in her art, in the mounds of it, in the beautiful walls and blocks of handmade tile.

Aged and alone she went to her pool and climbed to the top of the short diving platform. She felt weak in her slightly wrinkled knees, unbalanced as older people do, the board hot on her feet. Doris turned slowly and looked at her house, this fanciful box of paradise within a paradise that she had carved out for herself. No, it would never be finished. She turned again, holding on to the handles tightly, her hands sweating, and looked out to the ocean. The sun glinted off the horizon where the sea sealed with sky. She was going to swim, she decided, and so she jumped.

The Rhythm of *Meijo*

In the yard, Genji lies on the tough dry cradle of the fallen palm tree leaf, staring up at the sky. It is not comfortable, but it is better than the prickly grass. The black air swooshes through him, soft and supple. Out here, there are no walls or constraints or people too close. He is not in the box waiting for it all to be over.

Genji is just a young boy and the stars, small scattered heads of Kukui flowers on a black sea, light up his insides, unlocking him. And then there is that moon.

In recent months, the astronauts have been in Hawai‘i practicing on the Big Island, walking around the volcano surfaces as if it were the moon. (Genji likes thinking of Hawai‘i as a little piece of the moon that fell off and landed in the ocean and just sprouted some leaves because of the new climate). Rumor has it that during their training, the astronauts liked to run along the Yuen family beach and play with the Yuen family dogs. Genji imagined playing catch with a dog on the moon. He hopes the Apollo 11 mission takes a puppy with them in two months.

A man named Elvis with a thick swoop of black hair, tight white pants, and a famous warbled voice is on O‘ahu now, roving around with his pixie wife Priscilla. Elvis records pack the shelves in the cramped family room. Genji is used to Elvis’s smoldering eyes peering at him from the shelf. Genji’s father, Hideo, is more excited about the man named Elvis than he is about the astronauts. Hideo frequently dances around the living room with no shirt on, thrusting his thin hips to Elvis’s rock and roll; his eyes closed, his mouthing of the words almost violent. “But Dad!” Genji says, sucking in air, “they are going to the *moon!*”

“Puh. Music,” he says, rubbing his knees, “is international. Music crosses boundaries. With music, I can be Japanese or Hawaiian, or whatever. With the moon, you

are only American. It's big and white, see?" Hideo flicks what looks like a coin to Genji, but it is old, dented, has a number on it. "Here's a moon for you," he growls. It is Genji's grandfather's *bango* coin from the sugar plantation in Waipahu. Number 57D. It is silver and shaped like a full moon.

Genji often thinks about what it would be like, to be cocooned in a space suit – one that he is sure wouldn't cause his stomach to wobble because it would be somehow spacious inside – and step off the ship, to bounce on the surface of a powdery rock tethered to the blackness. With no boundaries, with no enclosures, just the galaxy and Genji, maybe it would be like when the monk seal finally molts, its green coat of algae peeling away for a new slick one and then it glides through the water, whiskers streaming along. Genji would like to be like a monk seal with no more algae. If he could get to the moon, he would stop fearing the small spaces, the boxes. He'd be free; a slick-backed monk seal on the moon.

Hideo sings old *holehole bushi* songs from the plantation he was never on while he plucks at a guitar string, slumped on the couch.

Wonderful Hawai'i, or so I heard,

One look and it seems like Hell,

The manager's the devil and

His lunas are the demons.

"Stop it," his mother hisses while she cleans the table with a checkered rag.
"That's not even your song."

But Genji notices that when your father is a musician, he pretty much thinks everything is his song.

Hideo's father, Katsu, was born on a sugar plantation in Waipahu, a fat bundle, a Nisei, who would grow up to work the sugar cane like his parents. His *bango* coin, with his number not his name, the coin that identified him and provided currency for the general store, banged against his chest as he walked. Katsu had a *bango*, but he felt at home in the sticky heat and the way the sugar stuck between his fingers where he could lick it at the end of the day. He knew nothing of Japan save for what his parents told him, but they were often too tired to do so. He occasionally cooked with his mother, helping her make tofu by separating ground soy beans into the *kasu* and the soy milk, cooking the soy milk in an oven, adding the *nigari* to watch it curdle, putting the weights on it when it was in the wooden mold until it set, when she would then let him cut it into chunks. Sometimes while they cooked she would tell him of her favorite horse back in Japan and the babble of the stream outside her house.

When Katsu was just old enough, a seasoned twenty, his parents began to take stock of the available girls, disapproving of any of the Japanese daughters on the plantation and openly scoffing at the Okinawan girls with their thick, dark calves. And so, though it was becoming outdated, they decided to send away for a picture bride.

The virtuous sixteen-year-old Miyu arrived off a boat full of expectant brides, little blossoms who were shuttled from the dock in a cramped wagon to where their husbands were just barely able to match faces to photos. Her hopes and her expectations were no longer, if they had ever been, clearly distinct strands. Maybe he would be a man

of great wealth and power, one like the courtly men she read about in novels before she left. In the very least she hoped for someone like her father, tall with strong arms and an easy smile, one who treated her mother like a queen, wooing her with gifts, flowers, kisses.

Katsu found her in the crowd, nodded at her in her kimono, took her home after a Christian wedding ceremony in the immigration hall and a Buddhist wedding in a hotel. Miyu found that her new husband was not like her father; he spoke in slang and shrugged a lot because he grew up doing what he was told, and his house on the plantation reminded her of a horse barn back in Japan. But there was *gisei*, sacrifice, and *giri*, sense of duty, among a whole host of other values woven into her. The first time her dainty hands tried to grab the sugar cane, she bled.

Miyu did not learn to love Katsu, but she learned to love America's territory. Katsu gave her all his old schoolbooks from the nearby primary school and she began to learn English, learn the pledge of allegiance, learn about Washington and Lincoln, Dick and Jane and their adorable puppy. After ten years, they were finally able to leave the plantation in 1930 and move to the outskirts of Honolulu. Katsu joined the National Guard, and Miyu was able to stay home, in a home just large enough to make her feel she belonged in the community, that it was not embarrassing. They went to the Lutheran church down the road, no longer interested in Buddhism. Miyu hung a powder blue wood cross on their front door. And she spent many hours flipping through magazines, and though she never stopped wearing her kimono from day to day, she sent away for a

shapely white bathing suit with red polka dots. While Katsu was out, she would slip it on with her round black sunglasses and sit in the backyard under the sun.

Eventually, Miyu knew she had put it off for long enough. It was not that Katsu was bad at lovemaking, Miyu always felt satisfied enough, but she could not shake the feeling that whatever they had, it was not a love affair. It was not like the love poetry she had read as a girl in Japan on summer nights when she could not sleep. It was a sinking, a drifting, more like the poems of Ono no Komachi. Miyu sunk so deep into Komachi's sensibilities, believing so well that her lover was unreachable in reality, only available to her in dreams, so that on the mornings when she woke up naked next to Katsu, it seemed harsh. *Since encountering/my beloved as I dozed,I have come to feel/that it is dreams, not real life/on which I can pin my hopes.* She tried to dream of Katsu as a forbidden lover, but she could not sleep enough to drift off into this fantasy.

It was not his fault, this lingering passion Miyu had dreamed herself into, it was not his fault he was so unfit for it. And Katsu had always shrugged at everything and done what he had to do around the plantation, at home, at the Guard. It was his duty. He let her glide around the house, float in and out of the sunshine as she pleased. She had had enough, however, of her parents writing her multiple times about having a child before she dried up. The night that Katsu came back from the reverend's New Americans Conference downtown, she perfumed herself and took him to bed to do what she had to do – shrug in the face of it all and have a son.

Hideo was born in 1934, fourteen years late into their marriage. Miyu felt lucky it was a boy, that after she had failed to conceive for three years, she would not have to do this again because he was a boy. She named him Hideo, “excelling man,” ever so happy he was a boy, and she tried to raise him to be thick and strong. Katsu did not contribute much – he was too busy at the base and thought that Miyu loved going to the grocer, bustling all over town, alone – but he sang to Hideo each night, songs of the plantation, songs he did not care for, but whose thrum and rhythm Katsu could not get out of his head.

On December 7th 1941, the mighty anchored steel bulls that floated in wait for anyone so foolish as to charge them were reduced to wretched, sizzling carcasses. It ignited a nervous fear amongst everyone, one that would never leave them. The fear kept Miyu up at night brushing her long black hair over and over while Katsu shone his shoes until they glared angrily in the moonlight. He and his fellow soldiers in the Guard began to clean the rubble, meaty chunks of charcoal black smothering the once smooth ivory beaches, donate their good and healthy blood, help the wounded, only to have their weapons taken away three days later. Katsu slumped on the couch, ignoring his tea that went lukewarm in the cup and saucer painted with pink roses. They received their arms again the next day, only to be discharged a short while later. “I do not know what they want from me, Miyu,” he said. “I wish they would just tell me.”

When the shrugs soon proved that they could not sustain him, they morphed into moans and wishes that he could join those going to Oakland or Europe, the lucky few who would march on the fertile but burning land of France and Germany. Katsu became

weaker, his wishes turning black inside of him, he fell ill, and died, leaving Miyu and eight-year-old Hideo alone, to fear internment and the looming black wolf of life itself.

Miyu, in a wild frenzy, hid all of her silk embroidered kimonos and bought enough war bonds to almost make them all go broke. “I must, Hideo,” she would tell him during breakfast as he sat spooning cereal into his mouth, watching his mother, head bowed, soaked in sunlight from the window, her fingers trembling. She snatched the papers, lining them up on the counter. “It is not enough that your father died last month,” she shook her head, but no tears came. Eight-year-old Hideo kicked his feet together under the table. He heard the scratchy squawk of the Myna bird that had made a nest on the narrow ledge of the nearby church. “It is not enough. We must prove our loyalty so we are not sent away to Hell Valley. It is not enough.”

Hideo and his mother, through a connection at the police department – a neighbor with much sway vouched for them, vouched for Miyu’s loyalty, her love for her territory’s country, for her gentleness and beauty – managed to avoid internment. Though they had to move out of the Japanese community in which they lived and into a veritable shack nearby the closed plantation in Waipahu, Miyu stood proud. She had proven herself and every so often the police officer from Honolulu came to visit her for tea and soft smiles when Hideo was out of the house.

Hideo was quiet, endured stares on the street, in the movie theater, in restaurants for the war years. The only place he found comfort was the weekly gathering at his house

of all of his mother's Japanese friends. They would make soup and sit on the couches talking of politics and magazines and the weather. The soup was warm and the hugs of women whom he called aunt helped him sleep better.

People cared less when the war finally ended, except for the few times someone mistook him for being Chinese, yelled "Chink!" and crossed the street where he was walking. He smoked American cigarettes, he went to school when his mother miraculously found money for college in Honolulu (he suspected his mother's police officer friend whose thick shadow loomed around the house); he tried to kiss girls but not even the ugliest Chinese-Filipino one in his year would look at him.

He graduated a year early with a biology degree, because he *excelled* his mother said, and applied for jobs working at trinket shops in hotels, but most of the shops were run by Chinese, who would not hire him.

Depressed, he stayed in his mother's home and turned to American drink while working at a restaurant that only served the now magnificently popular Huli-Huli chicken, something for which he no longer had an appetite. It was only when he and his other Japanese friends, some of whom had jobs and some of whom had resigned themselves to the beach life, their shorts tattered and their toes almost always crusted in salt and sand after fishing for most of their food, got drunk and played music together that he felt sort of alive. They'd found an old shack, a run down club that was dark inside all the time though the afternoon light always found a way to squeeze through the slits and stripe the floor. For cheap the club served thick, syrupy drinks with too much alcohol that made Hideo feel warm in his ears, throat, and toes. They talked while they drank, talked about Sputnik and the new golf courses, the first Nisei Marumoto appointed to the

Territorial Supreme Court, the new mechanized sugar plantations, and slews of new tourists bouncing off planes, some of whom they just *knew* were looking for a good fuck, talked until they didn't want to talk anymore.

The club had a stand up piano that was missing a leg so that it tilted precariously to the side, like a woman tilts her head when she is bemused, baffled, or heated with anger. Sometimes his half-Filipino buddy brought red shakers and a hand drum and they all made music. Music that blended with the syrup of the drinks and the old wood walls and all the anger or contentment (for where else could they go, really?) and the calming lick of the breeze. One of the guys sang in Japanese sometimes, and Hideo didn't know what much of it meant, but he'd hum along to the way the tune carried, beating lightly on the hand drum a beat he'd heard in the waves early in the morning, in the way he walked down the sidewalk on a hot, slow day, in the dangerous thump of the breadfruit that fell from the trees when it was ripe, in the way the nearby church bell rang, in the way his mother sighed, and in the way he'd heard his father moan or sometimes sing to him the song of the plantation. He'd close his eyes and feel the warmth of his sugar drink spread through his arms, making them almost the languid tendrils of a squid, and he'd play.

Miyu did not approve of the music, even when Hideo said he was now learning the piano, learning some of the music of her country (to which she always replied, "America") so he could play for her. She was determined to save her son, her excellent man. "I have a girl for you to meet," she told him one night at dinner over spicy sukiyaki beef udon noodles. It was the most fulfilling dish he had eaten in a long time and he felt a

distinct softening of his heart for his mother, with her slightly graying hair, her regal cheekbones, and deep blush of lip color.

“Her name is Lula. Apparently her parents were feeling brave when they named her. She is the daughter of a doctor in Honolulu, and he has already said he will offer you a good job if you even just meet with her.”

“Wow, she must be hideous,” Hideo remarked, a noodle slipping down his chin. “Is she Japanese?” He did not much care whether or not she was Japanese, but figured he would ask as much because he liked asking questions he knew the answer to. He recoiled at the thought of working in a hospital, his biology degree long rusted in his mind. To play the piano in the dark shell of his run-down club was what Hideo needed now. The music, he was beginning to feel, could be his job, his life. Could be his beautiful moan, the one he inherited from his father.

“I don’t see that she really has any competition,” Miyu said coolly. “Of course she’s Japanese.”

“Well spotted, mother.” He couldn’t help but smile at her.

“I think you’ll like her. She’s very smart and sweet. And if her father wants to save you from smelling like that chicken sauce every night then I don’t see why you can’t woo her. Just be sure to bathe first.”

Hideo married Lula just a year later in 1957 because one night in the damp, cool movie theater showing *Jailhouse Rock*, he’d told her he wanted to be a musician, and she, in all her quiet gentleness brought on from the way her slightly condensed body and

pudgy arms pulled at her dress, had smiled up at him, enchanted. “Then you should do it.”

Thank goodness Lula had enough drive to become a dental assistant and support her husband while he continued to patronize the run down club with his buddies. Sometimes he would tell her, his lips wet and eyes wide, they would have a scheduled time and a crowd. It was *feel good music*, he'd tell her. He felt smooth; he felt like his islands, that smelled like chicken and sugary juice and hot rain in monkey pod trees, were mixing with Japan, another island that he knew nothing about save for what his mother and mother-in-law reminisced about over community dinners, facts and notes which seemed like enough to make music. They were going to make it big.

And sometimes when Lula would find herself furious at him, her muscles tightening, teeth grinding, tears slipping down her round face, furious that Hideo would wake up late smelling of booze and lay around all day, sulking until his next show while she went to work and looked into the mouths of O'ahu, helping the doctor yank out their rotted teeth and leave deep red craters in their gums, Hideo would hush her and tell her he felt *pride, hokori*. He felt, when he played, that he was excelling. Then his kiss was so passionate, with his wet lips and soft hands on her face.

Lula could never tell if it was true or not, for Hideo was a mystery whose eyes, whether for sleep or being enthralled in his music, were closed most of the time.

In 1959, Genji was born to Hideo and Lula in what had just become the 50th state of the United States of America. He was born fat and healthy and Lula loved to bathe him, feel the rolls of his skin slip between her fingers under the warm soap suds and

water, feel as though the whole earth was compacted in his weighty torso, full of sunshine, darkness, pink coral, the chirp of the plovers, and the hairless purple lobes of the Oceanblue Morning Glory flower she loved so much. She loved him and hoped that her Genji – meaning “two beginnings,” only given the Japanese name, instead of Edward, because Hideo had just come off the high of playing his music, connected to his Japanese roots, swollen with pride – would one day find his second beginning somewhere fantastic, another world perhaps where he could bloom.

Genji was five years old when he played hide-and-peek with his father that day, the day when the trade winds left and small dark clouds dangled in the sky above before ballooning up to tackle the tips of the mountains, swallowing them whole. It began to pour.

Lula went to work early that morning and had asked Hideo to wake up, despite him having been out late the night before, slushing his stomach with drinks and playing the keys. He was remarkably hung over when Genji asked him to play hide-and-peek, and it seemed like the easiest out for him, for his head, where there seemed to now be a whole host of Chinese drummers pounding away in their red and gold tower. His little son blinked up at him, his black hair falling back away from his face and bouncing for just a short second. Genji liked to hide in the same spot, in the wooden toy box in the garage with no toys in it and only one blanket, where he never stayed for more than the few minutes that Hideo pretended to be stumped.

“Sure, Genji, let’s play hide and seek.” Hideo smiled down at his son, hoping Genji could not hear the drummers, could not smell the booze that puffed from his

mouth, unfurling like a dragon. He was unfit to be a father, but he could make a convincing dragon, the old shack his lair, the piano his treasure.

Hideo collapsed onto the couch. “Ready?” he slapped his hands to his eyes and began to count. “One Kamehameha, two Kamehameha, three...”

Genji scurried off. He arrived at the garage door and halted, putting up a tiny hand to the doorknob and easing it open slowly, so it would not make a sound, and again when it he shut it. In the dark, for he couldn’t reach the string to turn on the light and because his dad would then know he was there, Genji found his way to the toy box with no toys, lifted the lid and crawled inside and closed it to wait in the dark for his father.

Maybe it was because Genji had grown a size or two that year, surpassing his height and weight on the chart at the doctor’s office, maybe because it was stuffy and humid in the garage with the trade winds gone and the rain pounding down in fat droplets, or maybe it was because Genji finally realized how small the toy box with no toys actually was, but he began to breathe heavily. The lid was stuck. He could not get comfortable. He could not understand why his mouth and nose were so close to the wood of the toy box, how poignant the scent of the oak wood, why the wood did not bend for him but rather pressed against his face and his knees, a pain beginning to form in his forehead. His right leg was twisted, and his bright blue socks with the yellow trucks on them scrunching down near his ankles which he hated, but he could not move his arms to get to them, to yank them up and give him that cool feeling of satisfaction. He began to breathe faster. Soon he would hear his father come through the door, saying loudly, “HMMM, I wonder where Genji could be?” Soon he would be able to pull up his socks and it would be okay.

But Hideo never took his hands off his face, and his counting was like a lullaby, quieting the drummers for a few moments, and the rain purred softly, and he fell asleep in a hung over stupor, his head resting against the forest green and tan checkered couch while Genji breathed faster and faster until he began to yell and scream to leave the small space where he was trapped.

The day she picked up Genji to take him on a drive to the Wahiawa Botanical Gardens in Waimea, Miyu was driving the new car of the police officer who everyone save Hideo was smart enough to see was her lover. It was a beautiful candy apple red 1964 hardtop Chevrolet Malibu whose supple vinyl seats made her feel like an island queen. It was she who noticed a few minutes into the ride that Genji's movements were becoming frantic, that he began sweating, crying, asking for the windows to go down, asking to get out. "I don't want to go, *sobo!* Let me out!"

"We are almost to the gardens, Genji, what is the matter? We will see beautiful ferns and plants of the rainforest and walk along the trails. You love the trails." For a moment, Miyu's memory drifted to her first time at the garden with her police officer, when the garden first opened in 1957. He'd taken her, escorted her with his still strong arms even in his older age; people moved aside for them to pass. He wore sunglasses and a baseball cap to remain unrecognized, and a tight polo shirt, a bit of white stubble peppering his jaw line where Miyu liked to rub her face at night. The garden had been lush, the path quiet...

"Out!" Genji wailed, pounding his fists on the window. He could not explain to

his grandmother that his throat was closing, that the car was shrinking into the toy box with no toys, that he needed to get out of the car that instant.

As he shrieked, a hard frown set into Miyu's face, in the lines of her lips and the once-soft creases by her eyes. She watched Genji squirming in the rearview mirror, tears springing from his eyes, and there was a smoldering in her stomach, like the bubbling of a thick, hot stew. Why did he have to do this? Where was her excelling man? Why had she come all the way to America, jerked around on a wooden cart, to be stuck with a strange man, a drunken son, and a tortured little boy?

Genji no longer wanted to wear his favorite blue and yellow striped t-shirt, pulling at the neck when Lula put it on him, and eventually refusing to put it on. He asked for the doors to his room to always be left open, the door to the bathroom could never be shut, the little plops of Genji's pebble-sized poops or sprits of his urine had to be heard in the next room or he would cry. He did not want to go to the new Ala Moana mall, or get on the school bus, and his now distressed mother would cry at night to Hideo, asking why God had done this to them, did he know why this happened? Did Hideo know what had possessed their son? Could they pray a little harder for Jesus to send away the demon? It seemed to her as though Genji's second beginning had come, but too early. It had come to smash into him, latch on, and bring him careening down a mountain into a valley he could never escape.

School was difficult, but his friend Brandon, a rather quiet boy who had trouble hearing out of one ear and liked to sit by the windows with Genji, always read books with him or took him to the water fountain if Genji began to panic. Brandon talked about

Batman adventures while Genji drank. Brandon spoke a little loudly, but it never bothered Genji because Brandon didn't ever ask Genji what was the matter, just talked and talked about Batman. Genji suspected that Brandon thought himself to *be* Batman, sometimes.

There was a nice curly haired man at church, Poncho, who used to be a pimp on the streets with five different women he handled but one day found the Lord and now handed out bulletins and directed a limping choir, who brought Genji a green lollipop each Sunday and saved a seat for him in the front where he could swing his legs freely without kicking anyone's pew. "Genji, my man," Poncho said, "the Lord makes us all different. He just made you to love the open air, you see? And you're in the best place for it! No place in all the world is more open than this one. There's barely any land to crowd us for miles and miles. Just ocean and air. Now, that's a blessing if I ever saw one."

Miyu bought him a bike, cobalt blue with white pedals like little clouds for his feet. "Try this," she said sternly, peering down at him. "It'll make your legs strong." He wobbled and fell off quite a few times, only just having grown out of his dad's old training wheels, but Lula helped him when she could. When he finally got the hang of it he would fly around the street, zooming like the cheetah he was learning about in class. He never went far; just up and down the street so he would not get lost, but he rode until the sky dilated a juicy pink then a pale indigo and then he would return home and leave the door open while he went to the bathroom.

The thing that soothed him most was at night, when he no longer felt he could breathe under his covers, Lula would take him out to the backyard with two blankets and they would lay there and look up at the stars. "Let's just breathe, ok, darling?" Lula

would coo. “Just breathe it all in. Whenever you get...uncomfortable –” she could not say scared, her son could not be this scared, she could not let it happen, “– just breathe slowly and think of the night sky.”

Genji would breathe, breathe in the soapy smell of the blanket, the cool night air, the sweet smell of moist grass after rain. He liked the night sky. He pointed up to the stars and asked Lula, “Mommy, what are those sparkly things?” He’d asked her dozens of times since he was four, and even more recently since they had started to lie outside. He savored the cadence of her voice when she responded.

“Those are stars, darling. And that little piece of white that looks like a piecrust after daddy has eaten almost a whole piece? That’s the moon. It’s sometimes big like a ball of dough and sometimes no bigger than your thumbnail. The moon controls the tide in the ocean. We like the ocean right?” Lula thinks this is true, remembers reading it somewhere, thinking that she needed to go to the library and see what books they had on the moon and the stars.

“But how does the moon do it? It’s so far away,” he squealed, and it was the soft note of wonderment in his voice that made Lula tear up fast and hard, like the moon had created a strong tide inside her, a wave rolling from the depth of her stomach to her eyes in one swift pull.

“God likes to have some fun,” Lula said. “Just like how the moon sometimes disappears completely. It’s playing hide-and-seek with us,” she said, giggling.

Genji’s throat constricted, his stomach wobbled and he pulled at his socks, feeling it crawl up inside of him, but a breeze floated by and he remembered to breathe into the night air. In, out. In, out. “Do we always find it?”

“Always,” Lula said, scooting her closer to her son and holding his hand. Two warm tears rolled out of the corners of her eyes and down into her ears where they cooled like seawater between her toes on a chilly day.

“I think I’d like to go there,” Genji sighed, and in the dark Lula could hear the small smile that was on her boy’s face.

She put her hand, clasped with her son’s, on her doughy stomach and imagined him up there, free with no doors or need for exits, as though God had finally given her something small she could cup in her palm and hold.

Genji was eight when he went to see his father perform in the shack for the first time. It had taken Lula nearly an hour to convince him it would be okay, it was a safe place to be, there would be a seat right by the door for him. She cooed at him, rubbed his hair, hugged him to her stomach. “I’ll be with you, Genji, okay?” She smelled like sanitizer and toothpaste from work and a bit of the vanilla cake that she was cooking just before they had left. Safe. He sat with Lula by the door always left ajar because of how it tilted off its hinges, Lula gripping his waist and holding him close, away from the few haggardly people in bathing suits and worn T-shirts whose drinks seemed somehow glued to their loose hands.

Hideo had certainly learned to woo the piano, to coax it into his control, to let the notes float into the room like plumeria flowers float like pinwheels in a fall wind. He and his band, whose fame extended one or two steps outside the neighborhood or into the circles of raggedy college students from UH who liked the shack precisely because it was

a shack and not a shiny tourist box, had learned how to dip into Japan and infuse the music with that of the far away heritage of their community, of Hideo's mother.

Lula always loved him when he played; her anger and frustration, the kind that frayed her nerves and knotted her muscles, melted away and she felt the way she did that night in the movie theater with *Jailhouse Rock* crackling in the background.

Genji thought that maybe being on the moon could be like listening to music, where everything opened up and you could swim around for a while. And it was there that his small, young heart began to admire his father without knowing whether or not he should.

That night, riding on the buzz of euphoria, Hideo danced with Genji in the living room. He turned the record player up so loud, Genji couldn't hear himself laughing or what his mom was saying, and he watched his dad bop around the living room, grab his mother, dip her, and kiss her right on the mouth. Genji jived, wiggling his hips, pretending to play a guitar in the air. The sudden urge to go to the bathroom made him rush away, out of the throbbing cloud of music and into the bathroom where he quickly shut the door, an old, old habit that crept back up like the turtle crawling back onto land, and he was already peeing when he realized that the door was shut. He could not move, constrained by his body's need to relieve itself, and so he shut his eyes and focused on the slightly muted but lively song from the record player. He breathed, bobbing his head to the rhythm.

The Apollo 11 astronauts splash into the cool blue waters of the Pacific Ocean in July 1969, crawl out of the spacecraft hatch, and are then scooped into the orange rafts where they lounge, awaiting their helicopter and the USS Hornet, which takes them safely to lush and fertile land. Their arrival creates a ripple across the humble island of O'ahu, talk of it carries on all of Hawai'i's many tongues.

“Are they safe?”

“Are they wearing their suits? I don't want any crazy moon diseases, now.”

“Oh Richard, don't be ridiculous, there are no moon diseases.”

“What do *you* know about the moon, Karen?”

“Well, if they *do* bring back any diseases, I hope you're the first to catch it.”

“I hope Nixon is the first to catch it. He's on that damn boat, right?”

“Do you think they smell bad from not showering?”

“That Buzz is so cute.”

“I wonder what the Soviets are thinking right now. Their little dog doesn't look so good anymore, huh? Damn Communist dog.”

“I wonder if they'll sell moon rocks.”

“Do you think they'll ever go back?”

“I bet they really want to have sex right now but it'd be too hard on their bodies. Change in pressure, and all.”

“Do you always have to bring sex into it? They just came back from the *moon* for Christ's sake... Plus everyone knows sex would not compare to being the first man on the moon.”

“You must still be a virgin. And after all this time, too. What a shame.”

Genji is home with his father the day the astronauts return. He had heard there would be a short parade to Pearl Harbor, a welcoming parade and ceremony, before the astronauts would be taken to Hickam field and sent back to Houston. “*Please, Dad, please take me,*” Genji pleads.

Hideo makes a ham and cheese sandwich in the kitchen, humming as loud as he can, ignoring Genji. “Your mother didn’t say I have to take you, did she?” he asks lazily. He has to do whatever Lula asks him while he is at home so she will let him play his music at night. It used to bother him, her demands when she did not try to look good for him, did not try to fit into the latest bathing suit or sundress he sometimes saw the slim tourist women wearing, even if their skin was ugly like the red shell of the King Kong crab. She did not try to cook for him either, sometimes just buying patties from the new McDonald’s restaurant, which admittedly tasted delicious after a long night of playing music. It does not bother him anymore; he just does what she says so he can play. He plops the last piece of bread on top of his sandwich and takes a bite. He has been eating ham and cheese since college and Miyu would hate to know he was still eating it.

Genji stops for a moment. He sees the lie not as a lie, but as an open door, one that beckons to him, and Genji loves open doors. “Yes, she did. She told me this morning before you woke up.”

Much of life happens before Hideo wakes up and his son is so afraid all the time, of everything it seems, that he can’t imagine that Genji has the guts to lie to him. “Fine, we can go to the stupid parade.”

Genji flies to the door and yanks on his shoes. “If we leave now, we can catch them leaving Pearl Harbor on the way to Hickam field.”

Hideo’s heart hardens. Why would Lula do this to him? Why must he go to Pearl Harbor?

“I want to be an astronaut so bad. I’m going to do it one day, Dad,” Genji gushes as they climb into the rickety old car because Lula has taken the bus that day.

Why has Lula forced him to do this? To go to the place that changed his life forever, making him feel unwelcome in his own hometown? Pearl Harbor made it so that even the porky Chinese girl missing a tooth who ran the corner store turned up her nose at him when he was twelve and refused to give him his change when no one was around.

“Do you think we’ll get to see them up close, Dad?” Genji asks, buckling his seat belt. Then, “Can you leave the windows down?”

Hideo rolls down the windows, still fuming. Pearl Harbor made it so that he got spat on at school by the *haole* children of military or missionary families, by the mixed local children who were no part Japanese or were so smeared with other ethnicities they could hide behind their green eyes and frizzy hair. He’s carried those things around in his pockets his whole life, has never returned to Pearl Harbor to see the new memorials, has never bothered to go to the beach his father had tried so desperately to clear and Lula knows that, so why did she say he had to go?

“Can you imagine being on the moon, Dad? Can you *imagine*?”

And even now, on the illustrious Island of Hawai‘i, where cultures and peoples mix like the fine paints of an artist’s palette, there is an unspoken murmur Hideo seems to hear, internalize; he feels it in his bones. Even if no one ever says anything to him, it is an

eyeing he receives, an eyeing each day around the city. He lives too close to Honolulu, to its clumps of glossy tourists, to the people who want to be like them. He wants to go live on the Big Island and herd goats, farm horses, or pick coffee beans in the hot sun and play music. How can she *do* this to him?

They arrive at Pearl Harbor and leave the car on a side street nearby. Genji skips ahead of Hideo, streaming towards the crowd of people waiting outside the grounds. They have made it in perfect time; he just *knows* they will come out any minute. Genji's elation, the zip that vibrates through his body at being so close to the men who were on the *moon*, is enough to softly stroke his fear of the large crowd into slumber for a few moments.

He pushes past slender and portly women with black, brunette, blonde hair in floral dresses, short stocky men in shorts and flip-flops, little boys in plaid shorts, men in long khakis and loafers. However, he cannot get to the front. The bodies of everyone else are packed too tightly, like bright orange, pink, yellow polyps of a coral colony. Genji begins to panic.

He spins around and finds his father squeezing past someone to stand behind him. Genji, his eyes dilating into wide discs, wants to ask his father to pick him up, put him on his shoulders like the other kids with their parents. But he knows he is too large and too old, he knows his father cannot hold him.

Breathe, he tells himself. *Just breathe like mama taught you*. He stares down at his toes in his sandals, wiggles them a few times and begins to count in his head. *One Kamehameha, two Kamehameha, three Kamehameha, four –*

A loud cheer bubbles up and bursts through the crowd. Genji lifts his head, fighting against the intense waves of nausea, against how his throat feels like it is beginning to close, slowly, like the small mouths of sea urchins close on the tubular kelp roots. The astronauts are coming and this is no time to panic. It is time to celebrate.

But he cannot see. He cannot see that the astronauts are being shuttled out of Pearl Harbor on a truck, quarantined in a large, shiny silver box with only a small window where the three of them can squeeze together and see out. A woman yells that they are waving, and Genji tries to lift himself on his toes to see, but the people keep bumping him, and his fear rises, he begins to sweat. It pools in his armpits, it runs down his face, it seeps down his lower back and into his underwear. “Dad,” he yanks on his father’s arm, “Dad, can you lift me?” He tries not to cry, tries not to punch the lady in front of him in her turquoise and lemon yellow dress, but he needs to get out, he needs to move, to breathe, he needs to be shot straight up out of the stratosphere and onto the moon.

Hideo laughs.

“Genji,” he snorts. “You cannot be an astronaut. They are locked up in a box!” he laughs, and it sounds like a deep, scratchy wheeze. He laughs through elated clapping and cheering of the woman in turquoise and lemon yellow. “You would never make it. And a spaceship! It’s tight in there, son!” It is all too hilarious for Hideo, tears are now squeaking out of his eyes at the thought. His anger at being in this place, his anger at his wife and his son for making him go there, is melting away in the bitter, evil irony of it all. He gives way to it like a drunkard gives way to sleep wherever he can get it, and lets it flow from him. “You’d never get there.”

Genji looks up at his father, the laughs shaking his entire body, realizing that no matter how much he hates his father in that moment, hates the way his shoulders are too rounded, the way his eyes are cold and withdrawn, his father is right. And in one swipe, Hideo has taken the moon from him. It is the first time in a long time Genji wishes that he could crawl into a hole somewhere and be alone.

That night, after bolting away from the crowd towards the car, after sitting against the wheel waiting for his father, crying, his head leaning on the black of the tire where he could smell the gasoline and grease and dirt, after driving home in silence save for his father humming an Elvis song, after he told his mother what happened and Lula made him Huli-Huli chicken with a cup of cold milk and sent him to bed, Genji lays in his bed listening to his mother scream at his father. It is shrill, a sound he has never heard come from his mother before. It knocks around the walls and into his room where the door is open. It goes on for quite a while, with only a few shouts back from his father, until they go to sleep and it is silent.

Genji cannot sleep knowing now that he will never make it to the moon. He knows now that he might always be afraid of tight spaces, of spaces he doesn't know, and that he will never escape that feeling, that it will chase him all his life as a bloodhound chases the criminal. He will never escape and the burden is too grand for his little shoulders. Poncho said Hawai'i is the best and most open place to be, that he is in the paradise on Earth, even the astronauts think that this is the closest thing to the moon because this is where they came to train. But even here, in the open-air paradise of the earth, Genji closes.

Miyu takes Genji to the beach the next weekend. It is a sweltering end of July day and Lula is working an extra shift at the office while Hideo writes songs in his bed. Miyu packs Genji a sandwich and a cold glass bottle of Coke and they go to the beach.

The two spread out their mint colored towels and sit down. Miyu wears a balboa blue poncho over her pink floral swimsuit and a sun hat. “*Sobo*,” Genji says to her after they sit down, “you’re really pretty for an old lady. Everybody thinks so.”

Miyu laughs and smiles at her grandson from underneath her sun hat. “Genji, I am not old, I am just ripe.”

They lay back and listen to the sound of the waves, the way they catch for a single moment at their peak, like a key in a lock, then tumble, before slipping away. “Daddy said I can’t be an astronaut.”

Miyu sighs and shifts her hat. “Your father says a lot of things I don’t agree with but this one is true. Genji, there are only three of them in the whole world. And that dog from the Soviet Union. You don’t want to become a dog, do you, Genji?”

Genji giggles. “Well no, I don’t.”

“Why did you want to go to the moon anyway, huh? And be so far away from your beautiful *sobo*? That’s not very nice.”

“There’s just a lot of room up there,” he says quietly.

“Oh, who needs that?” Miyu says. “You can make your own space wherever you want. There are plenty of spaces in the world. Deep under the ocean, far across it in Japan, the lavender fields of France, the desert or prairie of Africa that roams with all sorts of animals. The mainland has a lot of space, and there are apparently tons of people

called ‘hippies’ doing weird things you don’t need to know about deep in the woods where they try to forget civilization. There is a lot of good space, Genji, right here on Earth. Just go find one that you like. You don’t need the moon.”

For the most part Miyu does not believe what she is telling her grandson. Deep down, she no longer cares about spaces and other places. She traversed an ocean once, it had sparkled like a jewel to her on that journey; she had left her home, harvested sugar cane, bore a son, shed her Japanese clothing and grown a new American skin. That has been work enough and she is tired, weary even, and cares not for any other spaces. She finds she can hardly care anymore about the failure Hideo is, the way he wasted his space she gave him out of her loins. But her grandson needn’t know his *sobo* is a liar and really not beautiful at all anymore, just tired and blackened inside like the once creamy flesh of a now rotten coconut.

Genji digs a fistful of sand and lets it stream through his fingers. The sun warms his feet, his legs, his small chest. He breathes towards the sun, hoping to swallow some of its delicious rays. Again and again he lets the sand fall from his fingers and as he does, a song comes to him. It is an Elvis song, *Such A Night*, and he begins to bop his foot to the song he has heard his father play on the record player. It is a happy tune, one where Elvis’s voice dips and bounces and vibrates lightly, singing about kisses and stars, his voice sliding easily through the notes. *Duuuuwah-duwap!* He closes his eyes, bops his foot, lets the sand dribble through his fingers and the song roll up through his legs and into his head, and it opens up in his head like a clam opens and reveals a pearl, and it comes to him, that night when his whole family danced together and he had run off to pee, it comes to him that maybe if from now on he hums that song while he goes to the

bathroom, he can maybe let the door close for a few moments. If it worked one time in the bathroom, maybe it will work in the car, in his room at night. “And what about music, *sobo*? Can I choose that? I think it could be good. I feel good when I listen to music. Maybe I could play music like Daddy.”

And who is Miyu to tell him, her Genji, who is so scared and frightened of half the world he lives in, that music is no place for him? Why should she tell him one more lie when the sun is bright and the waves faithful?

Tattoo

Eric's mother cannot imagine how he can only see two true colors in a place like Hawai'i and seems to take it as a personal slight to her and her life choices. "It's your runaway father's fault, not mine," she used to say when he was young. "Color blindness is a male thing."

But one day, in a stroke of intense motherly feeling, one that "overwhelmed" her she says, instead of painting her nails a shimmery Blue Moon Lagoon, she bought an easel and some watercolors and told Eric it would fix him. He was six when she brought it home, sat him down in the kitchen, dipping the brush into a cup of water and dabbing one of the circles. "This is *green*," she said, smearing a big light yellow streak on the page. "Like the grass or, um, the mountains." She dipped into another round pad in the plastic set of twelve little discs. "This is *red*, ok? Red. Important color. Primary or something like that. Red, like, well, like some wines that I drink. Or like, a barn." Eric has never seen a barn. She laughed in her throat and smeared the dark but thin gray onto the page. "Do you get it?" He did not, and his mother gave up to go tan by the pool.

It was only with his neighbor Amy that young Eric ever used the easel or thought about drawing and art at all.

Amy moved in just a few weeks after he'd gotten the easel. The older lady across the street, Lili, said that Amy's mother and father were having "trouble" and that's why her granddaughter came to live with her. Amy and Eric became fast friends, her riding her skateboard, him bouncing the tennis ball against the garage, together eating spam musubis on the curb. One time when Lili was frying bacon in the kitchen, Amy and Eric skipped to the little path that wiggled between houses and unfurled onto the beach but before they made it all the way down the path, Amy stopped them. She leaned against the

chipping blue fence and said she'd let Eric kiss her on the lips just to see what it would feel like and it was the most exquisite moment of Eric's young life. He carried that moment with him forever, put it in his pocket and took it around, and sometimes when he was feeling a bit washed out, he'd take it out and spend some time there, smiling to himself.

One night, Eric's mom went on another date and left him with Amy and Lili. Quietly, almost just to the wall, Eric wondered aloud what his father was like, whether he had big muscles or curly hair or glasses or smelled like cologne or sand. Amy told Eric that she saw her father once, a little while back. He was lounging amongst bloated plastic bags full of trash, hair a grizzly mess with a thin layer of gnats, and resting his head on a torn black sweatshirt out back of the library in Honolulu. He called out to her, calling her *my sugar bean, Amy!* but Lili kept Amy walking. "Sometimes when I think about it, I feel something that makes my whole insides hurt" – she scanned the air around her entire body with her palms – "something that Grandma Lili says I may never be able to express in words. But she says that is ok and that mommy is happy now. Grandma also says I can't dwell."

"What's 'dwell?'" Eric asked, a little embarrassed that at ten years old, he didn't know what seemed like a fairly easy word.

"'Dwell' means..." she bit her lip, then waved him off. "Oh, I don't know. Grandma Lili said it. I think it means maybe not to be like a puffer fish? They just blow up and float in the same spot for like a million years."

Years later, Eric goes with Amy while she gets yet another tattoo at Aloha Tattoo just down the road from their house. The second they turned eighteen, Amy was plopped in the tattoo chair, bringing in her own sketches, laughing along with the tattoo artist, inking her supple skin with an elaborate dolphin on her left shoulder, a patterned gecko on the inside of her left bicep, an orchid which, Eric is told, is a stunning violet, climbing over her left foot. The name Lili slides up her right side, just under where the curve of her breast starts. Eric was with her for each one, and today he is with her while she gets a ring of shells, a beach halo, around her right shoulder. Eric chomps on a bag of Lays.

“Aren’t you going to get your tattoo, Eric?” She slaps him on the back.

“Yeah, soon, I promise.” Since they graduated high school two years earlier, Eric has been drafting his tattoo. He has wandered many times around the industrial complex of Kakaako looking at the Pow Wow! Hawai‘i art festival murals on the buildings for inspiration. His favorite is a long stretch of a bubbling lagoon with otherworldly creatures and whales that dissolve into puffs of smoke, and a floating pineapple head that slides between erupting volcanoes as black as outer space. It is topped off by a man whose back is turned towards him, his back now a shark’s open mouth with sharp white teeth. Eric imagines the painting sprawling over his back, but he is too scared each time, so he decided a few months ago to try and draw his own.

Now each day, before and after work, Eric draws in the muted light of the candle on the lanai, listening to the pool filter motor hum. Eric’s work as a waiter at the resort’s restaurant is the only interaction he has with his father. Since he started there two years before, Eric has served Maui onion soup, New York strip steak, Parmesan whipped potatoes, and beach house poke to delighted tourists, and he always brings home the thick

cut bacon with black pepper mayonnaise for Lili at night, so after her adult hula classes she can put her feet up and enjoy herself, the crunch inducing shivers of happiness. They watch *Jeopardy* while Amy does her UH homework in the kitchen and Eric sketches, and the little white dog Bunny snoozing at their feet.

Eric's mother does not want him to get a tattoo. "I know everyone here has them," she says, waving a soft hand at him, the other hand clenching the thick nozzle of the hose. She soaks the base of the red jade vine tree until the ground is soupy. "I just don't envision that for *you*." Eric is sure that some of his old classmates have tattoos, their entire bodies covered with them. He knows that the bully who plagued him from elementary school until graduation day, Trevor, is off lounging on the North Shore, trying to make his way as a professional surfer. He must be living in a run-down shack and eating leaves to survive, Eric thinks. He imagines Trevor's inked biceps flinching, snapping the mouth of the shark that bursts through the swell of water.

But Eric does not care about trying to fit in with his classmates anymore, he just cares about drawing the right thing to ink on his body where it will stay, forever.

On her first trip to Paradise, no one greets Sky Howard and her father in the airport, so she buys herself a lei from a stand. It smells fresh and lush; the petals are smooth and cool on her neck and chest. She is surprised they are real flowers, pleasantly surprised, but also disappointed, knowing the lei will be browned and dead by the next day.

A curvy, light-skinned girl with round green eyes and a long black braid comes up to her and her father. A cool breeze swings through the nearby door, there is soft ukulele

music in the background. A woman is talking loudly with her friend about her need for a mai tai *that minute*. “Aloha! Welcome to Hawai‘i! Can I interest you in a ride to your hotel in Waikiki?”

How did she know? Sky thinks.

“No thank you, we have a car to take us,” Lamont Howard says.

“Enjoy your stay on the islands!” the girl says, so bubbly in her flower shirt and black pants. Then she returns to talk to her coworker, her shoulders slightly slumped. She picks at the ends of her braid.

Now that she is here, breathing in the salty thick air, Sky thinks back to the first time in the cold lobby of his office that her father’s receptionist Jill showed her the pictures of Hawai‘i when no other daughters showed up for Bring Your Daughter to Work Day. A young Sky had sat there, all fluffed up in her Christmas dress and church shoes, sipping from the waxy Dixie cup as Jill flipped through pages and pages of photos. Sky’s small heart throbbed for her father, his head down, her fists small knots rubbing her eyes. That day, Sky hoarded Jill’s pictures of cerulean water in her mind like small, vibrant stamps. Since then, she had done book reports, memorized Lilo and Stitch, bought posters and framed prints for her gray rooms at boarding school in Maine. She has imagined over and over wading out into the basin of melted sapphire that is the Pacific, swimming amongst its lagoons and coral reefs. She has learned that sometimes she must put her head down, like when her classmates at boarding school wanted to touch her hair, or asked right off the bat what kind of rap she liked, or when it was time to study slavery in history class and everyone would turn to look at her, or even worse try *not* to look at her but glancing sideways anyway, as if to ask, *Well?* It is at these moments she puts her

head down, imagines herself as a Hawaiian sea turtle drawing its head into its symmetrically hexagonal shell, and goes to the islands in her mind. And now, thanks to her father's business trip and a graduation gift before starting at Amherst, she is really here. She has come so far to be here, but paradise had not eluded her. She is included; she will walk on its beaches, make slippers in its sand, soak up its sun, and take it all back with her.

Lamont Howard turns to his daughter and smiles. "Ready for paradise?"

The drive from the airport to Waikiki is congested with squat gray industrial buildings and bands of highway, lined by dirty abandoned bikes, and dotted with a Panda Express. But the car smells like air freshener and the breeze is warm and pleasantly sticky through the crack of the window. The driver plays island music on the radio.

The resort *is* paradise. The building rises above Sky; it looks like the Iolani Palace (she knows this from the photos she searched before leaving, determined to visit one day and get some culture during the vacation), but larger, more grand. Palm trees frame the front entrance and porch, their tops big pops of controlled color. She enters and compact men in brown and green floral shirts come to take her bags, lead her along the dark hardwood floor, blanketed by a muted brown and green carpet patterned with fern leaves, towards the white Greek pillars to the wide staircase. Ukulele music, like at the airport, hums at just the right pitch, tanned white women with bleach blonde hair float by in gauzy skirts, men with large bellies, gray hairy arms, sunglasses; they all smile easily. There are hanging birdcage chandeliers with candles, and one real birdcage where an

African parrot with a red tipped tail perches on a stick. It smells of salt air and cocoa butter.

The room is almost absurd in its luxury, with wide plush beds, a big screen TV, framed pictures of yellow and pink flowers, a large orange chair, and a small lanai out to views of the crowded beach and Diamond Head. It peaks out just past the condominiums to the left like a fuzzy green fist amongst the sleek pillars of white and gray.

And there is the ocean, a mass of azure blue sweeping out to the horizon. She ignores the clumps of people right near the shore, floating in blow-up tubes, and boogie boards; they curdle on the surface of the water like clumps of scum; she looks past them, past the buoys and people attempting to surf on small humps of waves, and the sailboats, and she looks to where the sky begins. There is it pure, just as she imagined. She sighs, relieved.

Eric's shift at the restaurant that day is longer than normal, though he doesn't mind because Craig is there. Craig, a fifty-something Japanese-American guy with bright eyes and puffy graying hair, is on a roll that morning as he cleans down the outdoor bar while Eric and Miki wait around for customers. Craig can't shut up about the pig farm his family used to own where he'd collect slop from the neighbors and about how good he is at gambling, the lucky streak he's been on since he started poker in the eighth grade gambling McNuggets at the McDonald's, how his wife just can't possibly fathom how lucky *she* is to be married to a guy just boiling over with all this luck. "These other locals, they're just bums, they're all drunks, trust me – I went to high school with them. But me? I win in *Vegas*, baby."

“You’ve never even been to Vegas,” Eric says.

“I been to Vegas,” Craig says, waving his hand at him, “what do you know? You’re just a kid. But hey. Don’t ever start gambling, you hear me?”

“But what if I’m lucky? Luckier than you?” Eric asks, grinning.

“Nobody is luckier than me.”

They all nod to old Kitty who waters the flowerbeds and avoid the gazes of the tourists partaking in the lei-making workshop at the nearby craft table. Eric fixes menus, Craig serves a few women on iPhones some morning cocktails, Miki escorts a young chattering Japanese couple to a table and speaks slowly to them so they can understand. They smile widely at her, signal to her for a photo, he with his collar popped, she holding up her floppy hat. Eric likes the curve of her hat and for a moment has a ridiculous thought about a tattoo of its lines on his arm.

Craig waves Eric over to the bar. “Now, you know who’d be lucky?” he whispers. Eric looks at him, and Craig nods towards the girl descending the stairs, tall and beautiful with a thick mane of black braids down her back. They both try to be discrete in watching her pass. There is something adorable in her walk, Eric notices. She tries to walk calmly, coolly, but her pace quickens as she weaves through the tables and potted plants towards the beach. She is so different from Amy, who stalks around on her rather short, muscular legs, and suddenly there is an onslaught of loneliness, a yearning for someone his age not draped over a boyfriend or vacationing with family or someone who just doesn’t even see him; he wants a kindred spirit who has not seen him lose all his teeth and grow them back again slightly crooked. Maybe something new. His brain begins to buzz and something in him hopes she returns.

Miki comes over and follows their gaze. “You creeps.”

Craig turns to Eric. “Maybe later she’ll come to the restaurant and we’ll see if you’re really lucky after all, huh?”

Sky rubs on a thick lather of sunscreen and tries to lay out her towel, but couples keep walking around her right next to her where she wants to put it. Someone plops down right next to her left leg, so she moves over a bit, but almost encroaches on a family of five’s umbrella and shade. Eventually she gives up trying to sit near the water and retreats back up the relatively thin stretch of sand towards the stonewall lining of the restaurant. She sees an unused patch so she makes a beeline for it, only to realize that there are no people there because a palm tree obstructs the view of the water.

Several minutes slide away as she searches, cursing the Google image searches that never showed people on the beaches. Finally she finds a spot right in front of a large party of Japanese tourists. They are all about twenty and loud, the guys with spiky hair or backwards hats, the slender girls flit around in their itty-bitty pink bikinis, tossing their long hair. They squeal and yell. One wears a sash with faux crystals that says “Bride.” They are annoying, unexpected, and she is ashamed that they make her nervous. She doesn’t know what to do, but she wishes they would be quiet so she could listen to the ocean or a bird, or watch clouds float on the lip of sky in the horizon.

But there are no clouds and its as if the sun has reached down to personally to sit on her stomach and burn her. She cannot position her braids in a bun that is comfortable to lie on, and Sky feels the Japanese men staring at her while she tries to handle them all,

upset with herself, little tears of frustration dotting the corners of her eyes because she had not planned her hair better.

A white child comes by tottering too quickly, falls in his plastic blow up tube that says *ALOHA* in big green letters and kicks up sand onto her legs. She remembers a specific moment in Maine at boarding school, one of the many times she ventured off campus for the day when she wasn't supposed to. She wanted to get into nature, see the trees drip with fall colors, climb over the cool boulders; see the sky melt onto the lake. She found a spot on a large mossy rock, sat, breathing in the sap and the sweet lake water, and was letting down her braids when some stupid kids, who should have been at school themselves, threw dirt at her from behind. They called her a name she did not quite catch and then sprinted away. There was no reason for it, but she remembered they snickered and cackled, thrilled at the chance to defy their parents when their parents were not present, her adventure squashed.

Sky clamps her book shut and marches to the water, phone in hand. She angles the camera just so (there are no people in her frame and just a smidgen of a palm tree), snaps a picture. In a few taps, the photo has a filter, embossed with the word "Finally in My Paradise" underneath it, and posted to Instagram where she knows it will get a multitude of likes and jealous comments. The anxiety mounts, it pricks the back of her eyes, and she decides to go back towards the restaurant so the families, the Japanese tourists, the ocean doesn't see her crying.

“Excuse me, are you still serving food?” Eric looks up from talking with Craig to see the tall girl in the bright lemon yellow bathing suit. It’s a true yellow, he can tell even through his eyes, and it makes him smile.

“If you tell us your name we’re still serving food.” Craig grins.

“The name’s Sky.” The girl plops down, tilts her head, and smiles.

Craig hands her a menu from behind the bar. “Anything you’d like.”

Eric chimes in. “We make a really good cheeseburger.”

“I’d actually love a cheeseburger.”

Eric returns from putting the order in to the kitchen to find Craig talking with Sky.

“So this is your first time to Hawai‘i, huh?”

“How’d you know?” she laughs, and it is sort of husky. Eric likes it. “My dad is on a business trip and he brought me along as my graduation present. I’ve wanted to come here for my whole life.” She looks out at the ocean and sighs, the sigh that Eric has heard many times from every tourist. *Isn’t this the life? They all sigh. Isn’t this just perfect? You are so lucky you live here all the time. It’s just paradise.*

“Do you like it so far?” Eric asks, coming up to sit down. He does not usually talk much with the visitors; they are not much interested in him. It is times like these he wishes he had an interesting tattoo for them to see, ask him about, a time for him to tell a story.

“Oh yeah, it’s *beautiful*,” she says, not looking at either one of them. “Just as I imagined it.” She fiddles with a black braid, rolling it between her thumb and pointer finger. “Where are you from?” she asks him. “I’m from Pennsylvania, but I go to school in Maine.”

Maine, which part of the country was that in again? Was it above or below New York? “I’m from here,” Eric says. “Well not here, not Honolulu, Kailua actually.”

“And I’m from Kaneohe, but my grandmother was a picture bride from Japan,” Craig says, double flicking his eyebrows to convince her he’s interesting.

“Huh?” Sky says. She turns to Eric. “You’re from Hawai‘i?”

“Yeah, I was born here and I’ve lived here all my life.” *See, here is my cool tattoo of this cool important thing to me.*

“Oh cool,” she says, looking down at her nails. Eric looks away, he was wrong about this, the awkward crawls on his skin, he should go memorize the specials a little better for that night.

Craig of course speaks up. “What are you looking forward to the most?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Sky says. “I’d really like to go to a luau, or see a hula? You know, experience the real Hawai‘i. I saw something about it in a brochure.” She frowns in the direction of the pool nearby, the one where children are always squealing and screaming.

Craig lets out a loud bark of a laugh. “If you want to know the real Hawai‘i, learn how to gamble. Do you know how to gamble? We love to gamble here.” Sky does not seem to know how to respond.

An idea is taking over, something Eric never thought he would do, but maybe Amy would be delighted, slap him on the back and tell him good job, way to live a little for once, dammit. Lili would love the audience he knows; she will want Sky to call her auntie the second she walks through the door. She will probably cook her bacon. “Well if you want to see some real hula I can take you.” Her shoulders stiffen and she narrows her

eyes at him. “I mean, uh, well, or you can wait for the resort hula lesson, if that’s more what you’re looking for, but it’s not very good. But my neighbor is really good at it. Hula, I mean.” He can’t stop the words, and Craig is shaking his head with a smile, and some woman is at a table chattering loudly into her phone about her massage appointment later, and some father yells at a child by the pool, and he can see Sky contemplating it, oh he feels like such an idiot, how *creepy* of him, why did he try –

“Ok,” she says. “Real hula.”

And Craig laughs. “Oh, you are in for a *real* surprise.”

Sky plans to meet Eric the next afternoon when he is done his morning shift. She does not tell her father, who will be in a business meeting all day, because she knows how it will sound. She knows she should probably not go, she should stay at the resort and get a facial or a pedicure, order some room service and wait for her dad all day to be done, but there is something about the guy that does not threaten or intimidate her. She has interacted with him before, multiple times at grocery stores, the Target, the Jet Ski rental shop in the mountains. He’s quiet, kind, unremarkable. It is less adventurous than stealing off and hiking alone in Maine, but more adventurous than a culture class in the hotel. And maybe this way she will be able to escape the frustrations of the hotel beach, of the people who pose for photos with boogie boards every time she tries to sit down and look at the ocean in peace.

At least no one can obstruct her view of Diamond Head, the incredible crater off to the left in the distance, a powerful force of nature. She tries to imagine Hawai‘I without all the condos, and umbrellas and people, but can’t. Thankfully, she finds a post

card with a vintage photo at the Hawaiian Treasures store across the street. She finds it on the rotating shelf of thirty-five options, a shelf almost buried between the stacks of magnets, fake flower hair clips, stacks of faux wood carvings of gods, plastic ukuleles, bags of dried Dole pineapple bits, authentic Hawaiian nuts, sunscreen, and blow up floaties. It will look good mounted on her desk at Amherst, it will remind her of the warm breeze and the view from her hotel window.

The next morning Sky soaks in the hot tub of the hotel, jittery with excitement about seeing a *real hula*. She imagines his neighbor to be like the girl on the enormous advertisement outside the store, with long flowing hair, a soft gaze, languid arms out to the sides, a flowing skirt. Maybe she will teach Sky to hula, to swish her hips. This will be the best story to bring back. Maybe it will be her “fun fact” for all her impending freshman orientation games. *Hi, I’m Sky, and I learned how to really hula from a Hawaiian native.*

When she can’t take it anymore, Sky arrives twenty minutes early down by the restaurant to wait for Eric. The minutes are agonizing, she pulls on her jean shorts, adjusts her gauzy flower top that she bought just for the trip, looks around the room.

Eric finally comes out, no longer wearing the uniform, but a gray Kailua High School T-shirt and flip-flops. He smiles at her, then looks down, rubs the little patch of scruff growing on his chin. “Are you ready? We are going to take the bus. It’s just to a town over the mountains.”

There’s a bus? “I’m ready!” They pass Dior and Honolulu Cookie Company and H&M. People mill about, carrying bags, laughing together. They reach the next street

over, one that is decidedly less shiny and colorful but that still funnels into the mouths of large hotels.

It is unbearably cold on the bus, goose bumps sprout over her skin, the fabric of the seats are stained, the seats themselves are awkwardly close together. She tries to cross her legs to keep warm and so she doesn't bump Eric. They make small talk as the bus jerks and shakes down the road. He points out things to her on the street, a good Greek restaurant he likes, the capital building shaped like an inverted volcano, a school. Slowly the tourists slip off the bus.

"There is one more stop before we go over Pali highway. I'm sure you'll like the view on the way over."

At the last stop the bus squelches loudly, jerks to a stop, and guzzles a horde of people into the seats. Teenagers with tight tank tops and baggy shorts, girls with enormous hoop earrings, a fat older woman with a braid to her waist, a handicapped older man with dark leathery skin for whom the bus driver took down seats and hooked him into the side, a middle aged woman with a ratty T-shirt and a buzz cut, and a guy in his twenties who slipped his shoes off and put his filthy feet up on the side of the seat where Sky is sitting. She scoots closer to Eric to get away from the foot.

He notices and laughs quietly. "Hang loose, right?" The two of them sit amongst the sea of locals, she is too dark, maybe, but more so, he is too light, and for once she does not feel like a speckle.

Sky finds she can only focus on the guy's foot right next to her, she is hyper aware of every time he adjusts, of how his toes wiggle, how the dirt is jammed beneath

his toenails, caked on the hairs of his foot. She must have missed the views because Eric suddenly signals for her to follow him off the bus.

“I’m really excited to meet your neighbor. How long has she been taking hula?”

They begin to walk past a Macy’s and a Starbuck’s. “I think she used to take lessons when she was a young girl in school, and then stopped for a while, but now she’s taking them again to keep busy. But don’t worry, she knows what she’s doing.”

They reach the neighborhood where plumeria stipple the side of the road. The pukanawila flowers burst along the way, big tufts like bundles of tissue paper, bright pink, red, purple, white, yellow. “It’s all so *colorful*,” she says to him, staring at the hooked buds of a red jade vine. “This whole place is full of different colors. That’s got to be so amazing to see every day.” She thinks of how comforted she was by all the browns of the bus, regardless of the dirty foot, how it felt to be in that sea of color, to sink, with a pleasant weightiness, to the bottom, instead of float on the top. It had been a different serenity than sitting on that boulder in Maine, or even in her hotel room while her father is out. A brief moment, but full, like hot oatmeal on a snowy morning.

“Everything’s the same to me,” he says, his hands in his pockets.

“What’re you talking about?”

“I don’t really see color.”

She sees a neighbor peer out from the garage as they pass, staring, and thinks that maybe this Eric is like all those idiots she went to boarding school with who tried to act like everyone was the same, but complained about affirmative action screwing them. “Oh yeah, everyone is colorblind these days,” she snaps, glaring at him. She’s so tired of it all,

she thought Hawai‘I would be different, that she would finally be able to *escape*, of course she’d only be able to meet a white guy and not –

Eric’s cheeks are burning. “No, I mean, I only see yellow and blue and sometimes grayish brown. I’m colorblind, like, uh, genetically. Because my dad was, you know, colorblind.”

“Oh, I, uh –”

“It’s still the same Hawai‘I though, I guess. Color or not. You don’t need it to see all the dogs, Jack in the Box food chains, and Yankees caps.” He tries to laugh, but it comes out more like a cough. Eric turns down a driveway. “Oh and, uh, we’re here.”

Sky barely has time to process the embarrassment, before a large woman with long graying black hair flings open the door, is hugging Eric, hugging her, introducing herself as Lili, yes, like the *queen*, call her auntie Lili, she’s so excited to show her hula, she’s got everything ready.

Sky follows, answers some small talk questions, but mostly watches how much Eric relaxes, how easy his smile becomes, how he goes into the kitchen to get glasses of water for the two of them. He knows his way around, he leans on the walls, he pops a grape into his mouth from the bowl on the counter. “Where’s Amy?” he asks.

“She’s out at the store,” Lili answers.

“Who’s Amy?” Sky blurts out before she can stop herself.

“My granddaughter who he’s in love with,” Lili snickers and makes kissy faces.

Sky sees Eric stick his head in the fridge looking for something. He closes it without bringing anything out. “Ok, ok, sit,” the old woman says excitedly. “On the couch, I’ll be in this chair.”

Sky sits on the couch, confused by the bright burnt orange of the carpet on the wood floor, and confused as to why the old woman was sitting in a chair, why there is no music, and feeling awkward because of what she said to Eric, who is now sitting next to her, handing her a glass of water, and telling her to get ready because Lili is top of her class. Sky yearns for the bed of the hotel, the sectioned off view of Diamond Head from the door. The pungent scent of bacon seems to cling to everything in the house and Sky wishes she could smell the floral air freshener in the hot tub room.

“This is the first one I learned, it’s an old, traditional one.” Lili clears her throat, scoots all the way back in her chair, and begins to sing. It’s midrange, monotonous, and in Hawaiian. She moves her arms slowly, fanning out first above her head, touches her shoulders, spreads out her hands towards them. She repeats the motion, continues to sing, then moves to spread her arms and hands towards her knees, turns her wrists slowly, softly, brings the tips of her fingers together. Now it is from bottom corner to top corner, her elbow then resting on her now perpendicular arm, she sings, brings her hand forward towards her face, her fingers oscillate like a fish tail, and then the other side. It happens all so slowly, so roundly, Lili rocks back and forth in the chair; her hands then form waves, she brings them in, singing all the while in the haunting monotone that only barely wavers, and her palms are over one another, thumbs twirling. She does this again, then spreads both arms out in front, brings them up over her head, drawing a globe in the air, her voice softening, leveling, she holds her hands directly out in front, her eyes closed, letting her voice carry on a little farther until all is quiet.

“So what did you do today, Sky?” Lamont Howard asks his daughter that night at a late dinner on the patio of the hotel under the haze of the tikki torches. The wind rustles the nearby palm trees and goose bumps rise on her arms from the slight chill in the air. He has worked late the other nights, and it is the first time in a few days they have eaten together.

“I went to – um...” Her voice catches. She looks at her father’s kind face, a face that has loved her for so long, and she aches to tell him about the awkwardness of the boy and watching the old woman hula in a chair. She was confused and upset the rest of the afternoon when she got back to the hotel. She had cried in the hot tub alone, napped on the bed though the beach was strangely barren and she should have been sticking her toes in the sand. Now, she needs a hug, someone to tell her that it’s okay that it all wasn’t what she had expected, that it never could have been.

And everything is at the tip of her tongue, and it takes her a moment, but she realizes that she will never be able to tell her father. He does not know she likes to sneak away and she does not know if he would approve, wink, and tell her about his raucous times in high school sneaking out the back window or if he would be livid, disappointed. It scares her that she cannot predict his reaction, that he would never predict this behavior in her. His kind face for a moment looks strange, as though she has never seen it before, and she looks away.

“I mostly just hung out. Hot tub, you know,” Sky says, her voice a little squeaky. She quickly sips her lemonade. “What did *you* do all day?”

“Ah, well, you know. I sat in a stuffy room with some business people and suffered through a short round of golf.” Lamont chews a large piece of steak. “These trips get kind of boring for me. I would much rather hang out with you.”

She thinks about how different the previous day on the beach would have been if her father could have joined her. They would have spread out, marked a huge spot for themselves with blankets and books. No little boys would have come through to kick sand on her. Sky and her father would have laughed at all the bad sunburns and silly people attempting to surf on the small hiccups of waves. And suddenly her mind jumps to her forbidden hikes at boarding school, how she wishes her father had been there, how he would have yelled at the boys who threw dirt at her. How the boys probably would not have thrown dirt at all. “I would’ve much rather hung out with you too, dad.” She wishes she could forget the whole hula ordeal, even wanting to see one in the first place and trade it for a walk with her dad.

“Aw, you’re sweet. Not many girls your age want to hang around with their old dads.” He smiles at her and she aches.

“Well, you know me.”

They chew their steaks for a moment in silence. Lamont waves his fork around, indicating everything. “I’m so excited you finally got to come. Was it everything you’ve been imagining since childhood?” he asks.

She hesitates, and he continues to smile at her. She only detects a slight falter, a slight worry in his eye when she does not answer right away. Some diners near by begin to laugh, the sounds bouncing off of the tile and into Sky’s ears.

“Just about.”

Eric heads to Amy's house at dusk. Even during the few seconds of the walk over to her house, his heart flutters as always when he thinks about the smile she will give him. He likes her best when she is in her UH sweatshirt, the one that's so long it covers her shorts, and her hair flopping in a bun on the side of her head. The sound of the knock on the door is comforting.

It opens and there is Amy. She is not smiling.

"What were you thinking?" she demands.

Eric feels a sharp pain in his stomach. "What? I just came..."

Amy puts a hand on her hip. She's not wearing the sweatshirt, but a banana yellow tank top and he can see the dolphin on her shoulder flex, the gecko jump on her left bicep. "You basically dangled my grandmother in front of a tourist and sold her as a show piece." Eric has never seen her face so hard and he cannot remember the last time Amy referred to Lili as "my grandmother." "You had no right to do that. She's not an extension of your father's stupid hotel gimmick."

"Amy, I didn't..."

"What do you mean *you didn't*? She told me you did. Are you saying she's lying?"

A frog croaks nearby. He swallows. "No, no, I did bring the girl here, but not for that. I wanted to show her something...I don't know...authentic and beautiful about this place." He wants to say something about it being special, about the fact that after his whole life on the island, he is really only at home in Lili's house, but it doesn't come out.

He is dizzy, he wants to hug her, and bizarrely, he feels like if he just kissed her, kissed her for the first time since they were little, that it would make it better.

Amy is about to reply when Lili comes to the door. “Eric! Just in time to help make some chicken. Come in, come in.” Lili turns and goes into the house, seemingly unaware of how Amy is staring at Eric. “Hurry,” Lili calls. “I’m getting lazier by the minute and we’ll never eat if you let me get in the way.”

Amy moves aside and Eric enters. The sound of Bunny padding around the kitchen, the way the pictures of Amy through the years tilt on the wall in the hallway, the way Lili hums over the *Jeopardy!* contestants on the TV, the familiarity of it all cradles Eric’s heart. But Amy’s anger is threatening, and he is clamming up.

Lili goes to the couch and puts her feet up. Eric and Amy stand on opposite sides of the island counter. She hands him a knife. Amy cuts the shiny, wet vegetables and Eric begins to cut the chicken. It is thick, soft, and cold in his hands.

“So what about a beautiful and authentic tattoo?” Amy snarls at him under her breath. “Why not show that?”

“I guess...I guess a tattoo is more personal, not about a place,” Eric mumbles. “Plus, I don’t have one.”

Amy whacks the knife through the onion. “Personal, huh? Because you’d get to have some control over how you look, right? Only messing with your own skin?”

His face burns. The heat from his face must be surging through his body and into the chicken he is holding. It seems ludicrous that he had always lumped everyone with tattoos together, into a group, a group he was not a part of, and yet, somehow he had

managed it in his mind. Everyone else, with their body art, their beautiful inked canvases, and Eric. “Yeah, only my skin.”

“Only the image you want to show, right?” She flings the onion slivers into a bowl now. “What *do* you want to present, Eric? What do you want a tattoo of? You’ve thought about it for so long, haven’t you decided? Maybe a hotel?” He has not seen her growl like this since elementary school when she would hiss at Trevor to scat or else. Eric’s hands shake and he’s not sure he can keep cutting the chicken without accidentally cutting himself or it all slipping to the floor and into a huge mess.

He realizes there is only one thing for him to do. He must answer her. And he is so unsure, so unsure of what is permanent in his life, even in a life so boring and monotonous as his. He is only aware of the constant light, a color, in his life, the light that Amy has radiated since he had seen her and her slightly pudgy legs scoot by on her skateboard, a light he has always moved towards and tried to stay in because to be in it, to hear Lili laugh at Amy’s jokes or hear Amy talk about her classes or the newest thriller novel she was reading, it made him feel better than even the moments when the rain breaks the heat or when he finally submerges his head with the rest of his body under the cold ocean water at dusk. He does not know how to answer her, to tell her that if he could tattoo something, this would be it. “Maybe a skateboard or this house, or something,” he says quietly, tears beginning to waver in his eyes. “That’s all I’d really want to show.”

He waits, looking at her, watches the anger melt from her features, her soft hazel eyes close and Amy puts down her knife. And for the first time, Eric makes himself reach over and put a hand on hers.

Welcome to the Family

Kaimi is trying to keep his mind off the wedding. He takes out his ham and cheese sandwich and sits on the knobbed root of the tree, his back to the Palace. Mynah birds the size of teacups pop around the grass and dive in and out of the rusting green garbage bin. The air is thick, sticky, the traffic squeezes by, honking and screeching over the shrill clicking and squawking. Sighing, he bites his sandwich, hummus slips onto his lip.

Tourists bumble in, usually glued to the screen of their cameras or phones; homeless people lie on the benches that ring around the tree trunks, the ones Kaimi always wishes he could sit on. He imagines King Kamehameha III descending from the yellow and blue coronation gazebo, walking towards the homeless men, banishing them, so the honorable Kaimi could sit on a bench and not a tree stump. But Kamehameha only lives in the highway signs, and the occasional naming of a school, bakery, or cat food. Tiki Cat King Kamehameha Variety Pack Cat Food. So Kaimi sits on the tree.

Today he is too tired to keep emailing people. He wants to go to his Macy's shift refreshed for once. Although his volunteer work at the Iolani Palace is exciting, a veritable treasure hunt, the kind he used to dream about as a child as he searched for shells on shell-less beaches while his parents dozed, he is no help. Macy's, where he can restock golf shirts and sell pungent colognes to customers who somehow think the Hawaiian Macy's is different from the ones in Ohio, Pennsylvania, or Texas, is where he deserves to be, the man who pushed his wife away and lost his job as a car salesman. At the Palace, he sends thousands of emails, hundreds of leads flop only to dead-ends; he spends hours poring over newspaper articles, archives, anything in the Register. Macy's is easy, simple: red and white, big stars from ceilings, glossy tubes of lipstick, bathing

suits, and Hawaiian shirt after Hawaiian shirt. No history, no search, just a cash register and a price.

Eileen, a sixty-five-year-old haole guide (“I’m *Black Irish*, my grandparents are from Cork,” she insists) from Milwaukie with a penchant for history and fake Chinese jade bracelets, comes to sit next to him. “How goes it, bud?” Eileen is still dressed in her docent outfit, a long magenta dress and the slippers over her shoes to keep from ruining the wood inside. She has forgotten to remove the slippers.

Eileen has a stubborn mustache that she refuses to try to remove. Or maybe she does not know that it is there, Kaimi cannot tell. “I’ve got my ham and cheese, so I can’t complain. How are you?”

“Just fabulous. This damn dress is as comfortable as any nightie. So, get any email replies lately?” Eileen, like Kaimi, emails people around the U.S. in search of artifacts from Queen Liliuokalani’s reign that were auctioned off by the American businessmen when they made Hawai‘i a territory. She, unlike Kaimi, has had some luck. Eileen was instrumental in the return of an elephant tusk from Minnesota. There is a picture of her standing next to it in the music room, the gold room, proudly, almost haughtily Kaimi thinks secretly. Eileen the Black Irishwoman is a little haughty.

“Haven’t caught anything yet, no,” Kaimi says.

“You’ll get there. Speaking of catch, want to come fishing soon?” Eileen has asked Kaimi to fish at least ten times, and each time Kaimi says no. It is something he used to do with his wife. She would stand with the pole, tip her baseball cap backwards, rub her face and stare out at the ocean while their Cavalier King Charles spaniel Zoey circled her feet. (He does not eat fish anymore, he much prefers red meat or lamb or

chicken, or anything but fish, really). Kaimi would sit in a chair, dig his feet in the sand, and watch his exquisite wife, Lanakila, or Kila for short, one of only a few who could trace her lineage back to Hawaiian royalty. She had liked to joke about it, sometimes placing a seashell on her head and calling herself queen of the clams.

He had followed her around all through grade school, middle school, high school, UH, buying her sodas, carrying her beach towel, hoping to be noticed by the beautiful Kila. Maybe that was his problem, this desire to be noticed. He wishes he could still follow her around the house, scoop her supple belly from behind, draw her towards him, place her hips against his. *I'll watch you fish forever.*

“I’m not a very good partner. The fish sense my inexperience and turn up their noses at me. It’s very condescending of them.”

“Puh, what do you have this time?” Eileen rolls her eyes, bites into a cookie, crumbs hang on her chin. She nudges him with her elbow.

“I’m actually going to Connecticut for my sister’s wedding.” He is surprised he is even invited to his forty-year-old sister’s late-in-life wedding. He is more surprised he is going. He leaves on a flight tomorrow. Kaimi has never been to Connecticut, has never visited his sister or asked for pictures, has never left Hawai‘i. But right now, as the traffic passes in hums and bursts and the air stifles him, he thinks that maybe some dark woods and a meadow would be welcoming. He imagines dew on this meadow and hopes that is where Malie lives.

Eileen wipes her mouth. “Oh, Connecticut, huh? There’s been some talk around the office of some plates there, near Mystic I think.” He knows he is going to Mystic, but Kaimi isn’t sure how the mainland concept of near compares to the island, the one he can

drive fully around in two hours with no traffic. He's done it before, when Kila first left and he couldn't sleep, he'd get up and drive the rim in the thick darkness, feeling, for the first time, hemmed in by the delicate stitching of sea to shore.

Eileen waves her hands, dismissing it. "But you'll be at your sister's wedding. Much more exciting."

Kaimi takes the bus from his Macy's shift up Pali highway and out of downtown Honolulu to his community that pushes against the brim of the road, then spreads down the valley and up the side of the mountain, crawling through the ridges and the green brush. The jagged mountains draped in the green fleece of the trees have always looked like they itched; he would like to give them a good scratch, maybe smooth them over with the clouds. His roommate – a heavysset, elderly Samoan-Tahitian lesbian who moved in after Kila left so Kaimi could still afford the place – is out. She is always out, which makes for a good roommate but does not fill Kila's space the way he had hoped.

Kaimi heats up his bento box from the Shirokiya Japanese market in the Ala Moana mall, feeds Zoey, and goes to sit on his rickety lanai chair in the heat. There is supposed to be a meteor shower.

Kaimi waits for the darkness to seep through the edges between the mountains, for his neighbor to stop pumping rap music so he can enjoy the night sky. As a young boy, Kaimi would sit outside ripping grass out of the ground and rubbing plumeria petals between his fingers until they tore while his prodigy sister played the piano – Bach, Mozart, Wagner – and he would think about Kila, her pudgy hips and big round eyes, the way her lips sucked down her sodas. He thought about her at night in middle school,

sometimes while he slept and would wake up to crusty boxers; in high school while she was at the beach parties with someone else and he worked at the dumpy shave ice stand; and in college at UH when finally they stayed up late, listening to the Beach Boys, talking about cooking, their secret love of jigsaw puzzles, their insane relatives, their Hawaiian heritage, the land. Kila loved the land. She used to swallow ocean water, choking down all the salt so that the ocean would really be in her while she was in the ocean. He used to think she was so poetic.

She had encouraged him to start volunteering at the Palace, where the two of them, lost in a haze of first love and sex, used to have picnics on the lawn even at night with wine, reenacting coronation ceremonies when slightly drunk. Kila would do the moonwalk or attempt the worm, and inevitably end up on the ground, laughing hysterically with dirt all over her face. She had urged him to search for the pieces of Hawai'i that belonged at home and he wanted to. But he had found no pieces, only lost one. Kila lived on a ranch on the Big Island now, tilling the land and forgetting him.

It begins to drizzle, the rap music pounds on, the sky throbs a pearly gray with the clouds and Kaimi gives up on the meteor shower. He goes to pack, confused about what to bring to wear in Connecticut for April, and angry he has to go. Why had Malie chosen Connecticut of all places? He remembers their parents had chosen. He likens it to a betrayal, but Kaimi knows that isn't true. Connecticut, with white houses, brick houses, chimneys, with massive boarding schools whose campuses are lush wooded islands is home of the missionaries, another little piece of his family heritage. There is no betrayal there.

Kaimi stops by his parents' house the morning of his late night flight. It is slightly rundown and smells like burnt rice. He breathes in deeply before knocking, sucking in the damp air, the scent of dust from the garage, and he fingers the magenta bougainvilleas that bloom near the door entrance. He likes going home, but the slow deterioration of the house makes him wonder if maybe he should have outgrown it by now.

His father comes to the door, his white shirt wrinkled, his face soft all around the edges. "Come in, come in, son!" he says and Kaimi goes inside to hug and kiss him. The windows are open and Kaimi can hear the chimes, smell the pink frangipani flowers right outside the windows like he always could as a boy. The piano music is a CD on repeat, playing softly. "Your mother is in bed. How are you? Are you ready to brave the mainland after all this time?" To his father, the mainland is like a big shark that a man chases his whole life to catch so that he can stand beaming next to it on a beach, with a foot on top.

"I've been the same," Kaimi says. There is always this underlying question about whether he has heard from Kila, whether he has fixed it, whether they will get back together. For a year and a half he has never had an answer. "Don't you wish you were coming?"

"I suppose I wish they had visited."

"Malie always did what she wanted," Kaimi says.

"And I always wanted to walk my Malie down the aisle." Yet, his dad smiles. "She's happy." He shrugs. Kaimi cannot shake the feeling that the suggested next sentence is, *Are you?*

The two head towards the bedroom, where the windows are open and a hot breeze barely ruffles the gauzy drapes.

“Here’s our Sleeping Beauty,” his father says.

Kaimi goes to kiss his mother’s wrinkled cheek. She doesn’t open her eyes, but just smiles. “You’re always so sweet to come. But where is Kila? Why have you not brought Kila?”

Every time she forgets, Kaimi is tempted by the opportunity to fabricate a new life for himself, or to yank back his old one and walk around in it for a little while. “Kila is on the Big Island, remember? But I’m going to Malie’s wedding; I’m flying out tonight. And I’m going to be your eyes, ok?”

“Malie,” his mother sighs. “I miss her music.” She talks as though just yesterday Malie has left for boarding school. She looks up at Kaimi and gives him a wry smile. “She’s going to be lovely and you’re going to be nice to her.”

Connecticut smells like pine, sap, spring water, leaves, dirt. Kaimi has never really smelled pine, besides the scented car air fresheners and everything soaked in the scent at Christmas (a scent heightened by the moist air and sea salt). But here bolts of fresh, cool air shoot through his nostrils, stinging him.

Malie is busy with last minute plans for the wedding, so he takes a bus into town and goes to the coffee shop she recommended until she can pick him up. There is no public transport to her house, she’d told him. *It’s a little off the beaten path.*

From the bus window, everything about the small town of Mystic confuses him, and yet, he loves how cute it is, how picturesque; the small white church is propped in the

hill above the main street. It looks like every cheesy movie he's watched on television, like he may pass the shopkeeper, school teacher, and pastor along the way, people who have lived there their entire lives, rather like the neighbors from his childhood who have only moved over one street, if at all. What he loves most is that the church seems to have been plucked from the train set that his father used to put around the trunk of the Christmas tree. (His father had purchased the set at a discount after dropping Malie off at boarding school for the first time. He'd displayed it proudly for his son, four months too early, so that Kaimi could try and imagine where Malie was. An angry, lonely young Kaimi imagined bringing the set to the beach and watching his favorite fat monk seal smash it just by rolling over it). Come to think of it, every house, the white panels, the black pointed roofs, the brick chimney stack, looks like the train set. There is a blue glass lake beyond the trees, where sleek sailboats nod off to sleep.

He exits the bus with his bag; a chill travels slowly to his toes, sneaking under his clothes. The dark purple, beige, pastel green, yellow fronts of the shops shock him, though he tries not to show it, and the humble signs that hang from curled iron announce boutiques, jewelry, antiques, restaurants, and finally the coffee shop where he is meant to wait for Malie.

At the counter a young teenage girl with wiry arms and a **Coffee Bean!** visor gives him a bright smile. The tips of her hair are electric blue. "Hola! Como estás?"

"What?" he asks.

"Estoy practicando! Aren't you Salvadorian? Columbian? Maybe Puerto Rican?" she asks, cocking her head, chewing on a nail eagerly. It splits from the top of her finger.

“I’m Hawaiian,” he says. It should bother him but something about the girl is sweet.

She stops chewing, rubs her hands on her apron. “Oh, my bad, I was just trying to practice. My teacher...my bad,” she says again. “Aloha! That’s right, right? Oh my god, wait, do you speak Hawaiian?!”

“I speak about as much Hawaiian as that little blue alien from the Disney movie.” He cracks a smile. “But I do wear a lot of floral. Not ironically, either.”

The girl smiles. “So, like, what are you doing in Connecticut?”

“Just buying a donut.” It seems simple enough, and he likes the ridiculousness of coming all the way across the ocean and the entire mainland for one donut.

“Take two, they’re small!”

Kaimi lifts the glass dome cover off of the platter and takes two donuts slathered in chocolate icing and heavy with sprinkles and looks back to the girl. Her nametag reads Jenny. “How much do I owe you, Jenny?”

“Nothing, nothing, on the house. You came a long way for that donut.”

He bites into one, the chocolate icing oozes. “I’m in Connecticut for a wedding,” he says.

“Wow, you know someone in *Connecticut*? Talk about a long distance relationship!” Jenny snorts a laugh, then blushes. She toys with the blue tips of her hair. It looks as though she had dipped them in the Pacific.

He smiles for a moment, but then he remembers how his sister would opt to stay at a friend’s mansion in Vermont or Massachusetts or a penthouse apartment in New York over holiday breaks rather than come home to O’ahu, to the outskirts of Honolulu.

“It’s dirty there and hot. My fingers will swell and make it hard to practice,” she’d whine to him over the phone. Hot? Kaimi thought. “And our piano is probably out of tune. There are real cities here, and mountains, and oh my *gosh* you have to see these girls’ lake homes. They’re *gorgeous*. So much better than those hideous Waikiki high rises.” Fourteen-year-old Malie had acquired the habit of *gushing*, young Kaimi noticed. Gushing about everywhere but O’ahu.

“I thought you wanted to be here. I need help with my family tree project. Mom and Dad want to hear you practice,” Kaimi would protest. “O’ahu has mountains.” In hindsight, the sixth grade family tree project was not as enticing as he thought. He should have mentioned the beach and her surfboard the color of sherbet he’d kept in pristine condition for her with washing, waxing, rubbing down until it shone. Either way, Malie laughed at him.

“Kaimi, I’m talking about the gray ones with snow on top. Besides, I can’t and I don’t want to. Be sure to go see the Macy’s tree at the Ala Moana for me, though, okay? Send me a picture, you know I love that thing.” With that she hung up the phone.

Kaimi hears the bell ring. Before he turns his head he can sense his sister’s presence – full-bodied, powerful, floral with a hint of mint. He turns to see that she is radiant.

“Kaimi!” Malie rushes towards him and he just has time to drop his donut on the counter before she envelops him in a hug. “Oh, Kaimi you made it! I’m so excited. I can’t wait for you to meet everyone. Oh, it’s been so long!”

Hugging her is like sipping the sweet Apple juice as a kid on the lanai while his dad hummed and watered the flowers around the yard. Oh, he has *missed* her; he has

missed the touch, the arms of his sister. She is regal in her age, like a queen with the right lines in her face, the right lipstick, the right pearls on her neck. She is groomed and perfect and loving and he has missed her. In a euphoric moment, all is forgiven, Kaimi might move to Connecticut, he loves it here.

“Ok, let’s get going, I have to get back to the house quickly and I want you to meet everyone.” He bets she has a whole island of people for him to meet, most of whom he has only seen in photographs, the emails he has barely glanced at. He wishes he had paid more attention, read the captions “from left to right,” knew something about the coconut colored faces that blended together across frame after frame.

“Of course, of course,” Kaimi says, picking up his luggage. He leaves his donut on the counter and goes with Malie.

“So, how’s, you know, life?” Malie asks him, sort of laughing at the broadness of the question. Kaimi is unsure how to talk about the last ten years in one car ride. “Besides everything with Kila. I’m so sorry about that, she was always kind of a diva. How’re mom and dad? I wish they would’ve just come.” She shakes her head.

“Mom’s really sick, Malie. They’re old.” And there it is, like a small child, he hates her all over again. *You could’ve come back to see us every once in a while. We are supposed to be ohana.* But she couldn’t have come back; there are hardly any jobs on the island for a musical genius. “I’m an artist, I’m not going to play at some tourist hotel bar with a dumb flower in my hair,” she’d told him over the phone after college. “Is that what you want for me? Unless you come up with something else, I’m staying here. You’ll be just fine without me.” And now, though he has always known, Kaimi realizes that she was the one who was just fine; she has had a different family, a different home and life in

Connecticut the whole time. And to see it is like a hollowing out, like sucking out the water from the pool and letting the concrete bake and crack in the sun.

“No, no, of course, I mean, I’m upset because, well, because I...I waited so long to get married and now they can’t be here, but it’s ok, I know they would love Derek and his family. His father is so excited to walk me, even if it’s a silly tradition.” She taps her fingers on the steering wheel, adjusts the car temperature, checks her lipstick in the rearview. “I’m so excited for you to meet everyone. Derek is so thrilled to meet my family.”

“But it’s just me,” he says quietly.

“I can’t believe I’m going to be married in a few days.” Malie makes a sharp turn off the road onto a path surrounded by lush trees whose leaves glisten in the mist. They arrive at a gated neighborhood. They turn into the driveway and the house sits in the perfectly manicured clearing like an old English manor, or how Kaimi always imagined one would look. He thinks about their parents’ house, with its squat one story and its dirty walkway and dead palm tree branches littered around the lawn.

“Oh, you’re just going to love our music room. I bought your favorite foods for just tonight. You still like steak, right? No fish. You’re staying upstairs in one of our guest rooms.”

It touches him, like the nudge of a small dog’s nose to your elbow when you aren’t looking, that she did not buy him fish. “I’m sure it’ll be great.”

The house is huge. The woods around the house are huge. The fountain out back is huge. Derek is huge. Derek has a smile like a big, white brick stuck into his face. His

handshake is too firm, his voice booms. Derek's plump mother, Deborah, hugs Kaimi and says, "Welcome to the family!" Derek's father, John, is tall, refined, and wears a heavy watch that weighs his wrist down as Kaimi tries to shake it. His Hawaiian shirt of yellow and blue floral is like a tacky sticker in an elegant photo book.

After the initial introductions, the smiles stay plastered on everyone's face while they all stand in the silence for a moment.

Malie claps her hands together. "Are you hungry?"

"I could probably eat something." She ushers him into the kitchen and everyone follows then stands around again while Malie looks through the spacious kitchen pantry.

"Would you like a glass of wine?" Derek offers. "We have a special bottle I'd love to open for you."

"It's one in the afternoon," Kaimi says.

"Oh, yes of course, I guess I thought with your time difference..."

"It's seven in the morning in Hawai'i." Malie glares at him so he tries to laugh a little bit. "But it's five o'clock somewhere!"

Derek seems unsure of himself but he goes to get a glass of wine anyway and his parents just stand with their hands on the marble counter, smiling at Kaimi.

"That's such a beautiful shirt," Deborah says. "Where did you get it?" John peers at him.

"Macy's. I work there." She is slightly cartoonish and small and Kaimi does not know a single thing about her or her husband. And they know nothing about him. He has come all this way and still has so much space he must travel. He understands, he is the

stranger to them, he is the unknown, the wild card, so he can only blame them so much for asking about what it is like to work at Macy's. *It's shitty, even in paradise.*

"Do you want some cheese and crackers?" Malie calls out loudly.

Malie hands him some cheese and crackers on a porcelain plate and Derek gives him a hefty glass of red wine. The wine is delicious, but Kaimi craves the marshmallow stuffed French toast that Kila used to make for him on special mornings with a side of leftover homemade *halo-halo* dessert to sweeten the deal even more. He imagines her now, wiping her brow with the back of her hand, sitting down in the grass and the dirt for a while to take a break from the ranch work, letting the sun soak her.

Malie goes over to stand next to Derek. She begins rubbing his back while Kaimi chokes down the cold cheese. "So, tonight we thought we could all just hang out, maybe a movie, I'm sure you want to get some sleep, and tomorrow we'll have a big fancy dinner but just for the close family and friends. Then the rehearsal dinner, which you won't have to worry about—" he always knew he wasn't in the wedding, but did she have to say it like that? "—and then the big day." She beams at Derek, then tilts her head to look at Kaimi. "Is there anything in particular you'd like to do right now?"

Out of everything, he can only think that he wished he'd asked for a different snack. "I'd like to hear you play. It's been so long."

Malie beams. "That we can do."

Her touch and sense for the music has aged as well as Malie herself. Kaimi sits off to the side so he can see her face, her hands on the keys, and watches her. She knows

the piece by heart, of course, but plays it as though she is playing it for the first time. Her eyes are closed, she rocks slowly back and forth, gives her heart and soul to Debussy.

He remembers the night of her last concert a week before leaving for boarding school. The thirteen-year-old Malie had received a million well-wishes and half-serious requests for CDs and signatures before she was famous and for addresses and emails and notes home, and if she could learn *this* piece for the next time she was home because it was his wife's *absolute favorite* that would be so wonderful, but when it was all over, she came home and kicked off her heels. Kaimi went into her room to sit on her lime green chair while she rubbed the arch of her foot.

“Want to take a walk, little bro? Our favorite path?” Kaimi nodded and the two went out into the dusk in their flip-flops. After stopping by the grocery store for a bag of M&Ms, they headed through the dirt neighborhood paths towards the beach. They didn't talk much, just kicked sand at each other and tried to chase the other close enough to the lip of the ocean to get their feet wet. Malie laughed and threatened to throw the bag of chocolates into the ocean where some lemon angelfish could eat them.

They found the rickety white plastic chairs that had been there as long as they could remember and sat down, passing the bag back and forth. The sky was darkening into a rich indigo freckled by white stars.

“Aren't you going to miss it here, Malie?” Kaimi asked in a small voice, still a young kid, still enamored by the way the ocean can twinkle and crash at the same time.

“Sure, I'll miss it,” she said, popping five blue M&Ms into her mouth. “I know you don't get it, but...it's...” She chucks an M&M angrily at the sand. “It's so *small*. It's hard to learn all this music, and play it and go somewhere different in my mind,

somewhere big and airy and then, like, walk outside and bam, hit the ocean or after an hour of driving, bam, hit the *other* side of the ocean.” She shakes her head slowly, then quickly like she tasted something sour. “Just too small. But I’ll always call. Don’t worry.”

Now, Malie plays and the room expands and Kaimi cannot look away. But Deborah is whispering about something to John, Derek is checking his phone, then leaves the room for a minute. They have all probably heard this piece hundreds of times; it is not new or fresh for them.

Malie finishes and Kaimi gives her a small round of applause. She tilts her head to rest it on her shoulder, smiling at him. “Good?” she asks.

“Good,” he says.

Kaimi declines a movie, preferring to go to sleep in the guest room with the fluffy down comforter on the queen sized bed.

He goes to sleep and dreams that Malie is dressed in a circus costume, banging out silly tunes on the piano while Derek makes Kaimi march through the music room, roaring with laughter. Kila watches him, still in her T-shirt and flowing pants, her arms crossed. Even Jenny is there, following him, offering him a donut in Spanish. Kaimi tries to break rank and reach out to Kila but Zoey comes up and bites Kaimi, sinks her teeth in and won’t let go. Kaimi howls. Derek and Deborah and John laugh and laugh.

Kaimi wakes up once during the night, wide-awake and restless. He thinks back to the last time he saw his sister. His parents had welcomed her enthusiastically, cooking

five course meals, throwing a separate party for all of their familial and neighborhood relatives to come see Malie, hear her play, catch up with *The Girl Who Left the Island*. Malie's room was completely redecorated; their mother bought a new bedspread, new throw pillows, bought framed photos and paintings of New England to hang on her wall for a week. The piano was tuned, cleaned, shined, the yard was cleared and manicured, the fridge was stuffed, new flowers were planted. Malie was coming; Christmas and Kaimi's wedding were a side order.

Malie showed up, complaining of the heat, the rain, the fact that she'd forgotten her face cream. "We can get you something here," their mother said brightly.

"Don't worry about it ma, they don't sell it here."

Malie barely noticed the paintings on the wall and asked their mother for the only type of tea she hadn't bought. "Oh, my, I'm so sorry, dear," their mother said, rushing around, flustered, trying to grab her keys. "I should've known that's what you liked, I just forgot, really, I'm so sorry." His mother's embarrassment, her flushed cheeks, the way her hair started slipping out of her bun she had labored over that morning in the mirror, made Kaimi furious.

"Ma, it's *fine*, I don't need to drink tea here," Malie said. She painted her fingernails at the table while their father bustled around, cooking. Malie grinned at Kaimi. "So you finally caught Kila, huh? You were always chasing her around. Good work, little bro."

"You wouldn't know," Kaimi said, brooding. "But yes, I finally 'caught' her, even though she's not a fish."

“Oh Kaimi,” Malie said, waving him off, “I’m happy for you, can’t you finally just be happy for me about boarding school years and years ago? I’m sure Kila would say the same thing.”

“Be *nice*, Kaimi,” he mother said. “It’s over.”

Christmas morning was anticlimactic. Malie bought Kaimi a sweater that was too small. “In case you ever come to Connecticut,” she said. Kaimi almost didn’t give her the leather, gold embossed folder for loose-leaf music he’d spent so long picking out, she didn’t deserve it, but he didn’t have anything for a back up gift. He couldn’t give her nothing, but her misty eyes after she opened the gift only made him moody.

And finally the wedding. There is a picture of Malie, her hair luscious and flowing, standing next to Kaimi in the sun, he in his white suit, she in a tight navy blue dress after she declined to wear the dress their mother had picked out for her. They are smiling, arms around each other, their outlines glowing crests from the sun. Kaimi has the picture framed in his apartment, even though he knows that right after it was taken, Malie was pulled away by family friends and relatives, even the ones who thought she was snotty and selfish for leaving the island were too nosy to resist. Kaimi stood near the bush with his hands in his pockets.

It was Kila who came up to him, and the warmth spread all over him as he looked at her again in that dress, his bride, with one single flower in her hair. She kissed him, and it all melted away. Malie and Connecticut may as well have never existed, when Kila kissed him like that. He was so whole, so full.

Kaimi is up before anyone in the house, so he gets dressed in the most muted toned shirt he brought, and tiptoes his way downstairs. To his surprise, Malie is up in the kitchen with a cup of coffee and a novel.

“Hey little bro,” she says. “I was just getting some alone time, some quiet before the day starts. I made stuffed French toast.” She gets up to get him a plate, a glass of orange juice, some hot syrup.

“How long have you been up?” he asks.

“I haven’t been able to sleep well recently, just with all the excitement and planning, you know. So I’ve been up a while.” She smiles, and it’s the first time he can see that his sister really is exhausted, but enormously happy.

“Well, don’t let me interrupt,” he says, sitting down to eat. “Just keep on reading and don’t mind me.”

“Are you sure?”

He looks down at the toast, marshmallows and chocolate oozing out between slices. “Yes, I’m sure.”

They sit in silence, him eating, her reading, and yet, even in the quiet, there is a certain kindness between them.

Malie closes the book as Kaimi finishes his last swig of orange juice. “Would you like to take a walk? We have a trail I’m sure you’d like.”

Malie grabs him a fleece to wear and they set out. There is a pleasant crunch of gravel and sticks beneath Kaimi’s feet, and a brisk coolness in the air, a fresh scent of trees. A few squirrels run across their path and he cannot help himself; Kaimi drops down to rest on his calves and examine one clinging to the bottom of a tree trunk. Malie laughs

as he peers, getting almost close enough to touch the fluff of the tail when the squirrel darts away and Kaimi yelps. The sun threads through the trees, its golden strings tethered to the ground. This part of Connecticut is private, quiet, welcoming. There is something in the woods that allows Kaimi to loosen, to talk.

They talk about their parents, their mother's health, her good, resilient spirit. They talk about Macy's and the Palace (though he does not mention the treasure hunt), music lessons and playing in professional concerts. She tells about the first time she met Deborah and John and how after they'd asked her more than enough uncomfortable questions she purposefully spilled water all over the table so that they would stop. "They are harmless, and Derek realizes they try too hard sometimes, but he loves them and so do I. They are some of my biggest fans." Malie tells him about her first concerts, her stubborn students she sometimes wants to give up on, how tons of people over the years have tried to speak Spanish with her so she responds in French, just to mess with them. Kaimi tells her about Eileen's mustache, the crazy tourists he deals with from day to day, about their father's insistence to leave food for the mongoose outside of their house, even though he is deathly afraid of it. He tells of the time that Zoey saw a monk seal lounging on the beach and tried to run up and pounce on it, how he and Kila had to both grab the leash to hold her back, tripping and falling in the sand in surprise, yelling and screaming, only to collapse on their couch and laugh about it later over cold beers. Kaimi and Malie laugh, and the forest, the trail, feel warm and welcoming. He had not realized how much he craved this.

There is a lull, and finally Malie asks. "Why did Kila leave, Kaimi?" She asks it softly, and he thinks she has moved closer to him. They walk a little slower.

“I just wasn’t enough, in the end, and I realized it, so I pushed her away,” he says, and hearing it aloud, even after a year and a half, was enough to make him want to crumble into the ground. “She...she wanted to be more adventurous. And she wanted me to go with her and I just...I just didn’t. Not on purpose, but I didn’t.”

It had started with the hikes Kila wanted to take, the boogie-boarding trips to Chinaman’s Hat, the cliff diving. She’d pull her bikini over her wide hips, throw her hair back in a hat, wake him up early in the morning and try to drag him out of bed.

One holiday weekend she tried to convince him. “It’ll be fun, we’ll challenge each other, do something exciting, get all sweaty.” She smelled like lavender soap and cocoa butter shampoo. He tried to grab her around the middle and draw her back to bed. “No,” she said, pushing him gently, “I’m not going to sit around this house for another weekend. It’s wonderful outside.” She opened the window, letting the sun burst through. “I want you to go with me,” she said softly, kissing him on the cheek.

“I don’t feel well, Kila,” he’d say, kissing her on the forehead.

“You don’t even surf anymore! You loved surfing. Come on. Be with me.”

“I’m a little tired from work, I’m sorry.”

It went on like this until Kila found a group of other adventurers to hang-glide and deep sea fish with her. Kaimi was relieved to stay at home with Zoey, but his relief was dampened by a soft sense of guilt. Then the time came when she would slip out of bed and pull on her bathing suit, shorts, and sneakers without waking him up save for a kiss on the head.

At dinners, over rice, Parmesan chicken, and salad, or when neither wanted to cook and would bring home pizza, Kila would go on and on about Jack and Eva and

Nicki and the rest of the group. Kaimi would smile and nod, wishing deeply he had gone, had been there, had stuck his head under the waterfall and felt it rush over the back of his neck, but also thankful that he had just tended the garden and cleaned the apartment, read a book. He liked her stories, the way she got excited when she spoke, laughed before she could even get the entire joke out because she knew what was coming. Yet sometimes, he wished he knew already, too.

It was when she asked him to go to Oregon for a hang-gliding trip over Lakeview that everything began to slip. “Don’t you want to go see something spectacular?” she’d asked, rubbing her hair after a shower. “We’ve never been to Oregon! Jack says its fantastic and you can’t beat the view of the mountains. It’s not even a part of the mainland that many people visit, so we’ll be seeing something really different!”

“We have mountains here.”

“I’m talking about the gray ones with snow on top,” Kila said. Kaimi gritted his teeth. Why did all the women in his life assume he did not know there were different types of mountains?

Kaimi was quiet as he looked at some of the pictures on the brochure she’d borrowed from Jack. “Can’t you hang-glide here?”

“I’ve already done that,” she replied. “I want to try this.”

“Why not hop over to the Big Island! They have it there, don’t they?”

“I don’t know,” Kila said, crossing her arms.

“I don’t think I can get off work.”

“It’s over July fourth, Kaimi,” she’d said, through gritted teeth. “Please,” she was sitting on the bed now, “please come with me. I want you there. It’s just for a trip.” She

came to sit next to him, little petals of water from her hair dropped onto his arms. Her arms were now thicker with muscle, her legs tough, more sculpted from all the climbing and running, but her stomach, his favorite part of her, was still pleasantly padded. He wanted to reach for her, but found the angle was too awkward, so he refrained.

“I really can’t, but I don’t want to hold you back. You go with the group. They love you.”

She’d stared at him, put her head down, and moved off the bed. And when she returned from Oregon, she had the same stare, just a little farther away now, the light in her eyes dimmed towards him, and she said she’d figured it out there, in Oregon, a place he’d never been or would ever go to, that it was time for it to be over.

“Wow,” Malie says, then after a moment, slips her arm into his. They walk a little longer in silence. “It’s special to me that you came all the way out here. It means a lot to have some family here for this whole thing.” She squeezes his arm. “And for the record, I agree with you. Hang-gliding is a ridiculous activity.”

He is grateful to her, for this walk, for the fact that for a brief moment, he does not feel like he will fall to the ground due to the hurt in his chest.

Kaimi tries to dress his best for the formal dinner in the dining room that night with Malie, Derek, Deborah, John, Derek’s sister and her husband, as well as Malie’s best friend Belle. They speak of late season snow and sweater sales and Kaimi sips more wine. But at least now, Malie stands next to him, or smiles at him from across the room.

When they make their way to the dining room, Kaimi finds his seat next to Belle. The table is adorned with candles, wine glasses, gleaming silverware, sculpted napkins, and elegant plates. Kaimi smiles.

They begin to eat Malie and Derek's home-cooked dinner. (Derek loves to cook with Malie, they do it practically every night except for the nights that he brings home Malie's favorite take-out. "He's done this for three years," she told Kaimi in the kitchen while she tossed the salad. "He thinks it's nothing, but I think I'm lucky.") Belle even turns to ask Kaimi about what books he's read lately as they eat their salads. The chicken is moist, breaded and cheesed to perfection, the vegetables are seasoned perfectly, John's wine selection is phenomenal; Kaimi tells him so and John seems relieved that Kaimi has said something nice. "It's really great to have you here," John says.

It's as Kaimi finishes his last few pieces of chicken that he begins to notice. The plate in front of him is curved around the edges, and underneath the juices and scraps of food, there are dark green and blue birds among branches. He frantically stuffs the last few pieces of chicken in his mouth, trying to uncover them as quickly as possible. His heart pounds, the chicken goes dry in his mouth. He can't swallow.

The plate is delicate and refined and Kaimi instantly knows he has found them. He looks around, his heart throbbing, his hands shaking. The table is covered with them, covered with royal Hawaiian plates, like gems studding each place setting, but gems slathered with food and grime.

"Stop!" he shouts. He grabs the plate in front of him and pulls it in close to his face. A vegetable falls into his lap, but he doesn't notice. It's there, right in front of him,

he just cannot believe it. How old was this plate? How many hands had it touched? When was it last home? He is buzzing. *It can't be.*

Everyone turns to stare at him. “What, Kaimi?” Malie asks, her eyes bulging.

Kaimi sees that everyone is staring at him. “I...I’m sorry. Malie, can I talk to you in the kitchen? It’ll just take one moment,” He picks up the plate and hurries out of the room. Malie appears a moment later. “These,” he points to the dirty plate smeared with food remnants.

“These, what?” She stares at him. “What has gotten into you?”

“These plates, these plates are, no, they belong to the Palace, to Hawai‘i, they’re the *royal plates*, part of a set, we’ve been searching for them, they were sold off in auction years and years ago...” He cannot believe it, he wants to kiss the porcelain. He searches for a towel, snatches a napkin on the counter and begins to wipe at it. Malie’s lips begin to tremble.

“But these have been in our family for years,” Derek says, coming into the room, his shoulders slack, his face puzzled. “That can’t be possible.”

Derek’s presence sends an electric bolt is running up and down his spine. “Well, they don’t belong to you. They are Hawaiian and belong to the Iolani Palace.” Kaimi’s pride is swelling in him, but he inwardly cringes, realizing that maybe he should not have said this after all, or at least not in this way, this is not how he was trained to handle interactions with ‘persons in possession.’ But he cannot help it. The plates, *he found them*. He would take them back from Connecticut to Hawai‘i, he would reverse his history, he would reinstate order. The pride, the honor, the excitement is too much for him, and he begins to shake. It’s as though he has grown taller than everyone in the room,

that he stands even above Derek in his ridiculous sweater vest, up high where he can stomp out his white brick smile.

Derek looks helplessly at his fiancé. Malie's face is blushed dark; her hair falls closer to her cheeks, giving her face a sharp look. Her voice is lowered to a harsh whisper. "Kaimi, what are you even talking about? Do you have any proof that these belong to the Palace? Regardless, I hardly think this is the time –"

"But these are *the* plates, the ones they've talked about around the office, they're what I came to Connecticut to find." He is sweating with excitement.

"I thought you came for my wedding," Malie snaps.

Derek and Malie stare at him. Kaimi sweats. "I...well...yes, but –"

"You didn't *say* anything about any plates to me today," she growls. "And all this from some 'talks around the office?' I don't believe you."

"How could you not believe me, I have proof from the registrar –" he'll just have to send a quick email, that's all, someone will respond right away with the inventory, "– I'm going to need these back, I –"

"They were never *yours*, you don't need them *back*," Malie says, her voice cold, her body rigid. Her lips no longer tremble; they just form a tight slit at her mouth. Her arms are crossed in front of her, her fists are clenched. "We can discuss this later." Her anger makes Kaimi acutely aware that his shirt is once again just too bright in the stainless steel mirrors. He tries to straighten up to his full height and face her, but finds he cannot. Derek rubs Malie's back and stares at Kaimi.

Malie marches back into the dining room, Derek behind her. "Let's eat, everyone." She sits and heaps more food onto her plate in swift angry movements. Kaimi

returns to his spot and sets the plate back down slowly. Belle avoids eye contact with him as she continues eating her hunk of chicken. He sits, but doesn't move, staring stonily at the plate.

Eventually Belle rubs her knife so far down that it screeches.

Kaimi suffers through the dinner, says barely anything, but watches as chicken, gravy, salad, rice, knives, forks, the little crumbs that don't make it to your mouth the first time, all smear, shift, and drop onto the plates. He drinks his wine quickly; accidentally bumps his legs under the table too much. His knife slips out of his hands and crashes loudly. He does not look at his sister for the rest of dinner, she does not engage him, ask him any questions. She only laughs too loudly, and tells story after story about her life in Connecticut, how wonderful and magical, it has been; how it is such a part of her, she's always felt at home here. Kaimi says nothing.

They have dessert (a shining raspberry tart that Deborah made), they have coffee, they talk more about local politics, the wedding, the weather, the colors, church, the wedding. The only way Kaimi can think to control the way his heart is pounding against his ribcage is to go miles and miles away. In his mind, he is on the Big Island, walking up to the ranch, offering the plates to Kila, feeling her kisses warm and smooth on his neck.

When the guests leave, Derek, Kaimi, and Malie stand in the kitchen. Derek is the first to speak. "Well, I've got some last minute reading to do for, uh, work, so I'll see you upstairs, sweetie. Good night, Kaimi." He kisses Malie on the forehead and hustles out of the room.

Kaimi looks at his sister for the first time in hours. Her shoulders are square, but he can tell she is minutes away from breaking, from slumping over. It is the same look she had the first time she came home from boarding school senior year, when the family couldn't pay for the first conservatory she was accepted to and the conservatory wouldn't offer her any aid. She tried to carry herself proudly, but Kaimi knew that every time she disappeared to her room that winter vacation, she would collapse. He had painted her something in art class for her wall: a sloppy but colorful and creative rendition of their favorite beach with the two of them standing on the shore. He never ended up giving it to her, always afraid to knock on her door.

“So, what is your problem exactly?” she finally hisses.

Kaimi pauses. It is right at the tip of his tongue, he is right there, in front of his family. It is as if his mother is there, with her pleading eyes, clutching a painting of Connecticut woods, and his father, he is there too, his fingers wrapped tightly around a piece from the Christmas village train set. “I..” Malie is looking right at him, her eyes no longer angry, they just penetrate him, confused, and there is the unmistakable tint of hurt. “I was mistaken. These...these aren't the right plates.”

She peers at him. He looks at the floor. “So you came...just for my wedding then?” Her voice is flat, harsh, like two sharps played simultaneously on the piano.

He looks right at her and suddenly they are young again, digging in the sand on the beach together, digging to Peru or Morocco. There she is, nursing his jellyfish stings, teaching him about the leaves and the flowers, all of their names. She is there, talking to him on the phone in high school about Kila, telling him not to worry about her, that he's a

total catch and she doesn't know what she's missing, running around with those other boys. "I came just for your wedding."

"Okay. Alright."

"Yeah. I was mistaken. I'm sorry I made a scene and ruined your dinner."

She sighs and looks at him. "Nothing is ruined, Kaimi," she says. "Nothing was ruined. Let's just forget about it, okay?"

"Okay," he says. "Let's forget about it."

That night, Kaimi dreams he is on the Big Island, walking up to the ranch, but he has nothing in his hands for Kila except for a plastic snow globe of trees and a white church and a brown bear that says MYSTIC on it in tacky green lettering. She walks away from him. But it does not hurt him as much as he was expecting; Kila seems to get farther and farther away, she is blurry as she continues to walk and Kaimi does not walk after her. He does not walk from side to side, he does not walk backward, or forward, he only shuts his eyes, and lets her walk into the haze of trees and crops, away from him.

Portraits of Strangers

“A man’s portrait was a psychological document subject to analysis and moral evaluation...but a beautiful woman’s face was an unknown terrain where there were no traces and byways...She was purely physical...Yet a new concept of women’s portraits has begun to emerge. Her decorative and nonconscious aspects will probably fade. A new woman is being elaborated, a pensive and active being to which a new form of painting will have to correspond...A woman’s portrait will cease to be a tableau, and will become an intimate, analytical, and ideational document.” –Camille Mauclair, 1899

Chloé’s first visit to the artist’s apartment was like stepping into a dream on feet that are slightly off balance. It was cramped, dank, and slovenly, it reeked of dried paints, candle wax, fresh wood shavings, cooked oysters. There were canvases piled on and around a chair like a barricade, some with paint on them, some with nothing, one with a yellow and green crucifixion in a corner behind a stark rendering of the artist’s own face. Drawings, sketches, water colors stacked high near a lamp on the table, topped by a well worn copy of Pierre Loti’s new book. A dark lump of wood partly carved into some sort of face lay on top of a small armoire, sideways, its only eye staring at her. And a cluster of dark clay jars, whose faces seemed to limp out of their mold – disfigured, elongated, uneven, but alive.

From the large armchair crushed into the corner, Chloé could just see a small tuft of hair atop the artist’s head. She was afraid to go any further. She smoothed down her dress, and felt as though her corset was tightening on her. Suddenly the sleeves were too hot and unbearable.

“Hello?” Chloé said quietly. “I am here with the bread, monsieur.” She had delivered for him for almost a week now, but never had she needed to enter and she wondered what kind of trance he was in to not hear the knocking this time.

The artist sprang from his chair and whirled towards her. “Ah, Chloé, my dear, you’re a fantastic specimen.” The artist took the bread from her arms, crunched it under

his nose and sucked in a long breath. “Nothing like the smell of fine bread. One of the only good things civilization has left us, no?” The artist bit into the tip of the baguette, his mouth wide, tearing off a large hunk of the bread much too big to chew. Crumbs spilled to the ground, his mustache twitched.

“One of the only good things, monsieur?” Chloé asked, though immediately wanted to take it back, wishing she were no longer in this dream, where the artist chewed and stared into her eyes, and the unruly mustache on his face moved in such a way.

“Yes, Chloé,” he said attempting an air of tragedy. “There is nothing good left for me here. For any of us really, but definitely not for me.”

Chloé Monette first met Paul Gauguin only a week before, late March 1891, when they were rushing back into their apartment building on a pearl gray night, the kind that Paris typically donned during the extended winter.

It had begun to rain, and Chloé, out of fear of getting her papers and books wet, was hurrying towards the door, allowing the hem of her simple wine purple dress to sweep through a puddle. She was coming from the salon of her matron, a rather distinguished Madame Lefèvre who wrote and published papers on women’s rights to manage family finance and the unification of all classes of women. The Madame at first employed Chloé for deliveries and then took the hesitant eighteen-year-old girl under her wing (“I do not have any children of my own, happily, but I have you”), and supplied monetary support for Chloé’s schooling. But the Madame was adamant that the schooling, though progressive, was still too focused on wifely duties – duties that she never found necessary to focus on – and Madame Lefèvre decided to supplement the

girl's education with personal lessons and familiarization with her own writings. Chloé had not wanted to accept the Madame's offer at first; Chloé was no longer part of the bourgeoisie, her mother had raised her a strict Catholic and probably would loathe the idea of her spending time with a fashionable, outspoken woman whose husband let her do and say whatever she wanted. But the Madame insisted upon the education if Chloé was to keep her job and so she obliged.

Chloé enjoyed her work with Madame Lefèvre and did not mind delivering newspapers or making teas, coffees, and small pastry plates, during which she often dreamed about becoming a doctor just like one of Madame Lefèvre's sisters. Curing the body fascinated Chloé while it also frightened her that she knew so very little about her own. Chloé became enthralled with the Madame's writings, savoring the conversations they had at the end of Chloé's work. Her long walks home from the heart of the sixth arrondissement and Madame's illustrious, gold crusted home to the old Vaugirard in the fifteenth ceased to be bothersome. When walking, she focused less and less on the sadness that sometimes reeled up into a knot inside her when she realized she was once again not going home to a father who could read with her and hug her warmly. She had never had that reception and was unsure how you could miss a thing that was never there, but his absence was very real to her, almost tangible.

And, Chloé thought as she hurried through the rain, the money in her purse wasn't to be sniffed at. It would certainly take care of her and her mother for another week.

When Monsieur Gauguin bumped into Chloé near the door, she nearly dropped her book and the small bag of potatoes, onions, and cheese she was carrying back to make for her mother. Monsieur Gauguin dropped his cigarette. It fell to the ground and

instantly went limp in the cold rainwater. He cursed under his breath, then looked up at her.

Chloé, who had always been rather quiet around men, who had never kissed anyone or held the hand of a suitor, had never felt noteworthy until the moment that Monsieur Gauguin looked at her. His eyes widened just slightly, his head tilted a fraction of an angle to the right. She was aware of her dirty hem, how her hair must have been falling flat under the pressure of the rain, the way her sleeves poofed too much at the top (it was a gift from an aunt with too many clothes but, she sent her regrets, not enough money to assist her poor sister and niece). She did not find his ruffled hair and thick eyebrows attractive, but she could not deny the warmth that spread in the bottom of her stomach. She wondered what it would be like to sit closely to him on a couch, their legs touching at the knees. But quickly, Chloé remembered her mother upstairs, alone, cold, and in bed without a book or knitting needles, just the Bible verses in her head, waiting for her daughter to be home. She had always been a little sick and weary, but for the last year since Chloé had turned eighteen, her mother had kept herself inside.

“After you,” the artist said.

They entered the apartment building, shaking the rain off of their heads. “This damned rain. They never had rain and cold like this in Martinique, I’ll tell you,” he said. “I went there to draw and paint.” He eyed her, waiting for her reaction.

“Martinique?” was all Chloé could manage. She wished he would stop looking at her like that, out of the corner of his eyes.

“Yes, were you not at the Universal Exposition two years ago? That iron thing they erected is just...the least sensual thing I’ve ever seen. It’s horrible. But there were

other things at the exposition that were of note, like the extraordinary little villages. You *did* go, didn't you?"

Chloé had in fact gone to the exposition just once with Madame Lefèvre. She had not climbed through the cage of the iron tower, rather scared of its lattices and its four large feet that seemed to grow out of the ground in an unsettling way. The thought of its iron roots clutching the crust of the earth made her uneasy. But she had enjoyed the clanking and humming of the monstrous machines, inside and away from the environment, and enjoyed the way the visitors stared at her and Madame Lefèvre because they were unaccompanied by men. The Madame's face flushed more in front of the machines than Chloé had ever seen her flush in front of a human. While the Madame was usually the perfect image of poise, her hats and feathers always in place ("I use my brain always, and without fail it tells me that good fashion is imperative, ma chérie"), Madame Lefèvre seemed to glow uncontrollably as she admired the pumps of the machines, the shining glass, the iron hinged arches, the intensity of the blue and gold interior design. She whispered excitedly to Chloé that the machine, technology was the future of equality. Chloé did not understand the gushing Madame, but she nodded and realized how small she felt in the central dome, how small the apartment her sick mother sat in, knowing nothing of machines and towers.

The artist referred to something else, however, something Chloé had tried for two years to forget, something she had begged God to wipe from her memory. When she and Madame Lefèvre had first ventured into the *village nègre*, Chloé was charmed by the rows of small, braided huts, rather unlike the elegant Haussmann buildings that ran through Paris like beautiful vines. But the wildness of the huts amused her and she

wished she could reach out and touch one, roll the straw between her fingers. She imagined herself living in one by the sparkling water, her hair loose and wavy, and she smiled. Amidst her daydream, she noticed the living, breathing people inside, blinking out at her. Their arms, legs, chests gleamed in the light and blended into the shadows as they moved, tricking her eye.

“Madame, are those real people?”

“Of course, what did you expect, dear girl, for them to be made of wax? Come along.” They moved down the line. “Senegambie,” Madame Lefèvre said, pointing, then again as they moved: “Annam and Tonkin –” near where Chloé had been born “– hindou, indienne, tahitienne, Tunisie.” At each spot, people shifted around inside the huts, weaving a basket or handling a piece of kitchenware. A few danced outside them in their loincloth wraps and skirts with no tops, some with smiles, some faces glazed over.

Chloé saw a large girl about her age with flowing black hair, dancing. The girl moved her arms so gracefully, her eyes closed. Something about her was so sensuous and beautiful, and Chloé wanted it. “How wonderful!” she said aloud before she could stop herself.

The girl’s eyes flicked open sharply. “Is it?” she snarled, glaring at Chloé. Another woman in the hut immediately told the girl to hush.

The snap hit Chloé and she recoiled. Suddenly, she felt that every person in each hut was staring at her, questioning her. Is *it wonderful*? Chloé then saw that the weaving was half-hearted, the dancing tense, that the people were staring back at the visitors whose eyes feasted upon them with hardened faces. Chloé put her head down and scurried off to catch up with the Madame, her cheeks heated like a furnace.

Madame Lefèvre did not comment much inside the building or ask Chloé what was wrong; she rather peered at the agricultural and kitchen objects in the *palais central* and then motioned for Chloé to move on with her. “There is a Wild West show,” she said. “Annie Oakley is apparently quite the woman.”

For the rest of the night, Chloé could not remember the oohs and ahhs at the Wild West show, nor the details of the hinged arches of the dome, or even the height of the tower that punctured the warm, blue August sky. She could only remember the girl, how low and gruff her voice had been. How everyone then seemed to stare at Chloé, challenging her. She wished the huts had not existed, that she had not seen them. She wished the people *had* been wax, or better yet, not there to see her seeing them.

“Yes,” Chloé answered Monsieur Gauguin. “I was at the exposition.”

“Well then you saw the beautiful primitives themselves, in their very own natural habitat! It was fantastic. I am going there to paint, very soon, you know. Tahiti.”

Chloé looked at the dark, dank apartment building walls, smelled the rank cold sifting down the stairs, through the ceiling. Her natural habitat. “But how you will afford to get there?” Here was an artist who inhabited the streets of old Vaugirard, not the enticing, throbbing streets of Montmartre where women kicked up their skirts, where artists and students frequented bizarre cabarets like the *Le Cabaret du Néant* and contemplated death with coffee at coffins for tables, where people danced and drank together at the Moulin de la Galette. Chloé lived in this apartment and Chloé knew deep down she would never set foot outside of Paris, let alone buy enough cheese or fish at once to last a week.

“Why, I am going to sell my paintings! It’s all arranged, the sale. People don’t appreciate me yet, they call me mad, but they *will* finance me.” Chloé, without thinking, took a step backward. “I’m sorry, it’s not true what they say about me, I’m not a madman. But I *am* going to go to Tahiti, to my own nature.”

“Well,” Chloé said, the cold from the rain settling onto her skin through her dress, her wet hair sagging against her neck, her mother’s wheezes ticking inside her like a slow clock, “I do hope you arrive there safely. Let me know if I can be of any service to you.” She wasn’t sure why she said it, it seemed polite, seemed like the way to get away from him and up the stairs.

“I have heard you do food deliveries, if the gossip around this place is correct, and I will be in need of bread and food deliveries next week. I will be working too feverishly to take any breaks. I will pay you.” *With what?* thought Chloé. But she could not turn down money, the instinct had been wired into her ever since she was old enough to realize her father had disappeared for good, that her mother gotten sick. Money, Madame Lefèvre told her, managing money made you free.

“Of course, monsieur.”

He beamed at her, his mouth curling up into a smile. “My name is Paul Gauguin. I live on the second floor. And you are?”

“Chloé Monette, monsieur.”

“I sense a very distinct...energy in you, Chloé. Maybe you will let me paint you sometime.” He peered at her. “After I return, of course. When I return, I will be a whole new man.” He laughed for a moment. “Pardon me,” he said. “I mean, *if* I return.”

Gauguin went to a cabinet, dropped the butt of the baguette onto the table, and poured himself a drink. A trunk stood open in the corner, a wide cavity ready to swallow. “Why do you say there is nothing good left, monsieur?”

“Have some absinthe, Chloé.” He thrust a dirty glass at her. The yellow, greenish liquid sloshed in the glass. She took it; it burned, but electrified her. Frightened of the strength of the temptation to down it all, she quickly put it down on the table. She wouldn’t tell her mother or the Madame.

“Good girl.” He winked and gulped down his brown liquor. “My wife and kids are all in Copenhagen, but that’s not really it,” he said, waving a hand. “This place has stripped me of myself, do you see? And the Tahitians hold the key, the answer. Their savagery, their land, will fulfill what my spirit has been lacking. My true emotion, feeling; the animal inside of me.” He finished off his liquor and came closer to her. “Especially the women,” he said, trailing off. “Those delicious nymphs hold the keys...”

Chloé shuddered. She wondered what Madame Lefèvre would say, suddenly unaware what the Madame thought about...that part of women at all. They only ever talked of money and babies, of scared newspapers and cartoons that made Madame cackle when they showed overly large women in men’s clothes ordering around their frail husbands to do housework. “We are succeeding,” she’d say gleefully, “they don’t know what to do with us.” And they spoke of the occasional fashionable hat, of new pastries, of how Chloé’s mother was managing. Never did they talk about delicious nymphs. And yet, she wished the Madame would give her...tips, let her try the rouge on her lips, tell her where the best club was for dancing and absinthe. It was quite easy, Chloé found, to

not tell her mother anything. Though her mother locked herself up to keep Chloé returning, she no longer knew what happened in unlocked Paris streets.

“I am glad the sale went well,” Chloé said and turned to leave, bumping into the table with the drawings. The Loti book jolted and fell to the floor. The black clay jar faces stared at her. “Enjoy your trip. I hope you find all that you are looking for.”

Chloé returned from the artist’s apartment, but before opening her own door, took a deep breath. Each time she had delivered Gauguin bread that week, he had regaled her with some sort of entrancement, something about the deep lagoons, the purling waters and hot, soft sands, the paradise he was to discover. He sometimes worked himself into a small rage about religion, about Paris, about civilization and their deplorable pitfalls, their horrible, twisted power. And each time he looked at her with deep intent, as if he wished to grab her and make her understand. He’d wax on about his soul, and she’d wait for her money while he ate his bread or wilted grapes, slurped a solitary oyster then cracked open the shell with a snap.

He had never touched her. The thought scared her, but she always found herself wishing he would, just once, just to see what it was like.

“Chloé? Is that you?” her mother, Sabine, said in her small, elfish voice from her normal spot in the sole rocking chair. “I am very cold, chérie.”

“Yes, maman, it’s me.”

It was always her. It could never be anyone else. No one ever came to visit them, not her rich aunt, not her one cousin who had married a Portuguese aristocrat, not even the doctor came very much any more (he was too tired and had simply told her, putting

on his hat, “Your mother is fierce in faith, mademoiselle, her heart ironclad with the Lord. She’ll survive.”). Chloé’s father had disappeared soon after she was born, and her mother never spoke of where he went, though Chloé knew it had to do with the family’s past life in French Indochina where they lived until Chloé was one. There was a hot, moist day her mother never forgot but never spoke of. Sabine locked it inside of her to keep it hidden but never disposed of it, though to be rid of it was all Sabine truly desired. The memory of it was a punishment for Sabine, a punishment she felt she deserved.

For a while, Sabine had tried to ignore the fateful day that lived on in her mind and fought to maintain their lifestyle. She worked in a shop sewing trims onto hats. She kept Chloé quite close when they were on the street, in the park, in church. Chloé had spent almost every holiday with her mother, every birthday with just Sabine and a small slice of cake. But Chloé got older and their money began to run out until they had to move from the second arrondissement to the fifteenth. And it seemed that when Chloé hit eighteen, Sabine could no longer drag herself to the market for food, even in the fresh spring air when the trees bloomed and the gardens blushed, stippled with tulips and happy Parisians. So it was Chloé who made the trips alone, left the apartment after her mother made her promise she’d return soon. (It was the “soon” that always made Chloé bristle.) The trips to mass were the last thing to go for Sabine, but never the prayers; for as long as Chloé could remember, they rattled through the wheezes and shrill calls to God for his mercy, for his peace.

Chloé brought her mother the blanket from her own bed in the corner, knowing she would not get it back tonight to sleep.

“I don’t like how much time you spend with that artist,” Sabine said quietly. Her ebony hair fell in clumped ropes down the side of her face, yet Chloé could tell that once they were soft, fluffy waves in which a young man would have liked to bury his face. “I think he is...corrupt.”

“He’s not in government, maman,” Chloé said, immediately regretting her sass. She recited the fifth commandment in her head. *Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* “It is just for my job.”

Sabine narrowed her eyes at her daughter. “How long has it been since you have gone to Saint Lambert?”

“I went just last week.” Chloé began to prepare her mother some tea and some bread and a lump of cold cheese on a plate. She thought of the large head of Jesus crowned with his thorns above the entrance arch, the drafty innards of the church, the ribs of the gothic ceilings, and the small puddle of light at the dais like a warm heart always beyond her reach from the back pew. She went for her mother, for the fear that had been passed to her by shared blood, and for the opportunity to leave the apartment.

“You must go more, Chloé, you must pray for your poor mother. For our salvation. God smites the wicked.” Sabine shuddered under the blanket.

Chloé understood.

“I do pray. I pray every night for you.” She prayed for the swift and mighty eradication of the fear in her mother. Fear of the Lord hung in Sabine’s eyes like dazzling chandeliers, lighting them with a dangerous vigor that never went out. Chloé prayed for more money, for more food, for plumper lips, for the expansion of her mind, and for the

squashing of any and all desire she sometimes felt for men she brushed elbows with in line at the market, for their easy smiles. For some of the thoughts she had at night.

Chloé brought her the meager plate of food and mother and daughter sat by the window and ate their cheese and broke their bread. “We belong to the Lord,” Sabine murmured. “If only he will spare us.”

Over the next year, Chloé continued to go to school, dream of being a doctor, and listen to Madame Lefèvre discuss society’s newest fears of the *nouvelle femme*, of the too cerebral, unsexed *hommesse*. “I don’t even own a bicycle, but this makes me feel like I should,” Madame Lefèvre said, slapping the newspaper down on her vast desk, almost knocking over a cup of hot chocolate, “just to get back at them while I blow kisses and count my money. Don’t you want a bicycle, chérie?” Chloé began bread deliveries to another apartment tenant who took pity on the beautiful girl who had no man to help her. (How hard it was for working-class girls to find suitable matches these days! How could they stack up against the voluptuous, skirt flinging women of Montmartre or the impeccably charted courtships of the wealthy?) But Chloé spent the rest of her spare time in 1892 praying with her mother and going to Saint Lambert for mass.

Though she knew Madame Lefèvre did not wholly approve of her show of religious fervor, she had also a duty to appease her mother, who did not wholly approve of her education and time spent with the Madame. Besides, she enjoyed the walk to the church, the way the spring street smelled of steam and bread early in the morning when no one was out, enjoyed the quiet time in the pew to let her mind wander while the priest chanted, prayed, spoke, burned incense that made her drowsy. And secretly she was

thrilled by the chase of the pardon she convinced herself to desperately seek. Sabine so often made forgiveness appear impossible to attain from the righteous Father, that Chloé was steeped in a deep pursuit, like the ones men went on through shady, hot jungles after animals, the ones she read about in books. She prayed, until her knees ached on the icy floor, for the Lord to take her to heaven, where clouds were gilded and angels guarded the majesty of His face, an Eden where perfection and love and righteousness reigned. And then her mind would always wander to Monsieur Gauguin, wondering if he had even made it to Tahiti alive.

It was that spring, on Easter, when Chloé promised her mother she would trek across town in her best dress – the one Madame Lefèvre had given to her, with the intricate lilac trim, tighter waistline, and matching hat tilted just off to the left – to attend mass at Notre Dame. She went to say extra prayers in the holy place and beg for forgiveness from the Father, beg for entrance to his courts, and instead she met the man.

Chloé met him outside the cathedral, in the garden out back where despite the chilled air, the perfume of the flowers was robust, the birds chirped. The bells of Notre Dame rang through its towers and spires and a swarm of pigeons lifted into the air, snapping their wings and rustling the nearby trees. The white sand of the pathways coated her worn black shoes like powdered sugar and she was thankful no one could see how worn they really were. She was walking slowly, daydreaming about performing an important surgery (she knew not what kind) and saving a life, when he came up to her.

Sébastien Morel was tall, thin, his nose long and straight, flowing black hair, clear green eyes. He had impeccable clothes and the blackness of his suit shone against the trees, the white sand, his pale neck and hands. She later concluded that he was young and

severe, educated and devout, that he carried around a walking stick with a gold tip not because he needed one, but because he always liked to have something in the firm grip of his hand. And despite his hardness, he was close to what Chloé had always imagined her father to be – smart, handsome, exquisite.

Sébastien walked towards her, his cane poking the sand, until he arrived in front of Chloé. “Happy Easter, mademoiselle. He is risen.” He gave little bow.

“He is risen indeed,” she answered, tilting her head so that her hat guarded her face. Chloé’s stomach did deep, warm swoops; she could feel her face flushing under his intense gaze. It was not the same gaze as the artist, she realized, even though it had been a year since Monsieur Gauguin had been in Paris. The artist looked at her like one looked at a rare animal; Sébastien looked at her like one looked at a rare text under glass.

“You are unaccompanied,” he said.

“My mother is ill,” was all she answered.

“With what? I am studying law but my father practices medicine.” He smiled at her, then tipped his head just slightly and did not wait for her to respond. “Would you like to see where I study? It’s just up Boulevard Saint Michel, near the garden. I’m sure you are familiar with the neighborhood.” He nodded towards the bridge. “Do you live close by?” He held out an arm for her to take. “Don’t worry,” he laughed, “Sébastien Morel, proud Parisian. And you?”

Chloé slid her arm into the hook of his elbow and they walked towards the bridge where the water below dazzled in the nets of morning light. “Chloé Monette, *femme nouvelle*.” She smiled, stood a little straighter, and fancied in her mind that her hat was more like one of Madame Lefèvre’s with a tuft of luxurious white exotic feathers.

Sébastien laughed. “Don’t make me laugh so,” he said. They moved towards the streets where vendors were selling knots of white and pink lilies and women bustled around in their best dresses. “What do you really do?”

Chloé’s skin became uncomfortably warm, her brow sweat a little in her embarrassment; she looked at the ground and sidestepped some filth. “I work for Madame Lefèvre and mostly do grocery deliveries when I’m not studying.”

“Study!” But it was the mention of her deliveries that had made Sébastien stand a little taller, walk a bit faster so that he was almost pulling her down the Boulevard, even though she knew where she was going.

She was convinced, after it was all over – after the coffee dates where they smoked together (Chloé’s first cigarettes, they made her feel sick, but smart) and he would sip his black coffee and talk about the law and she would listen patiently, staring at his lips; after the one time they went to dinner secretly under the guise of a hefty delivery (“You *do* deliver things, after all”) in a dingy part of the eleventh without Sabine or Madame’s approval and they got madly drunk and slept together and with his warm hairy chest against hers, Sébastien told Chloé that she was smarter and more beautiful than the porky, wealthy bore he was destined to marry; after her heart had clenched in a pathetic, crinkled mess at the mention of his marriage; after she had strings of dreams of a paradise where the sun always shone, trees dripped languidly after a rain, and Sébastien was the only other person there to sit with her in the sun under a mango tree; after they went to an exhibit of Pissarro’s work and he told her things about art that she did not think she agreed with but listened to anyway because of the way Sébastien led her through the exhibit, the way the ladies stared at her with some respect; after he had kissed her one

time, hard, wet, his hands roving, her skin flushed all over, on a secret late night walk around the garden where the white statues glowed in the darkness and she, in an effort to be interesting, had told him about Monsieur Gauguin and the mission in Tahiti to which Sébastien replied, “Doesn’t he know they are already European? As they should be, after all” and Chloé could do nothing but shrug – after it all, Chloé was convinced it was her deliveries that had at once drawn him to her and closed her off to him. Sébastien was never meant to talk to a delivery girl, let alone kiss or marry one, but it was the thrill of touching the rare book under the glass that enticed him.

She never told him she was born in French Indochina, that she wanted to be a doctor, that she really *would* like to try a bicycle, drink more absinthe or whisky, that prayer kind of bored her but that she was desperate to make it to heaven if only so that her mother did not hate Chloé for abandoning her there. After a little while, it no longer crushed her that Sébastien did not and would not know these things. And he was not like Monsieur Gauguin, he would never need or want to leave Paris because for him, Paris was the thriving epicenter of the world, a world that leaned in close to hear everything Sébastien said or murmured, a world that watched closely when Sébastien spit in the street so it could copy the manner in which it was done.

When Chloé finally confided in Madame Lefèvre about the man (because Chloé could not get the way he looked and felt out of her head, she could not wash him off, away no matter how many times she went to confessional, no matter how many times she bent on her knees to pray), Madame snorted. “Chloé, you were not meant to be a decoration, something for a fake *philosophe* to dangle around in front of his group like a jewel, even if your skin has been looking positively *radiant* recently, darling. Have you

been stealing my soap? I would not even be able to be angry, you look just like a dream. Anyhow, you are a *woman*, ma chérie. And women of the mind are not here to be crafted by men into some arm accessory or made pretty just to sit for some lousy portrait by a bad painter who chooses the *only* unfortunate lighting in Paris so that you look like you have a *moustache*.” She huffed. “Do not let a kiss make you forget *that*.”

Chloé delivered hundreds of groceries, said millions of little prayers and even more big ones, went to hundreds of classes, made the same meal for her mother over and over with the exception of one small but juicy beef filet on her mother’s birthday, and kissed no one else by the time the artist returned in late spring of 1893.

He came to knock on her door. “Who is that?” Sabine croaked. A block of precious light barreled through the window near her chair.

“It is Monsieur Gauguin, maman,” Chloé said, looking through the peephole. *He is back.*

“Chloé —”

She opened the door.

He looked deranged, ravished.

His skin was tanned, his nose a little burnt, his hair too long. His mustache curled. “Why, look at you! Chloé, my ever beautiful Chloé. I am going to need as many food deliveries this week, this month as possible. I am wrapped up in my work, the most important work of my life.” He sighed heavily, looked over his shoulder. “But Vincent and Theo are dead, poor souls. I will need to find some other benefactors for my

exhibition. Oh, you'll never *believe* the experiences I've had. My stupid wife has written that she thinks I am unchanged, as egoistic as ever, but my dear girl, *I've found it.*"

Chloé did not ask what "it" was as she could feel her mother staring at her in the back but agreed to do the deliveries. "Just give me a list when you are ready, monsieur."

He moved closer to her, almost stepping past the doorway and into the apartment. She could smell heavy ink, cigarette smoke, the stench that seeps from the belly of a boat. It was not the soft scent of Sébastien's hair and neck and she stepped back. "Oh Chloé, those women...there are no women like them here..." Then with a start he turned on his heel and rushed up the stairs, hunched over, almost climbing on his hands.

She shut the door and her mother burst. "Enough!" Sabine shrieked. "You have strayed much too far from me. You cannot work for him. Do not let him paint you, touch you!"

"Maman," Chloé said, trying to keep her voice even, though she was grateful for her mother forbidding her. "He will not paint me. But I need to make money so that we can eat." She went over to the bed. "I have not strayed."

"You do not realize what a danger that kind of man can be," Sabine said, her voice low and dark, robust with the fear that always lit her eyes. Her mother stared at the window and seemed at once wired shut in the present and far away, drifting on a raft.

It was the first time Chloé felt like her mother had spoken to her from experience, from a time when Sabine had been more than a mother, when she had been a vigorous woman unafraid of death.

By November, the artist had had his exhibition in Durand-Ruel. “Look what they’ve said of me, Chloé!” he yelled, waving the paper excitedly as she delivered him a bottle of wine and some cabbage. “Listen to this preface by my good friend, Morice. ‘He has rediscovered the land of his dreams.’ Now listen here – ‘He became a savage and was naturalized a Maori – without ever ceasing to be himself, to be an artist.’ Isn’t it *wonderful*? There’s more – they say that, through my art, ‘the present of this race of defiant antelopes became the junction between two civilizations.’ What do you think?” His face was electric; he did not let her answer. “Deliver the papers from now on, too, wouldn’t you? I’m collecting.” He ran his finger swiftly under her chin. It was rough and cold.

Chloé did deliver the papers, but not without peeking at what they said first.

Joke. Infant babble. Demented brain. Petty soul. Fearful and finicky. Oiled with dubious scents. Rubbed in perfumes for export. Simply bad. Gauguin is the wolf.

Monsieur Gauguin barely broke even on the exhibition and had to move. “It’s not very far, chérie, it is just over on Rue Vercingétorix. Will you please deliver for me there?”

“Monsieur,” Chloé said. They were in his apartment, now boiling over with canvases and woodcuttings. “I am sorry to say this, but you have not paid me for two months. My mother and I need money. I don’t know if I can continue to deliver for you.”

Monsieur Gauguin began to bite his fingernails. “What if,” he said, “what if I paint your portrait, hm? You’ve never had a portrait done, have you? It will be quite valuable. I am making quite the *splash*, as it were.”

Chloé did not tell him she had read about him in the papers, that Madame Lefèvre had even commented that the man was an absolute lunatic, that his colors were enchanting but his subjects were baffling little people who she could not imagine really existed the way he painted them, open, topless, lying on beaches, their own bodies like waves, seductive eyes, flowing black hair. “Mon Dieu, they are not Greek *goddesses*,” she said, exasperated, waving a hand with a cigarette as she and Chloé had walked to the book store one day to pick up an order, “he must have made them up.” Chloé wanted to ask the Madame whether or not the Greek goddesses and all the paintings of them were made up, too, but did not dare.

And there was the small fact that Sabine would absolutely forbid Chloé’s portrait to be painted. Vanity, idolatry, excess, self-indulgence, greed. Furthermore, they were not among the bourgeoisie anymore. There would be nowhere to hang it, no one to see it.

“I’m sorry, monsieur, I do not require a portrait. Just my payment.”

His eyes turned desperate and suddenly he grabbed her, drawing her close. He licked the corner of his mouth. “Chloé, dear, really, a portrait. Every beautiful specimen deserves a portrait.”

Chloé tried not to tremble in his grip, wishing fleetingly that it was really Sébastien who was holding her once again, who would kiss her dry lips, who would look at her. Monsieur Gauguin moved closer to her face and Chloé was careful not to yank herself away too harshly, not to create trouble. But increasingly she realized Madame Lefèvre had not taught her what to do for this, this moment. She could not spout off theories of money management, or talk of bicycles. She could not recite the Latin she was learning in school, or the Bible verses on being a good wife.

“I am *useful*,” he hissed, his eyes not on her, even, but somewhere above, his tight lips with spittle brimming at the edges. It struck her as quite an odd thing to say, but she did not care what he was saying anymore, she just wanted his rough hands off of her. The panic was beginning to rise in her; her eyes were starting to mist, to cross. She was truly frightened and wondered for a brief moment if this precipice of fear was the edge on which her mother had perched for the entirety of her life, trying always never to tip over and tumble away. “I will show you. Just come to my apartment next week. I will have your money and a portrait to show you, to prove to you. It will be of my Javanese lover. It will excite you, I am sure.” He gave her a small shove, she stumbled backwards, and he slammed the door in her face.

After the encounter with the artist, Chloé went to Saint Lambert. An impending rain set dewy drops upon her hair as she walked home. She felt cleansed enough that her mother would perhaps not pick up on the overt buzzing nervousness that had coated her since she left the artist’s apartment. Chloé bought a bouquet of flowers, hoping their perfume would mask her disposition and make her mother a bit heady and drowsy. Perhaps they would decorate the apartment a bit.

Chloé opened the door and found Sabine standing before her.

The shock was enough to make her drop the flowers. “Maman! Why are you up?” Sabine was of a surprising height, almost six feet tall, a fact that Chloé had nearly forgotten over the three years of her bed rest. Her mother had sat for three years so that Chloé would come to her, and now suddenly, Chloé was being met again, just as she used

to be before she had started her education, back when her mother would grip her hand through the market pathways.

Sabine's hair was pulled back and tied in a fierce knot at the nape of her neck.

"Please sit down, Chloé."

Chloé made her way to the small bed in the corner.

"Before you were born, your father and I were very happy in our hot little home and our swathes of land near Saigon."

The sadness inside Chloé began to reel. But the severity of the way her mother stood before her, the way her mother's legs held so firm in defiance of the atrophied muscles, made Chloé very alert.

"We were some of the only French people who were happy there, who did not yearn for the tight, dirty streets of Paris. Our love was strong; the Lord was smiling upon us. We were good missionaries, good citizens, good landowners. Your father doted upon me –" her voice was soft for a moment "– always bringing me bracelets or ordering tea and dresses from Paris for me. He even took me on a trip to the beach once."

Chloé did not know if her mother understood the pangs the story was inflicting. The story was something she had sought, wished for, prayed for above all else. To know the story, to finally be inside of it, would be like standing on a port on a beautiful August evening waving goodbye to a ship that contained all one's valuables, but at least one would know they were safe and headed into a sunset.

"When we realized you were to be born, it was the happiest night of our lives. And that joy continued for weeks. Until I ruined it."

The news clanked to the ground and Chloé froze where she sat. Despite all her dreams about a father whom she admired, with whom she read books and attended gallery openings, Chloé had always recognized these dreams were a mask for the deep fear and assumption that her father had run off with someone, had abandoned them, had decided Chloé was unlovable. How could Sabine, poor little Sabine who had suffered the drop in social status and sat in a chair, wilting, for so long, be to blame?

“I was madly in love with our neighbor. He worked our land, we knew him very well, Chloé. He was an intimate friend to us both. Your father loved him as much as any landlord can love his workers and then some. But I wanted to be the artist of my own life, you see, to take the control that God rightfully held. So I did what I wanted.” Sabine turned her back to her daughter and spoke to the wall. “And your father nor God ever forgave me.”

Chloé sat frozen and the rain dripped slowly outside the window.

That night, Chloé could not sleep. The picture of her father, of her parents, that she had drawn was now smudged, smeared, until she could no longer see the outlines of the figures. Her dreams were fitful; Monsieur Gauguin pranced around his apartment in only a loincloth, Sébastien laughed and ran his hand down her arm and around her naked waist, her mother waltzed in a field with a farmhand while Chloé sat in a chair in the corner, unable to move, only allowed to watch. What seemed like a million men lined up in a row before her but she could not pick out her father, she could not see his face any longer.

She did not speak to her mother for days and did what she pleased. Sabine returned to her chair by the window, sighed much more often, and stared at Chloé when she returned later than expected. But Chloé offered no explanation.

Chloé let her mind wander to Monsieur Gauguin. She did not much want to see the artist after he had shoved her, after his rough fingers had dug into her arms, but her curiosity and the urge to do whatever displeased her mother, dragged her to his studio the next week.

The new studio was not unlike his old apartment, but it was packed with new pieces of art, the little artifacts extracted from Monsieur Gauguin's mind. There was a sculpted, smooth hunk of wood that revealed a head with blank eyes and a flower in her hair. "Pua wood. My mistress, my wife of thirteen, Tehura," he said with a flourish that seemed much like a glossy shellac on an old, dull piece of furniture. On the flip side of the head was another rough carving of a shapely Eve in a garden.

A new wife? Of thirteen? Chloé could not imagine it since the youngest married girl she knew was eighteen. She resented something so far outside of her mental capacity, even after all she had studied, resented its existence. No matter how she tried not to, she could only think of what her mother might say, of how many prayers her mother would deem necessary to even try and come close to conciliation for that sin. She stared at the carving of Eve. "I thought you were giving up religion." It came out sharp, harsh, but she had not entirely forgiven him for grabbing her. Yet she could not deny to herself that she liked to watch Monsieur Gauguin, to watch him rove around his studio, rummage through works frantically, to exist in earnest and fervor and nothing else.

“It’s about...sensuality, you wouldn’t understand,” he growled, turning away from her. Chloé told herself that she *did* understand. Certainly her mother had made it so that she had no choice.

She saw a large canvas on which a naked brown girl lay buttocks up on a bright yellow bed, her head turned towards the viewer, her eyes wide open. A dark, ominous figure watched her. Chloé crossed her arms over her chest and looked away. There were other carved wood statues, wooden blocks like stamps with figures in them, papers with red and black ink, jewel-like water color paintings, sketches of naked men and women, one of a naked woman lying on her side titled “Ornamental Design.” And there was the beginning of a manuscript, some of the ink still shining.

“Ah, here it is. This is Annah, my Javanese love here in town. Have a look, Mademoiselle Monette.”

There was her portrait. The brown girl with supple copper breasts was entirely nude in a room of exquisite color and rigid furniture. The wall behind her blushed rose pink with a rectangular strip of geometric pattern where it met the dark sea blue floor. There was a small patch of dizzying canary yellow carpet. The girl, whose arms rested uncomfortably on the chair’s arms, whose face was placid and so reminiscent of every portrait Chloé had seen in the Louvre, seemed to perch on the chair, not quite sitting, not quite standing, the blue and black armchair too rigid for the wave of her hips, the soft half diamond of hair between her legs, the length of her thighs. Her feet rested on a decorative emerald ottoman and a bright orange monkey sat nearby, staring off to the right. Her hair was pulled back to reveal the only thing the girl wore: two bright gold hoops in her ears. And in the top right corner was something Chloé had missed at first: a soft blue spot

where a line of fruit seemed to float. The colors melded into a warm haze in front of her eyes.

Chloé did not know what to say. It was as though she was back at the Universal Exposition, that perhaps the girl was in fact blinking at her. How did the fruit float? Why was the monkey so still? She looked away. She wondered what the girl's father would think. "She posed for you...like that?"

"She didn't have to." He narrowed his eyes at her. He stepped closer. "Well? Let me paint you." And somehow she knew all the women in his paintings were forced. He had done what he wanted.

She heard the Madame's voice in her head. *You are a woman of the mind.*

But Chloé could not help but wonder at the fact that chair seemed to trap this girl; though she was on the verge of standing up, the painting had caught her before she was allowed to do so. It kept her there, almost sitting, almost standing. And maybe it was the artist's terrible try at depth (for what was so wrong with the classical tradition, really?); because the girl's feet were on the ottoman, were they not? She *was* sitting, was she not? Yet, Chloé could not shake the feeling that she wished to stand. And it did not matter if he was making it up, if he wanted to make it up, or if he was just an utter failure. Chloé would not be trapped in his frame.

"I will just take my money and be on my way, monsieur."

Chloé left with the thud of francs in her purse and set herself on the path to Saint Lambert to thank the Holy Lord above that it was not her in the painting and that she never had to see the artist again.

Endnotes

Arabesque

1. Newspaper title from photo found on: "People in the Collection: Duke, Doris, 1912-1993." *Duke University Libraries*. Web. <<http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/collections/people/dorisduke/>>.
2. There are my own photos of a portion of Shangri La from the courtyard inside. Please see the books cited for further fantastic photos of the grounds and collection.



Doris Duke's Shangri La A House in Paradise: Architecture, Landscape, and Islamic Art. Eds. Thomas Mellins and Donald Albrecht. 1st ed. Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2012. Print.

Littlefield, Sharon. *Doris Duke's Shangri La*. Honolulu: Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, 2002. Print.

The Rhythm of *Meiyo*

1. In Japanese, “meiyo” means “honor.”
2. Thank you to the tour guides at Hawaiian Plantation Village at Historic Waipahu for sharing accounts of what life was like for the workers. Here is my photograph from the plantation:



3. Please see the websites cited for incredible photos of the astronauts' return to Earth and their brief travels through the island of O'ahu.

"Apollo Mission Control Photos." 2011.Web.

<http://www.apollomissionphotos.com/index_ap11_vintage3.html>.

Hoover, Will. "Historic Moon Journey ended in Islands." *Honolulu Advertiser*. July 24, 2009 2009.Web.

<<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2009/Jul/24/In/hawaii907240365.html>>.

4. Thank you to Professor Wenska for interviewing with me about his childhood growing up in Hawai'i and his experience with the different ethnic communities he observed and lived with.

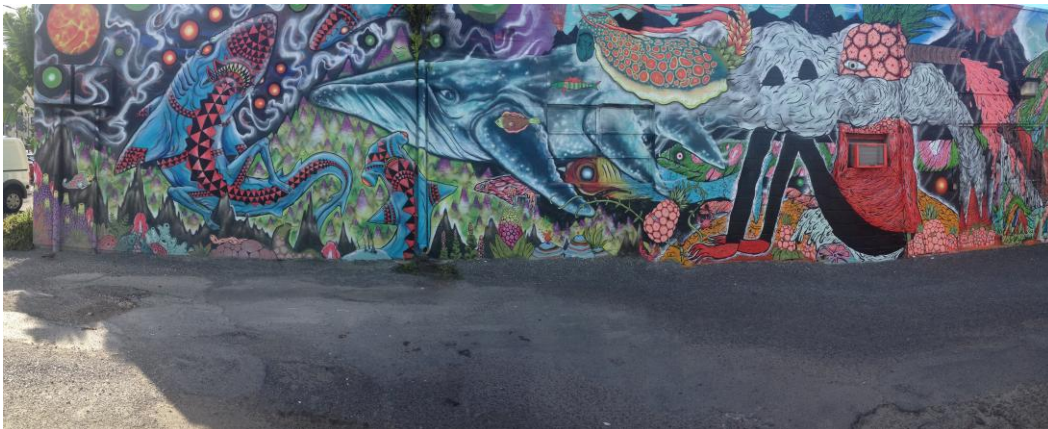
5. The inspiration for Hideo's music was a wonderful CD called "Hawaiian Nisei Songs: A Musical Cocktail of Japanese American Songs in 1950s Hawaii." It is available on Amazon.

6. Much of Genji's claustrophobia was based on blogs written by mothers whose children suffer from claustrophobia as well. While I will not cite every blog post here, I am indebted to these women who have shared their stories so earnestly and openly.

Tattoo

1. Thanks to the bartenders Craig and Miki who allowed me to interview them while on the job about their work in the tourist industry and their lives in Hawai'i .

2. Here is a photo I took of part of the mural I described in my story. Please see the website cited for more incredible photos of the Kakaako murals:



Williams, Pete. "25 of the Best Murals Seen at POW! WOW! Hawai'i 2014." *Highsnobiety*. February 14, 2014. Web. <<http://www.highsnobiety.com/2014/02/14/pow-wow-hawaii-2014-murals/#slide-1>>.

3. Thank you to the educator at the Bishop Museum for the demonstration of the specific type of hula – a child's hula, a *hula noho* – described in my piece. "Hula is dance, hula is storytelling, hula is history, hula is spiritual and ceremonial, hula is fun and entertaining. Hula is many many different things, but one of the most important things it means to modern day Hawaiians is it is the strongest link that we have to our *kupuna*, *kupuna* means our ancestors...Hula is our oldest traditional way of storytelling that has survived...Contrary to popular belief, hula without words is not hula at all...The *hula noho* is a hula for more than just children, it is one we can all learn a little bit from...There is a certain amount of *kaona*. *Kaona* is hidden message, hidden meaning behind the words, a deeper sense to the words..." (transcription from video of introduction to hula performance).

Welcome to the Family

1. Many thanks to Zita Cup-Choy, an Iolani Palace Docent Educator, who interviewed with me at the Iolani Palace and shared many documents with me about the ongoing international search for Palace treasures. If you would like to participate in the search, please visit the Iolani Palace website: "Recovery, Restoration, and Preservation." *Iolani Palace*. 2015. Web. <<http://www.iolanipalace.org/SacredPlace/PalaceCollections.aspx>>.

Portraits of Strangers

1. Pierre Loti's work *The Marriage of Loti* (1880) was an influential work for Gauguin and other Primitivists of the time because it "recounts the author's idyllic romance with a young island native." Shackelford, George T.M., and Frèches-Thory, Claire. *Gauguin: Tahiti*. Boston: MFA Publications, 2004. Print.

2. A description of the *village nègre* and other aspects of the Universal Exposition of 1889 can be found on page 21 in: Shackelford, George T.M., and Frèches-Thory, Claire. *Gauguin: Tahiti*. Boston: MFA Publications, 2004. Print.

Additional information on the exposition can also be found at the website: "Paris Exposition of 1889." *Prints and Photographs Reading Room of Library of Congress*. Mar 28, 2011. Web. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/250_paris.html>.

3. The newspaper comments on Gauguin's work can also be found Shackelford, George T.M., and Frèches-Thory, Claire. *Gauguin: Tahiti*. Boston: MFA Publications, 2004. Print.

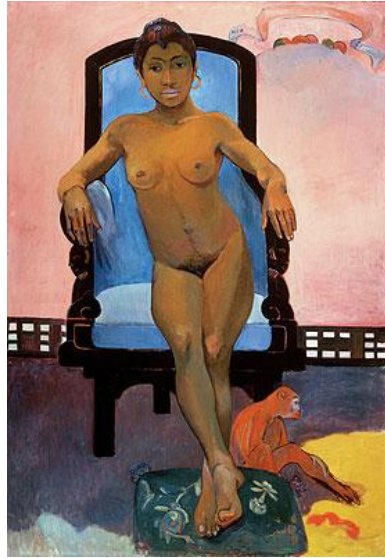
4. Some of the specific works of Gauguin described in my piece are as follows:

Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ, 1890-91, oil on canvas.

Head of Tehura (Tehamana), 1892, painted and gilded pua wood.

Manao tupapau (The Spirit of the Dead Watching), 1892, oil on burlap mounted on canvas.

Aita tamari vahine Judith te parari (The Child-Woman Judith It Not Yet Breached), 1893-94, oil on canvas.



These and many others can all be found in: Shackelford, George T.M., and Frèches-Thory, Claire. *Gauguin: Tahiti*. Boston: MFA Publications, 2004. Print.

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