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Another Warning

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SANDRA PARK

Another Warning

1. DUCK AND COVER

A black mynah bird squawked loudly, its yellow eyes drilling hungry holes through a green papaya stuck singly on the tree. Mother lifted and twisted off the fruit, taking it inside to ripen. The tree bore small sweet fruit, blooming and ripening one by one. It amazed everyone that the old bent tree continued to bear fruit, each one seemed like the last.

The end of school and the beginning of summer was just around the corner. Mother had dipped the twins' crinolines in blue starch water and hung them upside down on the clothes line, layers of stiff white stuck out like giant party flowers. Lana was completing sixth grade and moving on to intermediate school in the coming fall, leaving Liz behind for a long, lonely year. Although the girls would live through the next school year without expiring from loneliness, everyone in the family felt a little sad for them, especially for Liz who tended to be overly shy when she was not at home. On the last day of school, Uncle Shorty was treating the family to dinner out at Kung Hee Fat Choy, their favorite restaurant. It was a noisy place decorated with new Christmas ornaments draped over old, peeling ones: each year, a new layer of cheer was added to the old faded faces of good luck and prosperity. Each person would pick a favorite dish, then Shorty would order a few more, then they would eat until they were stuffed and take home the leftovers in white boxes, evidence of his generosity stockpiled in the humming Frigidaire.

The girls dressed up for dinner out, pretending they were movie stars. They had to pretend quietly so that mother wouldn't disapprove. Watching the girls whisper and giggle throughout the many courses, Gloria felt a great sadness descend upon her shoulders. She remembered when she was a girl, constantly teased by her two brothers, always on the brink of tears, her lips trembling. It was silly to feel left out of a children's game of pretend; she was losing heart, growing faint and small. She wanted to be part of a twosome, having dinner by candlelight, smiling mysteriously across the table.

After dinner, Fatso and Shorty walked out arm in arm, flushed with food and drink.

Gloria rode in Shorty's car on the way back from the restaurant. She mistook the privilege of riding in the front seat with other privileges she did not have, asking too many questions about Eunice's intention to marry him. Given the softly whizzing air and the interior spaciousness of the Packard, almost a bedroom on wheels, Gloria's talk referred back to the restaurant and forward to a wedding, somebody's, in the family. She mentioned her willingness to find some really good Hawaiian music, authentic, low-key, maybe two brothers who harmonized and knew how to take requests; she would pay for it, a gift to Shorty and his bride.

At home, Gloria went to her room. Fatso, Shorty, and Father sat in the patio with cigarettes and cold bottles of beer. Ezra swigged from his father's bottle, his mouth full of sour froth. The girls emptied their snap purses of their best hankies and the family's fortunes printed on slips of paper inside folded cookies. (According to Father, Chinese business is good business: every patron is promised luck and prosperity—in writing! That is the Chinese way. Koreans serve sticks of Double Mint gum and toothpicks after dinner, reminding their patrons that Korean food makes the mouth stink. That is the Korean way. After a Chinese dinner, we pat our stomachs, feeling rich, even our ears feel full of money. After Korean, our tongues on fire, we're ready for a fight, arguing over nothing.) Mother picked up Grandmother's broken dishes strewn all over the kitchen floor. As she kneeled down, the daughter told her old mother everything that happened at the restaurant—who they saw ("Remember Alphonse? Mrs. Lee's son? He was sitting close to a woman with two small children, not his"), what they ate ("too sweet, the sauces stretching the good stuff"), who paid ("Shorty gave a big tip, too"). Grandmother watched her daughter mop the floor: she was a good girl who told her mother everything.

The last time the girls were allowed into Gloria's room marked a dark narrow passage to becoming a woman, especially for Lana who was slowly pulling away from her sister even as her sister clung to her, registering her feelings only after looking at Lana's face, whether it was flaccid and sad or tightly convulsing with suppressed giggles. It was Liz' blank face, the presence of a child, that allowed Gloria to lapse into her trance talk with Dante. She blamed

herself for his disappearance, letting three rubbish days go by without waiting at the window, sleeping while he worked, descending into her own fatigue over the small details of life. In the back of her mind she knew that no amount of voiceless talk would bring him back: Dante's appearance was not guaranteed like the promises of television: he did nothing attention-getting to recommend himself to the world, moving with the habit of someone who gets up early and sees the world before its bright waking hours. Gloria regarded the girls as the same small children she always cared for, learning to watch adult faces for clues about what's next, good or bad, the little girls who giggled endlessly when they were told to keep quiet.

Touching her brow, then the back of her neck, Gloria was moving her lips in full view of the twins. At first they didn't notice, too busy arranging the reds and pinks of nail polish in ascending order of intensity, the last called Fire & Ice, their auntie's favorite. Lana jabbed her sister and pointedly flashed her eyes at their auntie. The girls couldn't believe their eyes: they looked at each other and their disbelief instantly doubled: their auntie was moving her lips without sound, her eyebrows going up and down, her eyes growing hard then soft with tears. What was she doing? The girls kept still, afraid to break the spell, aware of the intrusion, as if they had walked into the bathroom and found their auntie naked. For a long while, the girls made themselves invisible, like black garbed Noh players assisting their auntie's drama. Stealthily, Lana steered herself and her sister over to the cedar chest where they could huddle, allowing Gloria the length of the room to pace, roaming a vastly larger space between herself and the object of her love. Clicking her tongue, Gloria wandered the few steps back and forth along the length of her vanity between the bed and the wall with the sealed front door. The faintest utterance was on her lips, a whisper that seemed to call out a name. She touched her hair and seemed to answer, moving her lips, pausing, lips going again.

After that day, the girls no longer followed their auntie into her room to watch her brush her hair and pat her face with various treatments. And Gloria no longer expected the girls to follow her. In the middle of a story, the older woman understood that there were more days behind her than in front of her and she must hurry forward, running like a girl, toward the center of the dream. The dream was a changing dream with no beginning and no end. Gloria

no longer ruled her dreams, gladly giving up her pet ideas about love and marriage. Moving her lips, she spoke freely, without regret or a need for reply.

General Douglas MacArthur passed through Honolulu on a regular basis, recalled to duty for the Korean War. He barely smiled, square-jawed and impenetrable behind dark aviator glasses. There was some hero talk but island people were still fatigued from World War II, especially the heavy presence of uniformed men in town and the local scandals involving soldiers and local girls. Everyone wanted things to return to the way they were before the mobilizations of the Pacific theater, before everything new. The *Honolulu Star Bulletin* carried headlines about 'the 38th parallel.' Pearl Harbor was both a memorial and an active naval shipyard. Like the arms race, the pace of change was speeding up, not slowing down. Each time the general passed through on military transport, there was a front page photo of him, laden with flower leis, lifting his arm in greeting, a leader's stern survey of crowds and ceremony.

In spite of the heat and humidity, nothing slowed down. School teachers nurtured their young sprouts as they had tended their victory gardens. Teachers believed that a combination of sun, water, and spelling would build sturdy bodies and minds. (The younger teachers dreamed of a love life after school; even a slight breeze at recess could set off alarming sensations beneath their light cotton dresses.) The twins obediently colored maps of the world—while every other place in the world was a color on a map, the children's reality was the island, the house in which they lived. Good weather seemed to cooperate with lesson plans that emphasized good habits and positive values. The girls learned about basic food groups and dental hygiene. Even moments of anxiety seemed routinely scheduled: once a month, civil defense sirens blared for a full minute at noon. Radios announced an alert at the same time, emitting an odd hum. At a loud signal that sounded like a berserk foghorn, the school children were taught to duck and cover, diving under their wooden desks and covering their small heads with their arms, as if fending off the attack of a nuisance dog. It was a festive exercise, disrupting spelling bees and multiplication tables.

Improvement was taking place everywhere: for the first time in memory, the city and county embarked on road projects. The men in the family discussed driving routes based on road maintenance

detours. When the caterpillars and pile drivers were raising a racket on Keaniani Street, Father went out to talk to the crew. Then he visited the neighbors. By the next day, he had collected enough cash to pay the road crew to roll down Keaniani Lane. At the end of a work day, around mid-afternoon, the crew rumbled down the lane, laying out a thick gravel bed and pressing it into place. Then they laid down hot asphalt, followed by the rumbling steam roller. Everyone watched the dusty dirt lane transform into a neatly groomed cul-de-sac. One of the big machine drivers, an old-timer wearing a woman's straw hat and Hollywood sunglasses, even finessed a T-shaped turnaround at the end of the lane. The neighbor men threw in more cash and brought beer out for the crew. The women carried out pans of fried rice and sweet and sour ribs. More trays and pans of goodies were brought out. The neighbor men and road crew mingled, laughing in the dusky light. The boys took chunks of black tarry gravel and put them in their pockets. By dark, the lane was quiet, steam still rising off the freshly laid asphalt.

Everybody in town heard about the new Keaniani Lane (the mayor took credit for it and everybody laughed—he strolled around town in white pants and white shoes, shaking hands, remembering names). The dairyman in his squat blue and white step van stopped complaining about having to go around to the back of the house (to the door that was not nailed shut) to pick up and deliver milk bottles. He wanted details on the arrangement with the road crew; the neighbors on the lane referred him to the mayor's office. The slop man who came by once a week did not say anything but he nodded to Mother. She was one of the few people in town who collected clean slop for his pigs; the slop can hung on a pipe he had driven into the ground away from the house. When the honey wagon came by on its once-a-year mission to lower its hoses into the backyard cesspool, the two-man crew complimented Mother on the blacktop; they said it was better for their truck and equipment. Even the Fuller Brush man lingered, accepting a glass of beer and a beef and mayonnaise sandwich. Mother and Grandmother watched him eat; taking his time, he said more that afternoon than the men in their house said all week. After his wife and daughters left him, he took to sales work. He said that he had had his disappointments but somehow, no matter what, he still loved people. "People are

people,” he said. More salesmen found their way down the lane. Mother enjoyed answering the door, asking them to step inside.

Every Friday in the summer, the ice cream truck tinkled its tune and turned into the lane. Everyone knew the words to the tune:

*Fortune's always hiding
I've looked everywhere*

Fatso said that song was the story of his life. His pockets were full of coins, sagging with the weight of quarters, nickels, and dimes.

*I'm forever blowing bubbles
Pretty bubbles in the air*

Children stood next to the truck, studying the faded picture menu of various kinds of ice cream on a stick or neatly wrapped in paper. The driver leaned back in his busted seat, waiting, only the lurching idle of the engine suggesting that there were other places to go, other children standing around, dreaming of ice cream, inhaling the fumes of a small, hardworking truck. Fatso gave all the kids money to get their favorite, a nutty Drumstick, a Neapolitan sandwich, an orange Creamsicle.

Once a month, the mosquito truck pulled into the lane. It was a square black vehicle that puffed out clouds of DDT to kill mosquitoes. Although mosquitoes were more a nuisance than a threat, their buzzing attacks could drive some people crazy. All the neighbors agreed that the smooth, black lane attracted a lot of attention. Thanks to the DDT program (and the uniformed boys who died of dengue fever), there were, in fact, much fewer mosquitoes, and families could relax in their patios on warm nights.

The children made fun of the truck driver. He drove slowly and waved at them, baring his blackened gums in a toothless grin. The truck did not look official: it had no city and county emblem and rattled like a jalopy, wheezing its way up and down the lane. The driver dangled his left arm out the door as if trolling water—a blind search for something, a slippery fish or fish-shadow with stunted, vestigial wings—his right arm barely steering, the truck making squeeze box noises, not a tune but random notes like birds on a wire.

2. TSUNAMI

Sirens had been blaring for so long that no one heard them any more. Radio broadcasts repeated instructions to go to high ground and stay there. Streets winding uphill and homes with a view high above the bay were designated as safe. People in the flat Coconut Grove neighborhood left their homes and moved in a dense, antlike phalanx up the hill. Their empty houses looked like paper cutouts, tilting against the sky. A tree spread its branches, sagging with bunches of sweet, sticky plumeria. The line of cars going uphill was slow and wiggly. A man leaning out of his car window, flicking cigarette ash, smiled at two teenaged girls who walked with their arms entwined. An old Ford truck carried four boys on its running board. Whenever the truck stalled, the youngest boy hopped off and back on, laughing. The boys waved to the pedestrians as if they were in a parade. Remembering the attack on Pearl Harbor, most of the adults were grateful that this was only a tsunami warning. There were oldsters who complained that they fled their homes too quickly, their stiff limbs and foggy thoughts rushed by sirens at dawn. Most people were still in their comfy bed clothes—faded muumuus and holey tee shirts, the soft rags of sleep and privacy. Only Mrs. Pomodor rushed down the hill to change into a nice daytime outfit, a polka dot shirt, capris, and high heeled sandals. She said that it made her more alert and ready for the day. “It’s worth the risk,” she said to a woman wearing a towel like a shawl. “After all, I met my husband in the war.”

At first, people politely knocked on doors to use the toilets of the homes on the hill, offering apologies for their kids or old folks. As the day went on, these residences became *de facto* relief stations for everything. Mr. and Mrs. Casella, retired school teachers who lived on a curving corner lot, made two huge pots of chili. One pot contained the wife’s recipe, sweet and mild, and the other pot held the husband’s, hot and spicy. Mr. Casella put on an apron and ladled chili into a Dixie cup for anybody who came by. “Hot or sweet?” he asked. He had a supply of Dixie cups in his garage and was glad to get rid of them.

By the afternoon, everyone looked familiar, as if their parked cars were little houses and all the people had arrived for the same party. Children roamed from their parents, even the little ones, looking for free Popsicles or following their older cousins. People were leaning

on cars, lucky ones sat in the shade—as if in a great silence, except that it was really under the long blasts of sirens.

“It started in the Aleutians, a volcano,” one man said.

“I been there,” another man said. “Silver salmon. Mild, pale, good eating.”

As dusk fell, cooling off the streets, people got back into their cars. Sirens continued to go on and off. The all clear signal had not been given, but some of the evacuees were heading down the hill. The fun had worn off, people were tired. Father looked for his son, “Ezra?” After a few beers, he wasn’t in a hurry to collect his family. There were too many of them. He wasn’t sure how everyone had fit into the car. He had enjoyed spending the day in the company of other men, holding a bottle of beer, talking in the street. As night fell, yellow porch lights were flicked on. The night air felt thinner than the daytime; it felt sharp on the skin. Without further beckoning, the father’s family members appeared, gravitating toward Mother (he called his wife mother) with Grandmother on a blanket. The two girls rubbed their legs, feeling chilly in matching shorts. Uncle Fatso gave the girls a quarter each for being good all day. Auntie Gloria asked, “Where’s my handsome boy?” She expected him to instantly show up whenever she said that. “Hey, handsome,” she called out. A rude whistle flew back from a passing car. Soon, René drifted back. Only Ezra was missing.

It was a long night for the family, looking for Ezra, alternately cursing and sighing for him. Father crisscrossed the hill, peering into the dark until his eyes felt like dry, rough pebbles. Mother and grandmother sat in the car, waiting.

A mile away, in a wild, weedy field where the ground tilted up toward the mountain, Ezra was walking. His bare feet were tough, their soles stained the color of shoe leather. The air felt like petals on his face, his skinny legs humming with movement. He was following the sounds of a faraway ukulele. Earlier in the day, under full sun, the crowded street scene had pressed and squeezed the boy away from its hot center. All day long, his smallness had slipped through the spaces made by wide hips and bare legs. He was a bright blue ball in a pachinko machine, shooting through the levers that sang *ka-ching, ka-ching*, rolling along the easy switchbacks toward home. Although he knew that home was down the hill, he traced another line, the winding way in the dark. The boy felt, for

the first time, as if he were on a voyage, the kind that calls for kisses and tears at the dock because no one would know when he would return. The thought of his mother waving a hanky, smiling through her tears, made him calm. If he were a grown man, he would feel content, but he was only seven years old. On this night, he felt free of childish distractions.

The melody was plain, a single line of notes plucked on a string, resounding on smooth wood. The music rose and fell with the wind, pulling him toward a tent on a vacant lot. The lot was a holding pen for sand, gravel, and earthmoving equipment, surrounded by a cyclone fence. A metal sign on the fence said "KAPU! Keep out!" The tent had sprung up as testimony that this one day stood apart, an extraordinary day like a net cast out to sea, still floating, seeking its own shape. It was a two-peaked, high tent, the kind that serves as a summer home on the beach. From the outside, its white fabric ballooned out and sucked in with the wind. It was brightly lit inside. Two large women sat on an old sofa, absentmindedly patting the sleeping children on their laps. An old woman leaned over them, covering the children's legs with small tea towels. There were two brothers strumming on ukuleles. The brothers were so big, solid as refrigerators, that the instruments looked like toys, their fingers picking out tunes with long, manicured nails. Everywhere he turned, someone smiled at the boy. He walked over to a large table and sat under it. The table felt like a roof over his head. He folded himself into a compact shape, a box inside a box, fitted together and snapped shut. Drowsy, he toppled over. The music felt warm, carrying the boy to a miniature island with a palm tree and grass hut on the sand. On this miniature, he fell fast asleep, a sleeping dot of a boy. The sleeping boy lived another life that night: songs of heartache, homesickness, young love, lost love, new and surprising love. The brothers sang as if they were talking to a friend. Swaying slightly as they sang, their wavy hair gleamed under lights strung on a slack line. The older brother closed his eyes and broke off into a girl's voice, a soft falsetto that climbed higher and higher, losing words. His girl's voice sounded like the kind of yearning that comes and goes with the wind. Each person in the tent heard a different song, a private sense of what that tugging was, that longing for lost things. The sleeping boy grew into a young man and fell in love with a beautiful girl. They sailed to another island and settled on a farm, wading ankle deep in cold stream water to gather

tall watercresses and hollow-stalked swamp grasses. They worked side by side from dawn till afternoon. Then, they rested on a big, soft bed. The dream had unfolded the boy's body into a long *ti* leaf, his spine unfurled and supple with complete rest. At dawn, Ezra awoke, turned back into a boy.

Down the hill, out to the beach, the morning lay flat and quiet. There was no wind, no tide. The water had completely receded. A clear mile of the bay's floor was exposed; it was a strange sight that no one could compare to anything in memory. On the wet stretch of sand, fishes were flopping everywhere. Ruts and ledges of sand, colorful rubber slippers here and there, seaweed clumped like gelatinous trees or light green and matted like hair, piles of pocked gray-white rocks, smooth green glass, shells that looked like ordinary gravel, and bits of trash that looked like precious jewels. Word spread and a few people ventured out to see for themselves. There were many who were tired of waiting. Earlier feelings of dread were overrun by boredom. Among the restless, there was no expectation that waiting any longer would make a difference. Every passing hour added credence to their suspicion that endless waiting was for fools. The sky was clear blue. Birds were silent, out of sight. By noon, it looked like the day before, people everywhere. A wave of people rushed from the highest hill to the bottom of the sea. Adults behaved like children, pointing and laughing. Everyone wanted to start a collection. The bay turned into a concourse of opportunity, crawling with treasure hunters. There were more fish and *ono* seaweed than anybody could possibly gather. Buckets and wheelbarrows were not big enough to hold the harvest. Separating collectibles from garbage was exhausting guesswork, an impossible predicament of what to keep, what to throw away. People were picking through the littered expanse, relentless in their efforts, driven by the unforeseen opportunity. A bow-legged woman said that someone found a wedding ring with a diamond as big as a tooth. Radio broadcasts continued to issue warnings.

On a hill overlooking the bay, Mr. and Mrs. Casella were sitting in their kitchen, listening to the radio. *Fly me to the moon and let me play among the stars*. Mrs. Casella was secretly in love with Ol' Blue Eyes. She poured a cup of coffee for her husband. She made more coffee for the people still camped on their lawn.

When the wave train came, it rolled forward at over two hundred miles per hour. From the shore, it looked more like a wall of gray water. There was no cry or open mouth of surprise. It was an assault of weight, a wall of water that rolled forward like a locomotive of hissing steam and solid metal. The train rolled and pitched forward, drowning everything in sight. Then, it rolled further up the shore, driving and hissing forward, flooding streets and houses, pushing upward against the law of gravity. Water piled up and fell, over and over, until the island sank in despair. It took this moment of total submission to allow a slow and final retreat of that great train. The wave left a sodden stretch of tundra, potholes where trees once stood, dark shapes of standing water.

Radio programs were interrupted with estimated body counts and eye witness reports. "Everything looked very small, people like bugs, cars like toys," one man said. There was no music on the radio, no strumming *mele* to accompany daily work. Armed forces reserves were called to action. Coast Guard ships were on standby.

All day, the family feared the worst, that the boy was washed out to sea. When the all clear signal was given, father bowed his head. In slow motion, the family gathered around him. Wordlessly, they squeezed into the Morris Minor and went down the hill, returning home.

Piled on top of one another, no one spoke or squirmed for more room as Father drove home. The sides of the small Morris Minor seemed to give way so Gloria, Fatso, Grandmother, and the girls could squeeze in the backseat. Thinking of her first husband bragging about a white horse with wings, Grandmother turned into a blue shadow, taking up no space at all. The girls intertwined their legs as if in sleep, making themselves into one. On family trips, Ezra usually sat between his mother's legs in the front seat. The family believed that the boy should see as much of the world as possible, even on a ride around town. Instead of the boy, Mother held Lucy up front, pressing her to her breast as if she were a stuffed pillow. The baby kept perfectly still, her eyes wide open above her mother's shoulder, looking at the faces in the back, the rhythmic chugging of the engine failing to lull her to sleep.

Their house stood as before, a white square with a pink concrete driveway. Grandfather, who had refused to evacuate, waved from the front yard. He was looking at the avocado tree, slung low with

fruit—hard, immature footballs. He was waiting for one to ripen before his eyes. Grandfather's favorite snack was a halved avocado, its natural bowl filled with sugar. He would eat loudly, smacking his tongue against false teeth.

That night, Father switched off the television and everyone knew it was time to go to bed. When the family was together in the livingroom, watching TV and listening to the radio reporting the same news every ten minutes, they were bound by the outside narration of disaster, news reports quoting civil alert officials who gave the impression they were going to work around the clock to check and recheck the situation. It all sounded vaguely predictive, like weather reports, pointing toward a day when this would be left behind, a final report rounding up the names of persons lost and property damaged. For this reason, the adult members of the family were reluctant to retire to their own beds, expecting the reports to continue around the clock.

Alone, each person grew dull and weary, forgetting and then remembering why this night was strange, an odd sensation that the small house with many people was empty, missing the presence of the boy, his golden promise so much larger than his childish frame.

When Shorty felt lonely, it was for Eunice, not the boy. Shorty had just fled his own disaster: he had finally proposed marriage to Eunice and, smiling to herself, she shook her head, no, not the right time. Shorty turned around and left her, still shaking her head. Against roadblocks, he had raced over the *Pali* toward the scene of the tsunami, already feeling left out of the family's dilemma, their house trapped in the lowlands of Kailua Bay. It became clear to him that Eunice would never consent to marriage because she lacked the imagination to see the two of them together. Her head dipped down, she smiled to herself because she could not begin to imagine what she could not see. The next day and the days to follow, Shorty told himself that he would keep his eyes open for another and his ears attuned to a different voice, a voice that wondered why he liked the things he did, the reason why he preferred his coffee at room temperature (temperamental teeth) (this would make her laugh). Already he could hear a voice belonging to someone he had yet to meet, teasing him about his sensitive teeth, rising in laughter.

Because the boy was his, Father found no consolation in waiting, the business of waiting failing to spin thoughts in his head. When

his wife was round as a melon with an unborn boy, he spent all of his waking hours wishing for a boy, silently and secretly because each girl was an awkward reminder of his constant wish that seemed to feed on itself, an embarrassing obsession for a man who can only plant the seed, the butt of family jokes about the seed that spelled g-i-r-l because his wife spelled b-o-s-s. For all the waiting, Ezra's birth was just like the girls'. He wailed like a baby, louder and longer than Liz and Lana, flailing miserably until someone picked him up. The boy's special treatment was taken for granted, fulfilling an expectation that existed long before he was born. Everyone in the family cooperated, recognizing the emblem of a boy as shining and beyond compare. As Ezra grew up, father wished to keep him close by, no, to push him away, to somehow prepare him for the world, keeping him to himself, sending out another boy in his place, a boy spirit flung out to sea. Ezra's obedience galled his father: where was the famous Korean temper? The kind of hot temper that causes grown men to drink too much, gamble their paychecks, double their losses? Even as the boy followed him around, learning his tricks, he sensed that the kid had already packed up his bags and left home. Rubbing his wife's pregnant belly for good luck, he did not know that all a father does in the life of a child is wait. While he's waiting, there's a lot to do: going to the office, paying the bills, fixing up the house: no matter how fast or slow time goes by, it all amounts to the same thing.

His wife lay in bed next to him, awake but wordless. Sitting up in bed, Father's mouth was dry, no spit rose up in his throat, as if he would be without anything to say for the rest of his life. Looking into the dark room, seeing nothing in particular, he forgot about his ordeal. Stuck with sentry duty in the middle of nowhere, he remembered scrambling to his post, pulling up his pants, running with his boot laces dragging in the muck. Breathless, he signaled the other sentry to retire for the night. The other soldier was a kid like himself, watching his desperate attempts to pull himself together with buckles and laces, breaking out in helpless glee. They gasped with muffled delight, holding onto each other's shoulders so neither would fall down. Breaking the silence of sentry duty could have gotten them both killed. Father looked at his wife who was looking at him. This time he would not lapse into fatigued hijinks. He lifted

the white sheet and got out of bed. Standing in his bare feet, looking out the window, he would try not to get the boy killed.

Up the hill in the tent, Ezra sat under the table, watching the old woman make coffee. The dented metal pot rocked with a head of steam, perked coffee spurting into the hollow glass knob on top. The other children noticed the boy for the first time and joined him under the table. A girl with a round face, small and flat as a coin, stared at the boy. She looked at him for a long while, until she felt satisfied. The grownup brother with the girl's voice called out, "Eh-ay, you the one." The big man gave him a sweet bun. The boy asked for another bun, wishing to stay, having grown attached to the two brothers. They hummed a few more songs as they finished packing up the tent. Others loaded furniture and boxes of goodies onto their trucks and cars, waving goodbye.

"Blallah, take care, now."

"Eh, you too."

The vehicles U-turned slowly in the lot, stirring up brown puffs of dirt.

"Where you live?" the soft voiced brother asked. He handed Ezra a bottle of orange soda to drink in the car. The other brother was so relaxed, he could steer the car with his belly. It was a trick that made the boy laugh. Riding home, he sucked on the nubby glass lip of the bottle, pointing out the way.

The girls shrieked uncontrollably when they spotted their brother standing in the driveway, waving to a departing car. There were no harsh words for Ezra, just tears rolling down everyone's cheeks. Although he was a gangly child and really too big to be lifted off his feet, he was carried all day long. Uncle Fatso carried him on his hip and kissed his sweaty head. Father carried him on his back, as if he were a sack of rice. The girls made a sedan chair with their locked arms, carrying him around the living room. All day, somebody carried him. It wasn't until nightfall when everyone sat down to dinner that he was released. At the table, taking his place next to Father, his feet finally touched the ground.

The third day began with purpose after the endless waiting and chaos of the days before. It started with a few boys who surveyed the mess; they huddled and emerged with a plan. The boys worked steadily, sorting through the debris, drawing lines in the sand with sticks. After that, various groups formed to collect different things.

The impetus to make tidy piles and rows of things spread among the children. Day after day, the children picked up and carried things, making hills of seashells and building mountains of beach toys—plastic tubes shrunk and crinkled, deflated balls, buckets, shovels, dolls—and more than anything else, shoes of all kinds. Clouds of black flies latched onto mounds of garbage. The flies ate and respired in unison, droning with pleasure. A bare chested man with flowing hair made a bonfire of felled trees. He stood there all day, throwing rafts of palm branches onto the low, smoldering flames. It was a mournful slag fire that spewed black smoke and clouds of ashes.

When school reopened, the children reluctantly left their work in unfinished patterns. The beach was roped off as a hazardous area. Signs were installed. Restoration took place as a paramilitary operation. Backhoes, caterpillars, and trucks gobbled up the children's neat piles and rows. Between the shore and the hills, the tsunami's erasure was gradually filled in. The governor made a pledge that "the zone of destruction will be made over into a *Hawaiian style* Garden of Eden." Everything ended up as landfill, a multi-layered midden of the island's biggest tidal wave in history. Over time, the landfill cooked and settled into real estate. It was paved and seeded with green grass. Grids of power and water were installed. A canal with sloping concrete sides ran a straight line from the houses to the sea. Realty ads said, "You can go fishing in your own back yard!" Baby palm trees were planted. The brand new houses were charming, painted pastel colors of the rainbow with white trim.

The developers named the tract *Liliuokalani Park*. Kids called it *da zone*. "Eh, meet chu at da zone." Families pooled their savings and put as many relatives as possible under one roof. Everyone watered their lawns to a perfect, spiky emerald green. An odd smell sometimes emanated from the grass. The midden continued to cook beneath, forming methane fumes that seeped through the carpet of green. Authorities said it was safe, but children should not play with matches. People were encouraged to barbeque only on concrete slabs or in their driveways. Whenever that odd smell arose, neighborhood boys would slip away in groups of twos and threes. Each boy carried a book of matches in his pocket. They would crawl on their hands and knees, sniffing the ground, then lower themselves flat, dragging their length like combat soldiers. Lighting up, a boy would roll over,

face down, then jump up and run. One after another, in an invisible cloud of methane, they would ignite flash fires. "Kill the Japs! Get 'em, get 'em!" Strike a match: *Flash!* A smoking brown spot on the ground smelled like a burning body. *Flash! Flash!* Leaping with joy, the boys would run at top speed: they ran in packs around fields and parking lots; eventually, with stomachs growling for hot rice, they ran in smaller and smaller circles that zeroed in on their homes. After running so hard, the boys ate savagely. Their mothers refilled their plates and praised them for their grunting appetency.

Two boys, accountable to nobody, were spending the night on Flat Island, a patch of rock ledges and scrubby growth in the middle of the bay. Their flimsy pup tent was propped up against the wind, rattling against a scrawny bush. They had walked out to the island during low tide, carrying boxes of camping gear on their heads. The older boy convinced the younger that they were *defending* the island from invasion. They ate canned meat for dinner and washed it down with beer. From this tiny island, the shore dotted with houses seemed far away. The only significant landmark was Lanikai Point, a jagged rupture that reached its fingers out into thin air.

The black promontory absorbed the shock of white, foaming waves. Fishes slowly circled and slept in the bay. With the trees bending toward the water and the water lapping onto the shore, the interplay suggested that this is the way one receives the other. Across the beach road, people withdrew into their houses that were lit like lanterns against the night. Recent rains had raised the level of the canal connecting to the bay. The canal water was thick and brown, emptying at a wide mouth into the bay waters. Near the mingling of waters, only one fish jumped and flopped. An old and ugly *tilapia* from the canal was breaking surface, gulping air. A tough, scar-faced bottom feeder, the fish was no prize. It jumped again, a stubborn effort, an impulse. Near the mouth of the canal where the brown waters fanned out and slid into the bay, it jumped and flopped for the last time. Landing on wet sand, it lay panting. It would be another hour before the canal water and the bay water merged on that sandy spot. A light rain fell, sprinkling the old thing until its mottled skin glistened. Enough water fell from the sky to make it gasp for more, but not enough to carry it out to sea.