

A Magic Prison

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BCHEMI001

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Abstract: A Magic Prison

When Megan's aged and addled father goes missing in Lahaina, Maui, where he has been living most of his adult life, she must decide whether and how she should help to find him. As a child, she knew him only through their two weeks together each December; as a young adult, she had to deal with the consequences of his alcoholism and her stepsister's accusation that he molested her. Now Megan is forty-one, married to Steven and the mother of a young daughter, Jess; but she is her father's only child and her stepmother needs her help.

As Megan returns to Maui she recalls her Christmases with her father. Both good and bad memories are evoked as she searches for him: from the delights of snorkelling, the horrors of a cock fight, and the stories of the locals, to the beauty of the tropical landscape. We follow her as she visits the once-isolated community of Hansen's disease sufferers at Kalaupapa, on Molokai; tracks down her stepsister where she is working at the landmark Pioneer Inn, and walks through the historical sites of ancient Lahaina, once the home of Hawaiian royalty. We discover what it is like to work at a commercial *luau* and how she became a chef on Kauai.

A sub-plot involves the story of her husband's father, Clive, and his mother Carolyn, who had been banished to Kalaupapa. Megan discovers the truth about Clive's mother's disease when she finds Carolyn's letter at the museum there. As she begins to understand the complexity of connections between loved ones, both blood family and others, she sees how important her grandmother's tale will be to Jess one day.

A Magic Prison explores the complicated question of family bonds and mutual obligation through the metaphor of islands, each isolated yet linked to each other on a deep, sometimes subterranean, level. The prison motif appears in several different forms: through addiction, or banishment, or even unwanted colonization, people find themselves lonely and confused. Some shrivel up in these circumstances. Others flourish despite the adversity they face. Most of us do some of both, oscillating between success and failure. It is this tension that creates the magic alluded to in Emily Dickinson's poem.

Echoes of the Icarus myth remind the reader of another imprisoned father whose errors inadvertently caused the death of his child, who drowned when his wings melted. Megan, however, has learned to swim underwater, and so she not only survives, but opens her heart again to love.

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Though they live in Lahaina, Maui, my father and my stepmother are not like the characters I depicted, except in the very best ways. I have borrowed hugely from the settings of their lives and I thank them for that.

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American English is used in the text because the novel is set exclusively in Hawaii.

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A Magic Prison

A Magic Prison

By Emily Buchanan

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Of God we ask one favor,
That we may be forgiven .
For what, he is presumed to know .
The Crime, from us, is hidden .
Immured the whole of Life
Within a magic Prison
We reprimand the Happiness
That too competes with Heaven.

Emily Dickinson
(poem, 1601)

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Prologue

I think of my father every time I brush my teeth. Particularly the back molars, and particularly at night. It's a more reflective time than in the morning, when Steven and I are competing for the sink between getting ready to go to work, getting Jess organized for school, and trying to remember the stuff we need to tell each other before we part for the day. When I brush my teeth at night Jess is already asleep, and Steven's usually reading in bed. The light above the mirror shines down on my face, making it look gaunt and already ancient. I wonder if I'd look like my dad when I'm near death: the bushy eyebrows, the bewildered eyes and the willing grin. It wasn't a bad face to leave with, considering how advanced his dementia was. The grin softened the rest of it; the grin was the little boy: mischievous, funny, clever and wanting desperately to be loved.

If we had found him faster, would that have prevented the pneumonia that finally carried him off? At the time I was grateful for it. I knew he wasn't going to regain his memory; that he was going to struggle more and more with the simple tasks of life, like getting dressed, or going to the bathroom. He'd already mistaken his toothbrush for a piece of toilet paper, using it to wipe himself. I was hoping we would all be spared the shame of looking after him like he was a baby. They call pneumonia "old man's friend", but now I find myself wishing we still had him around, no matter how difficult he might have become. I wish I could see him one more time.

Aloha, Meggo

December 6, 2011

Aloha Meggo,

This is Hardy, the guy from the P.I. We used to pick coconuts together, remember? I've tried to call you a few times on your home phone but never got you and didn't want to leave a message. Finally I got Steven and he gave me your email address. I told him I wanted to get in touch.

The thing is, your dad's missing. Heather walked past here this morning on her way to church and I asked her about the old man and she got all upset and told me. She says she doesn't need my help for anything, but I thought you should know what's going on. She doesn't think there is anything to do besides report him a missing person to the police, which she has done. Her opinion is that if he wanted to be found, he would have been found. I don't know. Maybe he's hurt somewhere. I would want someone to look for me if I was lost.

He wouldn't go very far, and you know the area. Please try to come. I don't have a phone but I work at the Salvation Army on Shaw Street and you can find me there or leave a message. I am sending this email from a friend who will tell me if you reply. If I can borrow a car I will pick you up at the airport.

Hope you and your little *keiki* Jess are good. Steven said you were a happy family.

Aloha,
Hardy

Fuck. Why hadn't Heather contacted me? Surely she had my number lying around, even if we hadn't been in touch all that often during the last few years. We'd taken Jess there, twice, since she was born seven years ago. How long had my dad been gone? Hours, days, weeks?

I called their number in Lahaina. It rang repeatedly. No answering machine.

Then I remembered the last time with my dad. I wanted to hit reply and tell Hardy to leave me alone, but, like most of my dad's friends, Hardy didn't have his own email address. My dad would be found eventually. He'd probably gone off on a drinking spree, or got mad at Heather and walked out. He wasn't a nice guy anymore. He'd become bitter and temperamental with age, and he was particularly

mean when he was in a bad mood. I didn't have time for this. I had the unfinished summer menu hanging over my head, and Steven was already irritated with me for working so many nights and being away from Jess. At least he'd told Hardy we were a happy family. We were. I was sure we were.

I closed my laptop and stared out of the window at the tiny bit of sea visible in the gap between the three blocks of buildings separating our condo from the Pacific Ocean. The sun was beginning to slip towards the horizon. On the windowsill were shells and bits of coral from places where I'd dived. It was my altar, this little square of sea. Staring at the water, pewter in the late afternoon light, made me feel calm. Calm and clear, and more alive. *Kind of like after sex*, I thought. And smiled.

My dad was well over eighty. Closer to eighty-five actually. He wasn't in the best of shape after a lifetime of smoking and some pretty heavy drinking. Maybe something bad *had* happened to him. Should I get on a flight right away, or wait for a few days and hope he'd be found in the meantime? I hunched my shoulders like the vulture in Jess's favorite scene from *The Jungle Book*. *What yaqwannaqdo?* I asked myself.

I wanted my dad to be well and happy. I wanted him to be one of those hale and hearty octogenarians who dandled their grandchildren on their knees. And I wanted to have been loved by him throughout my life, actively and well, not piecemeal and at a distance. I put my head in my hands and felt a tear roll over my lips. When I licked it off, the salty taste helped me decide. *I've got to go*, I thought. Steven would have done the same for Clive . but then Clive had been a different kind of dad.

Swivelling back to my desk I opened my laptop and searched for flights. I could go tomorrow if I was willing to pay an extra hundred on top of what was normal. Tomorrow was the seventh, Pearl Harbor Day. I knew my dad would remember that,

if he was somewhere where he could see a calendar, if he was still alive. He told me some crazy stories about being in the navy. Only when he was well into his second rum and P.O.G., though, and then he repeated himself *ad nauseum*. There was one about being trapped in a flooded submarine. I don't know if it really happened to him, or if it was one more of his delusions. They seemed to be multiplying as he got older. The last few times I had called him he had ranted about everything evil in his life: the postal service, the government, even his neighbors' dogs. He hardly asked about me, or Jess, or Steven. That's when I quit calling him except on his birthday and Father's Day. Christmas if I remembered in time.

I tried Heather again. She picked up on the third ring, breathless, her hello question-marked and tremulous.

"Hi Heather, it's Megan."

"Oh, God, Megan dear."

"Heather. Are you okay?"

I could hear her sniff, and then blow her nose. She didn't speak.

"Is my dad still missing? I heard from Uncle Hardy that he's been gone for a while. The honorific 'uncle' that Hawaiians used had slipped into my speech as soon as I was connected to Hawaii. I could almost feel the tropical air wafting over the line. My ear felt warm.

Heather sounded as if she was holding back tears. And exasperated.

"That Hardy. I should have told you, Megan, but I'm still hoping he'll be home soon. He's done it before. I was sure he'd be back within a few days. I didn't want to worry you."

I interrupted her. "It's okay, Heather, I understand. I was wondering if I should come."

Her voice rushed out with relief. *Please* do. If you're not too busy. You've got your own family, and your restaurant . +

I'd let you know when I can get there, Heather. I think I can get a flight tomorrow. I want to come.+

Then I emailed Hardy, telling him *I'd* rent a car, and that *I'd* find him at the Salvation Army, and thanks for telling me about my dad. Old busy body.

I booked the flight, realizing *I'd* have to pay for it out of the money we'd set aside from our inheritance from Clive, Steven's father. I dreaded telling Steven although I knew he'd understand eventually. He'd been grouchy since Clive had died a little less than a year ago, and he got furious with me whenever I tried to talk about it. *I'd* gone with him to Kauai to the memorial service, and packed up Clive's house with him; made sure we made love as much as he wanted and, when none of that worked, reminded him that Clive was special to me, too. Instead of softening towards me, Steven had got sharper and harder, the look in his eyes of a cornered animal about to attack unless you back off. So *I'd* backed off, and tried to leave him alone. He'd have to take his own time about it, I guess. I hoped there wasn't anything else wrong.

I love him; *I've* got no doubt about that. When I see him after being apart for a few hours, my whole body melts. When he hugs me, I feel like *I'm* at home. Making love to him is still the most important thing in the universe. And Jess . she's the light of my life. But right now it feels like they're both fed up with me.

I feel the same way I used to feel waiting for my dad when he'd been at the P.I. for hours and hours and *I'd* given up hope on him ever coming home, let alone by the time he'd so vehemently promised me. The hours would pass and *I'd* imagine having to sleep all night in his house on my own. My heart would get heavier and

heavier, until it was a stone in my chest. Often he'd promised we'd go snorkelling, too, but by the time he eventually got home it was long past sunset, the sea, in the day so inviting to me, a dark mirror under which only terrible things awaited.

Instead of running to me with open arms and giggling . like Jesse used to do a few months ago . she turns away from me and won't let me join in whatever game she'd been playing. I want to cry. I have to swallow hard. I remind myself that I'm her parent, but I feel like a lonely child on the school playground, left out of the volleyball team even when the half-blind kid had been included. And I shouldn't feel this way . but I suspect Steven of having turned Jess against me. He's been acting so miserable that I imagine it's rubbed off on her. Maybe if I'm gone for a few days they'd be happy to see me when I come home again.

Thankfully it was my night off. After dinner I started to tell him about Maui, but he shook his head and pointed at Jess, mouthing, "Later!" After our little girl was asleep, I came back from her bedroom and faced him where he was sitting at his desk, doing something on his computer.

"So this is why Hardy was calling. How are we going to pay for this?" he asked me. He didn't look up.

"We've paid already with my credit card. I'll use some of the money from Clive," I responded.

"We're not putting anything away . no education fund, no retirement fund . and whenever you go away you seem to do something that endangers your life . bungy jumping, white-water rafting, you name it. What would happen to Jess if you died?" Steven's face was contorted with anger, but he was still pretending to be busy on the computer. "And I suspect you're still free-diving, too." He punched the table with his fist.

I stood there, staring at him. I won't do anything stupid on this trip, I promise. I've got to help Heather find my dad.

I only see Steven cry once before, and that was when Jess was born. Now his face crumpled. His head was in his arms on his desk and his shoulders were shaking. I didn't even know my dad was sick. I didn't even get to say goodbye—he cried out. He lifted his face and stared at me for a few seconds, and then he laughed a little, and wiped the tears out of his eyes.

I went to him and held him. At first he half-heartedly tried to fight me off, saying he had to get some work done, and then he sat and cried a little more. My arms were around him for such a long time that they started to ache. At least it was good exercise. His back felt smooth and firm under my hands, and his hair smelled great.

I love you, Steve, I said.

When he calmed down and blew his nose, we couldn't look at each other. I forced myself to speak, I feel like I need to go. I'm sorry if it's hard for you right now.

Steven nodded. He rubbed his fists into his eyes and turned back to his desk.

When we finally got into bed, both of us were exhausted. I spent the evening making arrangements for the restaurant, ordering supplies and paying bills, and lining up babysitters for Jess in the afternoons, when I normally picked her up from school. I hadn't even had a chance to pack. Steven reached for me, his hand smoothing over my stomach and then resting just below my navel, his fingers delicately tickling my skin. My dog Snorkel Bob groaned from his bed in the hall, and we both laughed. Thank God we still had this.

I packed in the morning, at the last minute deciding to take my goggles and snorkel. It would be crazy to go to Hawaii without it. I should have at least an hour to

spare now and then. Or maybe I'd find him right away. Maybe he's on his way home already, I explained to Steven as he watched me get the storage key from its hook. He shook his head, but he was smiling, and he called Jess to come out to the street to say goodbye. He held Jess's hand and they blew kisses. I honked the horn at them in response, three honks in a row: a parody of the Mayday hand signal my dad had taught me, and that Steve and I used at parties to let each other know when we wanted to go home. Steven smiled, recognizing the irony, and waved me off.

The flight from LAX was full, as they usually are en route to Maui. Though the attendant already looked harried, she was wearing a hibiscus behind her ear and her smile seemed genuine. Around her neck was a *kikui pod lei*. I wondered if she realised that those kinds of *lei* were originally reserved for Hawaiian royalty, and then I felt the same spurt of excitement I always felt when I boarded a flight bound for Hawaii.

I'd been making these trips for over thirty years, most of them last-minute like this one. When school was about to end for the vacation, I would get a Christmas card from my dad with a ticket inside for the two-week break. Usually I would end up coming back to LA a few days or, sometimes, a whole week earlier than planned. When I was little, I hadn't understood, and I'd asked my mom why I had to leave Maui early. She had said, "I missed you too much, my precious." My stepfather had said, "Sure," and rolled his eyes.

Mele Kalikimaka

December 1980

When the card arrived I didn't know who it was from. My mom had opened it and handed it to me without a word. There was a picture of a smiling surfer wearing a Christmas wreath around his neck. Two words I'd never seen before . *Mele Kalikimaka* . were in big glittery writing on the front. Inside was a paper that looked like a receipt from a store, with a smudged red copy behind it. I read "LAX" on it as well as "Mahalo". I looked up at her and she smiled. "It's from your dad . in Hawaii," she said.

"I can't let Megan go on her own. She's only ten!" my mom had said to my stepfather, when they were standing on the front lawn and thought I couldn't hear them. "Who knows what condition Jim will be in?"

And a little bit later,

"Damn him. After all these years."

"What did you expect?" my stepfather asked, snapping the shears he was using to trim the hedge.

The air hostesses were wearing pink and yellow floral mini-dresses and real flowers behind their ears. When we got on board they handed my mom a Mai-tai and me, a Hawaiian punch. The drink kind, not the playground one, ha ha. Everyone had a twinkle in their eyes. The napkin had Hawaiian phrases printed on it. *Aloha* . a greeting for both hello and goodbye, that also, strangely, meant: blessings. *Mahalo* . thank you. *Mele Kalikimaka* . Merry Christmas. My mom and I practiced saying the phrases to each other.

After that my mom held my hand and read me snippets out of her book of Greek myths. One story was about a man who made wings out of feathers and wax and escaped out of prison by flying away. Unfortunately when his son tried the wings he got too close to the sun; it melted the wax and he fell and died. People have been trying to figure out how to fly for thousands of years, she said. Thank goodness we have airplanes now, thanks to the Wright brothers. Later she napped, moaning slightly every time we hit a bump. At the rental car agency she realized she'd left her driver's license in her other purse at home. I'm lucky I remembered my head, she said.

We took a taxi from the airport to my dad's place. It was a long ride and my mom anxiously checked the meter every few minutes. At first the taxi couldn't find it. We drove down several streets that looked alike. On one block a blow-up pool stood behind a chain-link fence where some coffee-colored children splashed and screamed. I waved at them. Maybe we would become friends, and I could swim in their pool with them.

Look at the washing hanging on a line in the garage to dry, six white undershirts in a row, my mom remarked.

I looked. It reminded me of ghost decorations for Halloween.

Like my childhood in Texas, she sighed.

A few minutes later the taxi driver finally found the correct address. It was a small brown house with a carport alongside, a rusty Volkswagen beetle parked under it. My mom stiffened when my dad answered the door, a can in his hand. My dad looked much older and thinner than in the pictures my mom had pulled out of a box to show me. He wore an undershirt shaped like the ones we'd seen hanging in the garage, but this one was patterned with a surfboard and a blue hibiscus flower. The

soft flesh showing through the over-enlarged armholes looked paler than the rest of him. He seemed very polite, and was barefoot. Seeing him, my mom took off her shoes and left them outside.

“Everyone does it in Hawaii,” she said. I felt embarrassed because I knew my white socks had holes in the toes. “Why?” I asked.

“I don’t know, Megan. Some native custom,” my mom said. “Just do it.”

I removed my tennis shoes and stuffed my socks deep inside them. I looked up at my dad who was staring at my mom. “*Mele Kalikimaka*,” I said. My dad glanced at me and smiled. “Come out on to the *lanai*,” he gestured.

We went out onto a screened porch and he handed us Cokes from a cooler box. In the back yard were a mango tree and some lumps of dark green long grass, like seaweed but above the ground. Shiny black birds hopped between the lumps. “You’d never come across a more stupid bird, these Minah birds,” my dad said. “They don’t move out of your way when you’re driving. You have to wait for them . . . or run them over.”

We all laughed. I had a gruesome flash of a squashed bird on the road but I wasn’t sure if I’d seen it or imagined it. My mom put down her drink and said,

“Well, thanks for the pop. I’m only going back to LA tomorrow, Meg, so call me at the hotel if you need me in the meantime. I’m sure you’ll have fun, you and your dad.”

She hugged me sideways while looking at my dad. Then she looked me in the eyes and nodded, as if sealing a pact. I nodded back though I had no idea what I was agreeing to.

My dad said, “bet this brings back memories, huh?”

My mom smiled a tiny bit and said, “Yes, of growing up poor.”

My dad's jaw tightened and he walked with her back to the waiting taxi. "She'll be fine," he said. "She'll be home safe and sound in two weeks."

My dad made me spaghetti-~~o~~s for dinner, which he put into a bowl, like soup. We ate it with spoons, sitting on chairs on the *lanai*. My dad added extra ketchup to his. "Come on, Megan, try it like this," he tried to convince me. "It tastes so good with more sauce." I shook my head, and then watched him eat, the long muscles in his neck stretching forward with each bite, then backwards again when he swallowed. We had ice cream for dessert. My dad ate his with his mouth pulled wide open, as if he was at the dentist.

"Why do you eat it like that, Dad?" I asked him. It was cool to call someone Dad.

"It hurts my teeth. It's too cold."

"Why don't you microwave it?"

My dad laughed. I hadn't been joking, but I laughed too, really loud.

We went to Baby Beach the next day. We drove there in my dad's car, which smelled like an old refrigerator. It made it hard for me to breathe. When we parked on a leafy street full of new mansions, tight against each other like Lego blocks, I said, "I don't see the ocean, Dad," but my dad said, "Wait. They've got something special here for people like us. The beach isn't only for snooty folks." We climbed out of the car with the towels from the bathroom. My dad was carrying a bag from the supermarket with some cans of Coke and his cigarettes. The asphalt was hot under my bare feet. I had to jump up and down. "Dad, it hurts! OW!" I cried.

"Walk faster!" my dad said. We took a path marked "Public Access" between the high lava-rock walls of two houses. I wondered if the snooty folk living there ever looked out the windows to watch the people on the walkway. At least the path was white concrete, cooler than the street.

At the end of the path was a little beach, shaded by palm trees, water lapping gently on gritty black-speckled sand. It looked like the beach on Magnum P.I. My dad lay on the bath towel in his clothes, smoking a cigarette and waving encouragingly at me as I splashed around in the knee-deep water. It was warm and clear. I could see lots of little fish clustered around the bases of the coral rocks.

“Come over here and put this on,” my dad yelled to me. I ran up the beach to him. My dad fished out a dusty goggles from the grocery bag, cleaned it out with spit and stretched it over my head. “Ouch, dad. You’re pulling my hair,” I cried. I wanted to hit my dad, and run away. I hated him.

“Hold onto your undies, it’s not so bad,” my dad said. I laughed. I wasn’t wearing undies. This was a bathing suit! A mask covered my eyes and squeezed my nose and cheeks. “Now look under the water at the fish, but don’t get too close to the coral, it bites.”

It was like turning on a TV. The world underwater bloomed with bright tropical fish. Some were yellow with black stripes. Others were blue, and orange, and green with shimmering black spots. The coral was pink and green and white. Purple urchins dotted it like Christmas tree decorations in a world that was dressed up for a special occasion. I paddled around from rock to rock. When I lifted my head up to breathe I couldn’t believe how unchanged the day was, its colors pale and dull. I sat in the shallow water and watched some girls splashing as they swam, and then I put my head back under, sure that the fish would be gone again, scared away by the humans. They were still there. If I sat very quietly, the fish came closer and closer, until they were swimming through my toes and around my ankles. There was a secret universe here. The people strolling on the beach had no idea of what they were missing.

After that I tried to get my dad to take me to Baby Beach every day. He was happy to come, as long as he could find a shady spot to sit and smoke. When he got bored he'd walk the beach, picking up trash, mumbling about what shits people were. We went there for nine days in a row. I got sunburned after one long morning and so instead of staying on the beach he took me to the library where we looked up the names of the fish I saw and wrote them in a little book so I could remember them. %dI never forget these, dad, don't worry.+He laughed at me and said, %that's unlikely.+

On the tenth day my dad said, %it's Christmas today, Megan. Do we have to go to the beach on Christmas?+I thought he was joking, but then he brought out a stocking and a large flat package wrapped up in green and red. %Mele Kalikimaka, my girl,+he said. %Thank you, dad,+I said but I was full of panic. The weather and the oddness of being here had made me forget that it was Christmas; and I hadn't got anything for my dad. And where was the tree if it was Christmas?

%The stocking is from your mom, Megan,+my dad said, %and the gift is from me.+I decided it would be rude to open the stocking in front of my dad, so I picked up the gift and opened it. It was a long, bent tube. %It's called a snorkel, and it's so you can breathe underwater when you look at the fish,+my dad explained. He showed me in the bathtub how it was supposed to work. Both of us swallowed some water until I finally figured out how to use it. %Can we go try it now, Dad?+I asked.

%We're supposed to go over to one of the church lady's for lunch,+my dad said. I felt my throat close up and my face turn red.

%Can I call home, Dad, I mean my mom, to say Merry Christmas?+My dad looked surprised but nodded. %Make it quick, I'm not made out of money.+I practiced saying %Mele Kalikimaka+before I dialled, but there was no one home. My dad said maybe it

was because California was three hours ahead and they had gone for a walk. I remembered that they must have gone to the neighbors for their annual Christmas Egg Nog open house, but I didn't tell my dad that. Instead I went to my room and pulled out everything in my stocking. I found a new pair of socks and a Snickers bar to give to him. "Thanks so much; it's just what I wanted!" my dad exclaimed. I looked at him closely but it seemed like he really meant it.

Many years later, in college, a friend said to me, "Christmas sucks," and I remembered this Christmas: how I'd been so happy in my underwater world, and absorbing my dad's attention and enthusiasm, and then how I desperately wanted to go home as soon as I realised it was Christmas and that the rest of my family were carrying on without me. I didn't know then that I'd be on Maui for Christmas for the next eight years. I longed for our rituals: hanging up the stockings, going to the nativity play at the church, putting out cookies for Santa. I would pretend I was doing it for my little stepbrother, but I loved it too.

"You can't run around here. You got to behave yourself," my dad warned me when we arrived at the church lady's house. A lot of old people were standing on the veranda, which was decorated with plastic blow-up reindeers wearing *lei*. A table full of snacks and drinks was set under the umbrella. "Would you like some *pupu*?" an old lady wearing dark sunglasses asked me. Her glasses were so dark she looked like she might be blind. No one here except my dad looked like they had ever been in the sun. I giggled. "It's Hawaiian for snacks," my dad told me, without smiling. I nodded and tried to hold back my laughter. Wait until my friends heard this! The lady handed me a plate and I took it to sit in the garden. There weren't any other children. A teenaged girl wearing shorts and a t-shirt was lying on one of the lounge

chairs but she looked at me as if I was worse company than the oldies. %Roopos,+I said softly to myself, and started laughing again. She glanced at me and went inside.

My dad came over, carrying his plate. Though it was Christmas he looked unhappier than he had since I arrived.

%Are we going to sing carols tonight?+I asked him.

%Why would we do that?+he said.

%We do it at home, I mean, in California,+I said.

%As you might have noticed, we ain't in Kansas anymore,+he replied.

I looked at him, trying to figure out what he meant. The grandmother with the dark glasses was headed towards us.

%Offer her your chair,+he whispered to me hurriedly. I looked around. There were three empty chairs. %Now!+he said again, his voice urgent and angry.

%Jim, ma'am, would you like this chair?+I asked her. She looked around.

%There are plenty here, young lady.+I couldn't see her eyes.

%My dad told me to offer you mine.+My dad exhaled and muttered.

%Well, it is good manners. I'm fine here though.+She settled her *muumuu* into the seat across from me and faced my dad.

%You've raised a nice young lady, Jim.+

%I don't live with him most of the time,+I said. %I live with my mom.+

They both looked at me. Then we sat for a few minutes, eating our *pupu*.

%I would kill for a drink,+My dad said. His face looked like he meant it. I edged away. The lady patted him on the knee and said, %One day at a time, Jim.+He sighed.

“What’s the big deal?” I asked. Then I paused. People were supposed to be kind to each other, especially on Christmas. “What do you want, Dad? I’ll bring you something. There’s iced tea, and lemonade. Or water?”

“Finish eating, Megan, we’ve got to go soon,” my dad said.

A few nights later my dad took me to a party in one of the neighbors’ back yards. It looked fun at first, people talking and laughing and drinking drinks. He brought us Cokes, and then everyone gathered around a big pit in the earth. Two roosters started kicking each other with their feet, and the crowd cheered them on. I felt a thrill of excitement. My dad pounded me on the back and said, “Our money’s on the brown one. Shout for him!” It was when the brown one fell to the ground bleeding from the chest that I realised that the birds had razor blades strapped to their feet and were hurting each other. I started to cry.

“Shhh, don’t cry,” my dad said. “Please Meg. Please, my baby.”

I hated that he called me his baby, and it made me cry harder. We had to leave before the fight was finished. My dad slammed the car door when we arrived back at his house. It didn’t quite close all the way.

My new snorkel was neat. I could stay underwater for a long time and even swim through the schools of fish as if I was one of them. My dad wouldn’t let me go beyond the reef, where the water got very deep, but there were lots of places to explore on the inside of it. But my dad got less and less excited about going to the beach and had to do some stuff on his own.

When he was away I stayed glued to the tv. At home I was only allowed half an hour a day; at my dad’s I was allowed to watch *Mork & Mindy* and *Happy Days*. At seven pm *Charlie’s Angels* came on. That was my favorite: three women who fought

the bad guys. They were managed from afar, like robots, by an invisible old man who, at the end, always told them what a good job they'd done. I wanted their lives, their swimsuits and their hair, how it blew so perfectly in the wind.

I imagined my mom's face if she found out how much time I was spending sitting in front of the idiot box, as my stepdad called it. She'd be half-disapproving and also trying to be polite. Other people had different rules, she would tell me, and we have to respect them. But watching TV so much is not a good use of your time, Megan.

On the next Monday my dad had a job interview on the other side of the island. It's such a long drive, Megan, why don't I take you to the airport at the same time? he asked me. I kept my eyes on the TV and nodded.

When I got back my mom hugged me long and hard. Instead of squirming I stayed in her arms. Nothing had ever smelled so nice. I realised I was hungry.

Was your dad drinking? my mom asked.

Of course he was, Mom. He drank all the time. You get dehydrated if you don't drink.

I mean, beer?

Sodas and other stuff, Mom. I don't know.

God love her, my stepdad muttered. I wondered if he meant me, or my mom.

Returning to Maui

December 7, 2011

The flight was about halfway across the Pacific when the seatbelt signs came on. We will have to interrupt our drinks service, the attendant said in a nervous voice, it is dangerous for anyone to move about the cabin. A few years ago an attendant had broken her neck a few minutes before landing in Honolulu. The plane had hit an air pocket and she had died in front of the passengers who were strapped obediently into the seatbelts.

The signs finally went off about an hour later, though some turbulence remained. The attendants started handing out State of Hawaii landing forms, lurching from row to row as the plane hiccupped. They had to wave them in front of some of the passengers whose faces were still blank and unseeing, frozen in fear. I struggled to fill in the oval that said more than 10 visits, my pen skittering over the lines. The next question read, What is the purpose of your visit? Please indicate as many as are applicable, and I checked visiting relatives, and then, after hesitating a second, vacation. I almost checked business. I thought to myself: *this is like work, isn't it?* And I didn't want to be a tourist. Almost everyone coming to Hawaii was a tourist; and when Hawaiians travel away from the islands, it's often to Las Vegas. Go figure.

By the time the attendants collected the forms, the air bumps had smoothed out and the people on the plane were starting to smile and laugh in anticipation of their time on Maui. Some of them had changed into *Aloha* shirts and sun visors. I wore my normal clothes; I prided myself on not looking like a tourist and I never wore hats. My dad had told me long ago that no one should wear a hat indoors. Only gang members did that, he added. It was one of the few things we agreed about.

Just after flying past Mauna Kea on the Big Island, its black peak jutting through a mass of clouds, I fell asleep. I dreamed of water filling my mouth, of struggling to breathe. I woke up with my face pressed into the little airplane pillow, the attendant asking me to bring my seat back up to an upright position. It was my recurring dream, the one I had almost once a week. I'd been learning about conscious dreaming so that I could manage the outcome, but clearly I hadn't been successful with that yet. I didn't want to drown again and again; what if I could change it to flying, for instance? That would be a lot more fun. When I told Steven how a guy at work had told me about it, and how I was going to try it with my recurring dream, he'd said it seemed like one more way of trying to control things. Why not let the dream teach you something? he'd asked me. That's the kind of comment you can expect when your husband is a psychologist.

After a bouncy approach, the plane landed. I could see a strong wind blowing, the sea pockmarked by thousands of white caps and the last few remaining fields of sugar cane flattened into salad. It was raining hard through the open sides of the terminal, the palm trees outside bent over at right angles. I knew that soon the sun would be out again, and then it would be hot, just like *that*, probably before I got my suitcase off the carousel.

The damp green carpet of the terminal was still the same and so was Captain Jack's cocktail lounge, its orange neon sign dusty and faded. The same patrons seemed to be sitting at the bar. For a second I longed to join them, and then, sufficiently inebriated, board the next flight out.

While on the flight, suspended in the half-world between departure and arrival, I'd managed to forget about the purpose of my trip. Not forget, exactly, but set it aside. Now worry and anger flooded back into my stomach, and the escalator ride down to

baggage claim made me feel like I had vertigo. I recovered a little while walking along the breezeway, the wind lifting my hair. The warm moving air felt like a well-known lullaby. No doubt the hundreds of vacationers thronging the terminal felt exactly the same way I felt, especially the ones on repeat visits: proprietary. Not that any of us had the right to feel that way. How did the real Hawaiians cope with this constant unceasing invasion of tourists, their sacred places built over into more and more golf courses, condos, high-rise hotels?

You used to walk straight down from the plane to the tar, and then get your suitcase from a cart on the runway. Now the baggage claim area was a semi-enclosed building, open on the street side where I could see cars picking up and dropping off passengers. Moisture-laden air dampened my dress as I turned on my cell phone and checked for texts or calls . none. I called Steven and left a message when he didn't pick up; he was probably driving Jess home from school. Some of the people waiting for their luggage were wearing *lei*, their arms around children or parents or friends. The bright pink and lilac orchids looked both fragile and prickly lying in the damp folds of their necks. I felt a wave of exhaustion wash over me and I nearly collapsed where I was standing. *I'm probably dehydrated*, I thought. *It's the heat and humidity.*

At Starbucks I bought a bottle of water and a muffin. There was no space at the tables so I sat on a retaining wall surrounding a huge bank of ginger plants. The roof above them was open to the sky, and, sure enough, it was clear and blue. Sparkling rain drops on the bright green swards were the only proof that a moment ago it had been pouring. Nowhere else could you have an airport roof like this, I smiled to myself. I loved it here.

The P.I.

December 1981

By my next Christmas, I felt like a seasoned traveller. When I stepped down onto the runway into the warm Hawaiian wind, my father was there to put a candy *lei* around my neck, a circlet of little net bags holding packets of cherry lifesavers tied together with ribbon. Around my dad's neck was a *lei* holding miniature bottles of some clear drink, like they handed out in the airplane to the adults.

'I didn't want to get you flowers, Megan, they die,' my dad said. 'Got myself one, too, so we could match.' As my dad lowered the lei over my head, I felt as if I was getting a gold medal, like one of those little gymnasts, the best in the world at the Olympics. We both swaggered as we walked towards the baggage claim. I imagined I was the famous daughter of a handsome man, who had bestowed upon me the most precious necklace in the world. All eyes were upon us.

Fields of yellow-green stalks edged the road. 'Sugar cane,' my dad said, 'and that's the factory where they make it.' He pointed out the twin stacks of a mill as we drove along. It was odd that something like sugar could make so much black smoke. Within ten minutes the sea came into sight, a glittering mass of aqua winding with us along the coast road. I wound down the window and threw out the wrapper of one of the lifesavers.

'What was that?' my dad asked.

'A tiny, tiny piece of paper. It'll become part of the dirt in a day or so.'

'Who told you that?' His voice was cold.

'Mom.'

Silently my father pulled the car over at the next view point. He pointed a stiff finger at me. "Stay in your seat."

I watched him walk back along the shoulder and disappear around the bend, vehicles slowing down to get around him on the narrow road. The car got hot inside. Finally my dad got back, and threw the tiny, dirty paper at me. "Put it in the trash can when we get home," he said. "And don't ever do that again."

We drove a while longer, my face burning with shame. Finally he reached over and patted me on the hand.

"How far til your place, Dad?" I asked. I missed saying "Dad" during the past year.

"Up on the other side of Maui, the hot side, where Hawaiian royalty used to live," my dad replied. "Lahaina."

My dad had moved from his house, I discovered. He lived in an apartment down an alley behind Nagasaki supermarket. We climbed up the outside stairs to the second floor. At the door, my dad reminded me to remove my shoes. I left them on a rack inside the door, next to his slippers and his golf shoes, which had a dusting of green powder over the black and white leather.

"Hey, Dad, what's black, white, red and green all over?" I said.

"What, Megan?"

"A booger reading the newspaper! It's not red, it's read, get it, Dad?"

I thought I got the joke wrong, but my dad smiled. He showed me the balcony, where he'd decorated the overhanging palm tree with silver tinsel. "That's our Christmas tree," he said. The tree carried big brown-green footballs in its arms. "Those are coconuts. You can have one when it gets ripe," my dad told me.

What I longed to do was to see the fish again. While my dad was in the kitchen I opened a closet to start looking for my snorkel and goggles. He had promised to keep it for me from last year. A bunch of empty beer and rum bottles were on top of piles of clothing and shoes. I started to move them to look for my gear.

"What are you doing?" my dad yelled at me.

"Looking for my snorkelling stuff . it's not here." I replied.

"I'll get you a new one next time I go to the store," he said, calmer now. "It must have got lost in my move." We walked down to Baby Beach. I tried to see underwater, but all the colors were smeared and the water stung my eyes when I opened them. On the walk home, my dad said he wouldn't be able to hang out with me as much as he had last year, that he didn't have much free time, but that he'd be home in the afternoons as early as he could.

There was a little swimming pool too, with five bright white lounge chairs positioned around it. "Is that your pool, Dad?" I asked.

"Sure. You can swim in it anytime you want. You can swim, right?"

I rolled my eyes at him. The next morning I put sunscreen on . my mom had packed two bottles of it, one water proof and the other not . and headed down to the loungers. I took my book, and lay in the sun. Some of the tiles were chipped but it was a pretty place. Chlorine tablets bobbed gently on the surface of the pool, as did pink blossoms from the tree growing next to it. It was like being a movie star. Very soon it got really hot and I jumped in. A shock travelled up my spine as I hit the bottom much sooner than I had expected. *Ow!* I looked around to see if anyone had heard me and shook the tears from my eyes. No one was ever there though. I had it to myself.

When I wasn't at the pool I watched TV in the apartment and ate the food stacked on the kitchen counters: pop tarts, microwave popcorn, instant noodles, Cokes, and little boxes of juice. Sometimes my dad would take me to Baby Beach in the morning before heading out to the P.I. In the evenings my dad came home and we went to Jack in the Box or to the coffee shop at the Cannery Mall for dinner. Sometimes we'd get there in time for the early bird special and eat with a bunch of retired people. My dad was always ready for bed really early; I guessed he had a hard job.

Every day I checked to see if the coconuts were ripe enough. On the fourth day my dad told me to stop nagging him and then walked out the door without saying goodbye. When he came home he had his arm around the neck of a short square man, both of them grinning from ear to ear. It was a guy from the Salvation Army, where we had gone a few days before to buy a couch. He had mahogany brown skin, dark hair slicked back in a ponytail, and flip flops on calloused feet.

"This is my friend, Hardy," my dad said. "I met him at the P.I. He is a real Hawaiian and he knows how to pick coconuts." Hardy and my dad laughed. A wave of tropical-scented breath washed over me. Hardy pulled out a piece of canvas from a plastic bag and went downstairs. My dad and I leaned out over the balcony to watch. Hardy lassoed the canvas around the tree, then fastened it around himself. With great and surprising agility he leapt onto the tree and rapidly shimmied upward until he was close to the pod of coconuts.

"Hey, Meggo," Hardy called, "which one you want?"

I looked up and pointed to the one on the right. It wasn't the biggest but it was the smoothest. With awe I saw Hardy pull a machete out of the waistband of his shorts and hack the coconut from the stem. When it was in his hands he abseiled back

down the tree. We broke the coconut open. Hardy held up the shell before drinking from it as if to toast me. Then he passed it to me to drink. *Mele Kalikimaka*, I said. Hardy laughed. *Mele Kalikimaka*, Meggo. I pretended I liked the coconut but it wasn't as sweet as I thought it would be.

After that, Hardy came over every few days. He told me he'd grown up on Maui, in the only city, Kihei. He had fought in Vietnam when he was a teenager but had been sent home when he was wounded. Neat, I said, but Hardy shook his head and showed me four big scars across his back. Hardy didn't like to talk a lot. Mostly we sat and watched TV together, and Hardy taught me how to play poker. We bet using my dad's precious coffee beans; I always put every single one of them back in the can and closed it tightly. When I saw my dad taking a piece of lint out of them one morning, I held my breath, but he didn't even look across the table. He never suspected us.

One day Hardy pulled a crumpled photograph out of his pocket and showed it to me. A little girl stood squinting into the camera, tightly gripping the hand of the smiling young woman next to her.

This is my daughter Monsoon, said Hardy. Or I think that's what her name means in Vietnamese.

Oh, I said. How old is she?

The picture had been taken several years ago. Hardy wasn't sure how old Monsoon was, exactly, but he figured she must be around thirteen or fourteen now. Used to write to them, he said. He looked sad, and I touched him on the arm, like my mom did when one of her friends was sad.

What kind of work does my dad do at the P.I., Hardy? I asked him.

He looked at me for a long time.

"Tell you what, Meggo, let's go and surprise Dad," he said.

We walked across Lahaina, skirting the high stone walls of the old prison and then along Front Street, busy with tourists shopping at the little stores along the ocean. There were clothing stores, and ice cream stores, and restaurants. Our feet were loud on the creaky wooden walkways. I squinted in the sunlight and wished I had dark sunglasses like Hardy's, or looked like him, like a real Hawaiian. The tourists tried to stare at him without being caught at it. When we got close to the harbour, I recognized one of the buildings.

"This is where we come to eat pancakes sometimes, Hardy. One of the waitresses sings the menu if my dad asks her pretty please."

Hardy chuckled. "It's the Pioneer Inn, Megan. We call it the P.I. Your dad's special around here. Maybe they'll let you feed the parrot if you ask 'em."

We entered a cool dark room, fans whirring overhead and an ocean breeze coming in through the open windows. A voice shouted, "What's up, doc?" and I jumped. It was an African grey parrot in a huge cage. A few men were standing at the long teak bar but I didn't see my dad. Hardy said, "I'll buy you a Coke. Stand here near the parrot. Your dad's probably in the bathroom."

I waited. A few minutes later my dad came in. At first he looked at me as if he didn't recognize me, and then slowly his face broke into a smile. "You're growing up," he said, and put his hand up for a high-five. The other men held up their glasses to me in a kind of salute. My dad called to the bartender and paid for a round. He got me another Coke. Suddenly one of the men came over to me and put his arm around my neck.

"I'm Carson, the sailor. I sailed from San Francisco to this place, right here, twenty years ago this March. Nice to meet you, Megan."

A few of the other guys groaned, and my dad left the room. Carson had a glazed look in his eyes while he shook my hand. He reminded me of the principal at my school.

~~%d~~ never forget the year, girlie, and do you know why?+

I nodded obediently. I wondered if I was supposed to look puzzled, like when someone asks you a riddle.

~~%b~~ was my honeymoon.+

I smiled. ~~%n~~o, it was a tragedy. A tragedy,+Carson shook his head at me and his eyes filled with tears. I heard Hardy sigh, quietly. It made me less worried about what I was about to hear; I didn't want to hear the story if someone drowned. I waited for Carson to continue. He got his tears under control and began again.

~~%w~~e had our wedding in Golden Gate Park and the party afterward, what was that called, yes, the reception, was at the yacht club. My wife was beautiful. And then ñ and then ñ +His gaze drifted off and he sat in front of his beer without saying anything. Finally he looked up again.

~~%o~~ur honeymoon was on my sailboat. It took us three weeks to get here, smooth sailing. No storms. I guess she got tired of all the hard work it takes to sail, or having to take turns on watch. I thought she loved me.+

Another long pause. Tears began to roll down the deep grooves on either side of his nose.

~~%w~~e finally landed. We got out clean clothes and she insisted on packing a bag. *Let's stay in a hotel tonight. I need a real bath,* she said. We came here. Right here. We checked into a room and then came down to the restaurant. After sailing for so long, the world whirled around me like I was already drunk. I had to grab onto the

table so I wouldn't fall off the chair. We bought some wine and ordered food. She wanted a cheeseburger and I told her it was too fattening.

You've been bossing me around this whole trip, she screamed at me. She stood up. She grabbed the bag. *I've had enough of it and of you!* She walked out. I noticed that she tripped as she left. That was the sea legs. She hadn't had much to drink.

Carson looked at me as if to gauge my reaction. I kept my face utterly still.

We never seen her again, Susan. She was wearing a red and yellow striped top.

Megan, I said softly.

I keep thinking I see her, but it's someone else.

Yeah and that's your excuse to drag your sorry ass to this bar day after day, world without end, amen, said my dad. The other men chuckled and the topic changed. Hardy gently patted Carson on the back.

After that we went there almost every day. When I went home after Christmas I missed drinking Coke like crazy. My mom wouldn't let us have it in the house.

Aloha Car Rentals

December 7, 2011

The line at the car rental agency moved with agonizing slowness. The assistants seemed to be working on an antiquated system, filling out forms by hand or typing on their computers with one or two fingers. Children ran in between suitcases and people pulled bottles of water out from backpacks. I wondered if I had time to use the bathroom, or if I'd lose my place if I did. I didn't want to ask the frowning man next to me in the line to save it. Every time the phone rang, all four of the assistants stopped what they were doing and deliberated about the enquiry. The line got more and more restless.

"This guy wants to know where he can get McDonald's," shouted out the clerk who had taken the latest call. The other three stopped typing and looked up, that far-away look in their eyes that people get when they're visualising remembered places.

"On Kamehameha, near the corner with Whole Foods," replied one woman.

"No . . . it's halfway down Kaahumanu," said another.

"There's definitely one on Dairy Road," piped in the first man with the phone.

"Yeah, tell him it's on the road to the Hana Highway," added the last.

The fat man in the golf shirt behind me groaned. "People!" he said at the top of his voice, "Can you please get to work here? We've been waiting half an hour already." The four assistants looked at him in astonishment. The woman smiled.

"We're just helping him out. It's *Aloha*," she said.

Someone at the front of the line turned and said, "Relax, you're on vacation," and the rest of the line laughed. The fat man sighed. "Oh, yeah, Maui time," he grumbled to me, "how could I forget?" I smiled and grabbed my chance.

Would you mind keeping my place while I use the restroom?+

The fat man nodded and sighed again. But don't take too long, if you know what I mean. Because I am not hanging around for a single extra minute when it's my turn. I've got a tee time in one hour.+

I nodded and headed towards the bathroom. Once inside I checked my phone again: a few missed calls and messages and a sea temperature/visibility update for Long Beach, where we lived. I kept track of it, an old habit, hard to shake. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I saw the duplicity in my eyes. Who was I kidding? I didn't want to find my dad. I didn't want anything to do with my dad, really. It was too much hard work. Hang in there, Megan,+I told myself. Remember that you love your dad. Focus on the good memories.+

When I got back to the line it had barely inched forward. The woman who had talked about *aloha* had decided to give a speech. We all need to look after each other,+she was saying. It's the Hawaiian way.+

Are you Hawaiian?+someone asked her when she paused to take a breath.

Me?+she giggled, gesturing at her faded blond hair and pale skin. Of course not! But I feel we can all learn from and respect these native customs.+

The room went quiet. No one made eye contact and the grumbling ceased. I finally got into my rental car almost two hours after I landed. Another forty minutes and I'd be in Lahaina.

I took the Front Street turn into Lahaina for old time's sake. It wasn't at a light; I had to wait for several moments for a break in the traffic on the Honoapiilani Highway before I could turn left towards the sea, *makai* side. At this end of town, Front Street was narrow and lined by high wild hedges. The stone gates of the Puamana resort seemed like the last outposts of civilisation before the road began to

curve in towards town, and then straighten out to run parallel with the sea. Glimpses of the water flashed between the unkempt gardens of most of the little wooden bungalows that lined the street, their front porches a few feet above the ground. There were fig trees and fruit trees and palm trees littering the road with squashed fruit and dead leaves. In places there was so much untamed growth that it was hard to believe that this was the dry side of Maui.

Every seventh or eighth house had been spruced up, bought by tourists. Most of those were closed up, blinds down, while the beat-up ones usually had several cars in the driveway and a front screen door standing wide open. I was relieved to see Auntie Charlotte's mango stand was still there, its awning closed against the afternoon sun. Either she was out of mangoes or she wanted a break. Directly across from it was the asphalt parking lot of Lahaina Shores, where I'd reserved a room. Unlike anything else along this part of the coastline, it stood five stories tall, an ugly anomaly in a neighborhood of one or two story wooden buildings, some beautifully preserved, plantation style; the others, if truth be told, I thought, *little more than shacks*.

I knew this area well. Each time my dad moved, I would arrive at the new address wondering what I'd find. Some years it would be to a tidy apartment, somewhere near my dad's work; once, to one of these: a dilapidated house shared by several people, where the floors were splintering and the shower mildewed. That was when I went home having lost weight; even when my dad would remember to buy food, the others usually ate it before I could get to it. But there was no way I'd admit that to my mom. I couldn't bear to listen to her or my stepdad criticising my dad; it felt like they were tearing off a piece of him, like kids tore the wings off flies, not aware that they

might be causing harm or being cruel. And it made me feel like a failure, to be that man's child and to have his genes inside me, cooking up who knew what.

Sometimes, when I was really angry with him, I'd give in and tell my mom something that had upset me . nothing too bad, though; I didn't want to jeopardise the Lahaina trips, which had become essential to me. I didn't understand then why they were so essential, but in some way they'd become more real than the life I lived with my mom the other fifty weeks a year. Maybe having to look after my dad and fend for myself made me feel grown up. My life with my mom was protected and suburban, so safe. And there was the snorkelling. I lived for snorkelling. I dreamed about it during the rest of the year. Sometimes I'd be sitting at my desk at school and realise my mind was in the water. I tried to get my mom to take me but she thought it was a dangerous hobby. I never admitted to her how much I did it in Hawaii, often on my own.

I might mention to my mom that my dad snored, maybe; but I wouldn't admit that we'd shared a bedroom. Or a house with five other losers. And never, ever, that on occasion my dad had brought a woman home late at night, and I'd pretended to be fast asleep on the camping mattress on the floor next to the bed while they made fast drunken love.

I found myself sitting in the parked rental car, the engine quiet and the key in my hand. With the air-conditioning off I had begun to sweat. I felt aroused and disturbed, as if I'd woken up from an erotic nightmare. It was definitely one of these houses along Front Street, that visit. I had been eighteen, the summer after high school graduation. I'd gotten into Oberlin College, my mom's alma mater, and in her ecstatic state she'd agreed to let me come to Maui for the whole three months before college

started . especially once I said I get a job here. What she didn't know was that I hoped to meet up with Brad again.

I always kept my love life under wraps. Let's be honest . I hardly had one. I kissed a guy here and there but I never admitted it to my mom or anyone else. And I never had a serious boyfriend. So when I fell in love from a distance, it felt like it was fated. And I had to follow it up. If no boy was going to chase me, I was going to chase a boy.

It had started the December of a few years before. I arrived in Lahaina looking forward to seeing the guys at the P.I. again. My dad and I walked in with smiles on our faces, but the first person we saw was the new manager, a pale-faced *haole* with a tie on over his *Aloha* shirt.

"You can't be here if you're under twenty-one," he said to me. I was fifteen; I knew I didn't look anywhere near twenty-one. My dad winked at me and said to the manager, "Of course she's old enough. Anyone can see that." He added, his voice getting louder, "I was almost in the navy when I was her age. Fighting for my country. That not old enough for you?" The manager glared and said I could finish my drink on the veranda outside. Then I would have to go. I stood alone outside and drank my Coke. When I went back to say goodbye to the men grouped in a clump at the bar, they looked up briefly and cheerfully waved me off. "Aloha, Meggy!" I wondered if my dad would get up and walk out with me, but he didn't. He had no religion, my dad had said, and wasn't coming to the P.I. anymore.

I wandered down to the ocean and sat with my feet in the little lapping waves to cool off. Then I got up and meandered along the shore, passing families and couples camped on the beach with towels and umbrellas, toys and books. The beach narrowed and I walked past a red paGoda-shaped temple. Behind a chain-link fence

there was a garden full of cactuses and some picnic tables and benches. A giant Buddha statue loomed in the background. One sign said, COMMUNITY CENTRE. Another said, KEEP OUT. PRIVATE PROPERTY. Someone had sprayed over the printed words with black paint: KAPU. There were people sitting at the tables with cooler boxes and beers. A barbecue was burning in one corner of the yard. I raised my hand in greeting and some of the people nodded to me.

Around the corner was Mala Wharf where some small sailing boats were moored. I wondered what it would be like to sail over to Lanai or Molokai, or farther away.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder. I whirled around.

"Would you like a necklace, maybe for your mom?" A boy stood in front of me in a blue swimming suit, too loose and low on his hips. A dirty t-shirt rode up on his stomach. His skin was unusually pale for this climate and there were bruises on his inner elbows. He gazed at me, his blue eyes unfocused and appealing.

"My mom?" not with me, I said.

"Maybe you'd like something? I've got cool stuff to sell. Let me show you." He grabbed my hand and led me across the beach and up into a small valley shaded with coconut trees. I knew it wasn't a good idea to go along, but I didn't want to pull away from the soft feel of his hand against mine. I watched the rise and fall of his chest and the twists of his strong smooth back as we followed a sandy track past some old tents and shacks made of cardboard boxes and black plastic. In front of one of them was an old folding chair.

"You sit here," the boy said. "What's your name?"

"Megan. But I . . ."

"Megan, you sit here. I'll bring out some stuff to show you. My name's Brad."

He entered the shack. I hoped he wouldn't try to sell me drugs. When he returned a few moments later he had ditched the t-shirt, and I could see his prominent ribs as he walked towards me. I thought he looked about sixteen. Over Brad's wrist were draped several leather necklaces. It was the first time in the five years of visiting my dad that I had spoken to anyone roughly my age.

With embarrassment I saw how badly the necklaces were made, and how stained they were, as if they had been worn already. I wanted to leave. I didn't have any money with me anyway. But then he looked at me with desperation, and I could see the sweat above his lips. Touching one of the necklaces on Brad's wrist, I said to him, "Very nice. I'd like this one, here. But I have to get money and come back."

"You don't have any money?"+

I gestured to my skirt and t-shirt. No purse, no pockets. "I'll go get it. I'll come back. I promise."

Brad pulled his hand away and raised his voice. "No money?"+

A scuffling sound came from inside the shack. I stood up and backed away. I could barely stop myself from running down the valley back to the beach, but I sensed that if I did, something would chase me. It was one of those times when you knew you had to act unafraid. The rest of my visit I hung out in my dad's apartment, too freaked out to go anywhere. One day Hardy came over and we ate a coconut together. After a week had passed like that I told my dad that I needed to go home, that I had a vacation job. My mom and stepdad and stepbrother had been away on their annual skiing trip but luckily they were back by then.

I'd run into Brad again two years later, at the Safeway the Christmas before I turned eighteen, right at the end of my annual two weeks on Maui. I'd wanted to stock up on at least a few things for my dad before I left for home. Brad was working

at the check-out bagging groceries. He hadn't seemed to remember me from that time when he'd tried to sell me a necklace, but I knew his pale face as well as I knew my stepbrothers. And his body in that worn bathing suit, I remembered *that*.

Definitely not like my stepbrothers. Brad had smiled at me. The relief I felt at seeing him in a black and red hibiscus shirt, part of normal life instead of living in that shack in Mala Valley, surged around me like a warm Jacuzzi.

Hi, Brad, I'd said to him, and then I had blushed and scurried away with the stuff I'd bought: cheese and crackers, apple sauce, Snickers bars. My dad wouldn't eat much else. Brad had glanced at me, but not with curiosity. He was wearing a regulation name badge, and probably figured I was another friendly customer.

From then on I had been obsessed with the thought of him. The prom had come and gone; I'd had a cute date, who I kissed only because he'd expected it; and I'd had a few make-out sessions with guys at drunken parties, but no one attracted me like the memory of Brad. The whole senior class seemed in a daze, marking time until school finished and our real lives would begin. I was no different. When I wasn't filling out college application forms or doing homework, I daydreamed about Brad. And night-dreamed. And fantasized—though it made me feel kind of stupid to imagine ripping off his dirty t-shirt, his white skin whiter beneath it. The guy didn't even know me.

Gradually I had formed a plan. I'd tell my mom that my dad had organized an internship for me at . what would she like? . at the Historical Society. For the last few years she'd left the arrangements between me and my dad up to me. I'd buy my own ticket with my savings from my allowance and my babysitting jobs. I'd surprise my dad.

The memory of how that had gone made me leap out of the car. I needed air. As soon as I opened the door I could feel the breeze from the sea behind the buildings. Sweat cooled on my face as I walked to the trunk to get my bags. I lifted my arms to let the air whisper through the sleeves of my dress as I walked into the central courtyard and registered. The room was clean though the patterned cane furniture was faded and worn; a white fan turned silently overhead. A little refrigerator hummed in the corner kitchen. The windows looked out onto the orange and purple mountains, dry but beautiful in the early afternoon light. Too bad it wasn't a sea view, though. From here I thought I could see the roof of my dad and Heather's house.

Heather would be expecting me soon. I'd lied about my flight time to gain a few hours alone when I first arrived. If I was honest . . . it was because I'd imagined that I'd find my dad right away. Maybe not at the airport, but driving along Front Street, or here in this neighborhood. Then I'd bring him to Heather and spend the rest of the time acting like a tourist.

I couldn't shake the feeling that my dad was close. I imagined that I could call out for him, or whistle, and he'd come running like a lost dog. My dad had lived in Lahaina for almost his entire adult life. He'd hated going to the other side of the island, or even as far as Ka'anapali where the new post office was. As he got older he didn't want to drive at all; for the last few years he'd walked to Foodland or to church or to the old post office. The rest of the time he stayed at home reading the newspaper and picking fights with Heather, as far as I could work out. I wondered why she stayed with my dad. She must really love the guy. She was a lot nicer than Ming, no doubt about that. I didn't want to think about Ming.

I pulled out my phone and began to push the buttons. Heather didn't do texting; I'd have to call. My dad's number came back to my fingers as if I'd called him every

day, as if I really cared about his daily life and how he was, as if we were close.

Regret filled my throat and I could barely speak when Heather answered.

"Heather?" I gasped out.

"What's the matter, Megan? Is it your dad?" She sounded as if she was already on her feet, ready to rush to her car.

"No, sorry, had a frog in my throat." I cleared it. "We just arrived at the airport. Still have to get my rental car and drive over, and then check in to the hotel. I'll come over as soon as I can, in about three hours."

"Oh, alright." Her voice quavered.

"I'll come as quickly as I can," I added.

"I'll see you later," she said. I imagined her shoulders sliding down in disappointment. I grabbed my fins and snorkel and headed out to the beach, where I knew of some rocky outcrops where fish and some turtles hung out. The longing to be deep under the surface of the sea, in the quiet blue space, lightly held by the warm pressure of the water, was like a thirst; in fact my mouth filled with saliva just thinking about swimming at least fifty feet down. But I promised not to free-dive, so I contented myself with the snorkelling. I'll go for a quick one and after that I wouldn't go again until my dad was found.

Heather is Family

December 7, 2011

After a quick snorkel I grabbed a pre-mixed iced tea from the ABC store at 505 Front and then headed out to my dad's and Heather's house. While standing under the shower I lectured myself that this was what I had to do. I don't think I ever had a time in my life when I more badly wanted to hide away, to pretend there was nothing wrong. I told myself that the quicker I found my dad, the quicker I'd be able to do what I wanted again. And see Steven and Jess. It didn't matter much to me how my dad was when he was found; if I could find him, the rest would be someone else's problem. And if he was dead, so much the better. Problem solved. I didn't articulate these thoughts, not in these exact brutal words, but this was the kind of reasoning that washed around my head along with the shampoo and conditioner. Shouldn't there be a government agency in charge of this kind of thing? Why did it have to be me?

If I took Shaw Street I'd pass the Salvation Army on the way to the house, and either see Hardy or leave a message for him. As I came closer I saw him sitting at an old dining table under a tree, the only pool of shade in the blazing sunlight. Hardy stood up before I could get to him.

"Hey, Meg! Over here.+"

I walked towards him. Hardy looked exactly the same. A few more wrinkles around the eyes maybe. Skin darker. I could swear he was wearing the same clothes he'd been wearing when I saw him last, at least a decade ago.

"Wow, Hardy, it's been a long time.+"

"Sure has, Meg, sure has. You wanting to buy something?+"

I looked down. Did Hardy mean reefer? %Um, buy something from you, Hardy?+
%work here. We sell old furniture, remember? You and your dad bought a couch
here once?+

We both laughed. Hardy put his arm around me and lowered his voice. His breath
smelled . fine. No alcohol. No desperation. The tiniest whiff of tobacco.

%am glad you're here, Meggo. I thought you'd abandoned your old dad, haven't
seen you in so long.+

I felt a flash of anger rise into my face. I stepped away from Hardy and tried to
concentrate. I felt so light-headed. I always did on my first day in Lahaina. I told
myself that Hawaiians don't understand how a family can fall apart. They work to a
different model than us *haole*.

%Do you know where he is, Hardy? Have you seen him?+

Hardy looked at me with a mixture of hostility and sympathy, and gently
shrugged. %No, I'm sorry,+he said. %The last time I saw him he chased me away, told
me to get out. Let's talk story, Meggo.+Hardy pulled a plastic chair towards us. He
grabbed an old magazine, tore a sheet out, and wiped the orange dust from it as well
as he could. %Sit here, don't spoil your *da kine* clothes.+

%we been friends with your dad a long time, oh, so longō +Hardy paused. %Since,
maybe, the seventies. You were a little girl, still in diapers. Your mom was still living
here.+

%ou knew us then?+I'd thought my dad had befriended Hardy in his P.I. drinking
days. It was so bright out here. I should have worn sunglasses, or at least a hat. I
squinted at Hardy, who nodded.

%eah. We were neighbors on Molokai.+

I wished I'd brought water. My throat was so dry.

%Molokai?+

Hardy nodded. %We've known all three of your dad's wives. Your mom was nice, and really pretty, but it didn't last too long. Heather's kind, too, good for your dad. And then there was that Chinese one in between.+

%Ming?+I was talking like a parrot.

%Yeah, Ming. With the daughter.+

On the red ground were a few speckled leaves from the trees above. A beetle crawled over one and then scuttled under another. From behind me something rushed forward and attacked the beetle. My hands flew up to my face and I was halfway to my feet before I realized it was a rooster.

%Shit!+

Hardy laughed a short laugh. %You battle shy?+He paused. We sat for a moment while the beetle was swallowed in two awkward gulps, and then he continued.

%It's tough, I know.+

%Go on.+

%Look, Meg, I can't tell you what's happened to your dad. But I want you to know that at heart he was always a good guy. Wanted to do what was right.+

I sighed. If Hardy knew... But I wasn't going to be the one to tell him.

%Ming and her daughter both left the islands after your dad and her split up. She cleaned out all the money your dad had made from his shaping machine business. Then he had one of his episodes, you know, disappeared, and when I saw him again, he'd started heavy drinking again. Only when he met Heather did he dry up for a while, pretty much for good now.+

%I'm guessing the shaping machine was another one of his inventions.+

“Hey, Meg, your dad made some good things. Something for one of my friends wheelchair to help it fold up. And the shaping machine business was going great, until the thing with Ming. I was working there, too.”

Hardy was lecturing me. I fanned my face. I was sweating like a pig. I could feel it dripping down my back.

“Not.”

“My point is, I asked him where he went to that time. He finally told me after an evening in the P.I. that he spent his days drinking with the homeless people in the Mala Valley, you know that place?”

“Oh, yeah, I know that place. Did I know it? Brad’s old hang-out and where I had run on the day I heard the news from Dave.”

“But it got rough there at night, he said. Too many drugs. You know how he always thought all drugs, even weed, were *kapu*. Evil.”

We half-smiled at each other. The summer I worked at the Luau, Hardy and I and the gang had shared a few joints now and then. I had a memory of us laughing so hard that tears were running down Hardy’s cheeks along the grooves of his wrinkles, mine dripping off my chin. Hardy had been so funny when he was stoned.

“So at night he came to the playground behind that church. See there?” Hardy pointed across the parking lot towards Holy Innocents. “Some old lady from that church helped him out a long time ago and he always felt safe there, he said.”

“Is he there? Did you see him there last night?”

“I’m saying that’s where he used to sleep. But I’ve looked for him, every night, and he hasn’t been there this time.”

Silence.

“Hardy? I don’t get it.”

Hardy smiled at me.

He's got to be somewhere near us. Don't give up on him. I noticed burst blood vessels in his eyes. Grease had stiffened the collar of his t-shirt.

We've got to go see Heather, I said. We'll come back soon.

Hardy kept his gaze on me as I started crossing the street towards my dad's house. He called out to my retreating back, He wants to come back into the fold. He's a lost sheep, man! A sheep!

I half-turned and waved, Okay, Hardy, thanks.

Aloha, Meggo!

I waved back, held my hand up in the *shaka* hang loose-sign, my three middle fingers turned down towards me and the outer fingers pointing up. I could hear Hardy chuckle.

Heather opened the door before I'd got both my shoes off. She stood waiting for me to finish and then swept me into a hug, her face pressing into my shoulder. I couldn't remember being hugged by Heather before. We didn't know each other that well, and had been kind and friendly to each other, but not affectionate. When we said hello and goodbye we usually stood looking at each other for a few awkward seconds, and then smiled and patted each other on the back.

Heather finally stepped away, my arms trailing off her body like fronds of kelp in a current. She looked older, old actually, her back stooped and her hair thin and streaked with white. She wiped her eyes on a tissue. They looked sunken and tired, circled in dark rings, not the cheerful blue eyes I remembered.

Coffee? she asked me, and stepped into the kitchen.

I never drank coffee.

Sure.

“Let’s sit on the *lanai* and I’ll fill you in,” Heather said. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

For a moment I saw myself as a detective: important, solid and capable. We’ll find him, yes ma’am, I wanted to say. The mirror in the hall reflected the reality: a lean tall woman, pale from overwork, my swimmer’s shoulders strong, yes, but my face worried and confused. The mirror was still chipped where I’d thrown the knives at it so long ago.

“Not that there’s much to tell you, Megan. The police haven’t found him, or heard anything, but I don’t think they’re working too hard on it. Now and then one of his friends calls to tell me they’ve seen him somewhere— always somewhere around here— but when they get to him he’s gone. Probably hallucinations . . . most of them are drunks.” She laughed, and frowned.

I said, “Hardy thinks he might be in the Mala Valley, or sleeping at Holy Innocents at night.”

“He’s a drunk, too, Megan, you know that.”

“I didn’t smell any alcohol on him.”

“He’s no doubt switched to vodka. Then smoked a cigarette.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right, Heather.” I wasn’t going to fight with her.

“Megan, I really don’t know what to do about your dad. What if he needs help? It’s only the two of us who are his family.”

“Me and Heather, family? I’d never thought of us quite like that, but I guessed we were. There was a pause, a little too long, and then I nodded.

“I know I can’t make him come back if he doesn’t want to. He’s gone off for a day or two before, to hole up in a hotel somewhere and drink. He always comes back sober and sad. But it’s been years since he did that last, and this time it’s been quite a while and— I’m worried.”

"When did he go missing?"

"Just over a week ago. One week and two days ago, counting today." Heather lifted her cup up to her mouth and a drop fell onto her chest. She picked up a napkin and dabbed at it, but the coffee smeared across her red t-shirt.

"That's long. Nothing from him, no note, no phone call?"

"Silch."

We sat in silence. Finally I got up the courage to ask, "What happened that day?" I thought she'd tell me that the two of them had had an argument. Maybe she'd finally started fighting back.

Heather looked at me for a few moments. "I've been forgetting stuff. We all forget stuff as we get older, you know, it's normal. He got so he couldn't always remember the names of the people who phoned and couldn't tell me messages anymore. So I don't know who it was, but I heard the phone ringing. I was in the bedroom, I could hear him talking, and getting angry, and banging the phone down, but when I came out he didn't want to tell me what happened."

She paused, and scrubbed at the coffee stain some more.

"I didn't think much about it. A lot of stuff makes him angry. Then, a few hours later, I came in from the garden, and he was gone."

"That's all? Could the police trace the call?"

"It took them ages, and then they found out it was from a pay phone near the public library, you know, near the harbor?"

I nodded.

"Heather, this afternoon I'm going to walk around to his favorite places and chat to people. And I'd go see if any of the people in the Mala Valley will talk to me."

"Be careful."

I jumped to my feet and took my cup into the kitchen. Not much scares me, I told her. I'll call you later with an update. +

I walked back along Paemina Street and then onto the pedestrian access to the beach. It was the longer way back to Lahaina Shores, but I didn't want to risk running into Hardy again. My head ached. Always on the first day on Maui I felt like this, too hot and light, as if my feet weren't touching the ground. The sand near Lahaina Shores was wet, a rivulet running down to the sea from the drainage pipe further uphill. *This was the last dribble of the historic Mokuhinia sacred pond*, I thought. Water gone underground or dried up forever, no more than polluted waste now. I stepped over it carefully.

It was Jess's bedtime at home; I should call to wish her goodnight but I was too tired. I knew if I heard her voice I'd break down into tears. I told myself that my crying would make her more upset than if I missed the goodnight call, but really I had run out of courage. I went back to my room and stretched out on the bed, setting an alarm for half an hour's time and then turning it off when it rang and falling back asleep. By the time I finally forced myself to wake up, the sun was going down, the last light of it filling the room with pink and purple shadows. As fearless as I had acted in front of Heather, I didn't want to visit the Mala Valley in the dark. I thought about calling Steven and then realized I'd have nothing to report. He'd know somehow that I'd gone to the beach. I was supposed to be focused on looking for my dad. It would look bad that I'd snorkelled on the very first day. Rather wait until I'd done something more concrete. The only missed call on my phone was from Heather. I pretended I didn't see it.

I should make myself get up, though, and eat some dinner, or I'd be awake at four in the morning. Let me try to get over the jet lag in one night. I headed along

Front Street towards Cheeseburger in Paradise: it was Jess's favorite and a good place to watch the final light fade away over Lanai. As usual there was a line outside. Standing at the door were two hostesses wearing neon-green plastic grass mini-skirts, holding out menus to passers-by. I'd had one of those skirts as a little girl, but mine had been the real thing, made out of *tī* leaves. I remembered trying to do the *hula* in it. The hostess smiled at me and waved me closer.

It felt strange to be there without Steven and Jess; I remembered in the nick of time to hold up a lonely finger instead of three. Most of the upstairs was filled with raucous holiday families stuffing themselves on hamburgers and French fries, the adults drinking mai tais complete with fruit and umbrellas. Those who weren't having fun were fighting, the noise level deafening. I ate as fast as I could, and then went to the ice cream shop for a coconut gelato cone to eat on my way back to Lahaina Shores.

I stopped to read the historical plaque in front of the canoe pavilion. Every time I was here I found myself trying to imagine this place, this semi-neglected little park, as the site of the boatyard of the Hawaiian royal family at the edge of Mokuhinia village, an island enclave set in a giant fishpond. It was so hot and dry here now. My dad had to have irrigation installed to keep his lawn alive. I'd tried to find out more about this place on Google once. All I'd come up with was a bunch of travel reviews, saying this beach wasn't such a good one. There were cleaner, prettier ones up the coast. I hadn't gone very deeply into it, merely read the first page of Google hits and left the other 900,000 for another day. Who had the time for that?

Across the road a couple of guys, their shirts off and their backs glistening under the lights, were playing a silently ferocious basketball game. The fishpond had been filled in in 1918; it was probably right under where they were dribbling. A security

guard limped by. Just as I was thinking how tough that must be, on your feet all day and with a limp too, the man stopped in front of me.

%ou are not Jim's daughter, are you?+

I stared at him.

%im . the old guy who lives on Alio? Aren't you his daughter?+

I nodded, %eah, yes, I am. How did you know? How do you know my dad?+ I tried to sound interested rather than defensive, but I prepared myself to hear bad news. Then memory of another interchange like this flashed through my consciousness and I felt like running away. At least here we were in public, on the street. I could escape if I had to.

The man laughed, shifting his weight so that he could get more comfortable. He wore a dark green uniform with a badge, but his face was open and friendly.

%veryone in Lahaina respects Jim. He's helped us all at one time or another. And I remember seeing you with him when you were *keiki*.+

I was still sure he had the wrong guy. %y dad's retired. Has been for quite a long time.+

%es, but until a few years ago he used to work for anyone if they needed him, free. If someone's roof was leaking, he'd come fix it. And he fed people who were sick. He helped me weed my garden once when my knees were swollen up.+

%hō I'm glad to hear that.+

%ell me, could your dad use any help with anything? He must be getting on in years.+

I was about to shake his head and then I changed my mind. %s a matter of fact, my dad's missing. We don't know where he is.+

The security guard took a step back. %or how long?+

"A few days over a week. The police know."

"Oh no. Did he get kidnapped or something? Did they find his car?"

I laughed at the idea of someone being kidnapped on Maui. Then I saw how strange the laughter must look, and I stopped. I shook my head, and gestured for the man to sit next to me on the stone wall surrounding the park. I held out my hand for the man to shake. His hand was warm and calloused. "My name's George."

"Megan. He doesn't drive. He disappeared after someone called him and I think he was probably drunk."

The basketball game had ended, the guys picking up their shirts, drying themselves off, chatting to each other. A few were drinking from bottles wrapped in brown bags. The fluorescent tubes overheads crackled as they were switched off. I had to squeeze my eyes shut to readjust to the normal glow of streetlights and advertising. When I could see again, the security guard was nodding, his face screwed up in concentration.

"Look, Megan, we've got to get back to work. But here's my phone number. Call me tomorrow morning and I'll help you look. In the meantime I'll get the word out. Every eye on this side of the island will be peeled for your dad, I promise."

"Thanks, George. I appreciate it."

"Aloha."

"Yeah, you too," I said.

I walked past Holy Innocents church and turned down the driveway. The children's playground was at the back, next to the pre-school. Everything was dark and still; if my dad was here, he must be playing dead. I walked towards the sandpit and a movement light came on. The only thing out of order was a big pile of excrement behind the swing set; it looked unsettlingly human. I hoped someone

would be able to clean it up before the little kids arrived in the morning. Briefly I considered doing it myself, but I didn't have a Kleenex with me. And what if someone caught me in the act? They'd think I'd done it. I turned quickly and walked back towards the lights of Front Street. A few tourists were still wandering along, window shopping and laughing. I headed for bed.

University of Cape Town

The Plan

Summer 1988

Once I had hatched the plan to come back and search for Brad, I was almost ill with anticipation and fear. For weeks my palms sweated whenever anyone talked to me about my dad or about Hawaii, sure they had discovered my subterfuge. The first part had been to get a ticket. I had gone to a travel agent on a Saturday morning. The ticket was going to cost much, much more than I had anticipated. I almost gave up then, but when she asked if it was for me, I said hurriedly, "No, it's a surprise for my mom."

The travel agent smiled a red-lipped smile and said, "Wow. Maui for three months! You're a nice daughter! I wish I had one of you! Oh, let me give you a hug." I stood awkwardly while she grabbed my shoulders and pulled me to her. Her cheeks were like little apples, hard and shiny. She smelled like red wine and perfume. I felt young and silly, and wanted to cry. Could she tell I was a liar? I read a brochure on fishing in the Caribbean while she typed on her computer. She asked for my mom's name.

"Just her initial please. S. No Mrs please. She doesn't like that," I said, astounded that I didn't blush.

"Oh, a woman's libber." The travel agent stopped smiling. "Should I use Mrs instead?" She said the end of the word with an angry bee sound. I wished I could kick the trash can. "No, nothing. M. Wallace. I'll pay cash, but I have to get it from the bank. I'll be back in a few minutes."

I stepped out of the air-conditioning into the pre-summer warmth of Huntington Drive. It was going to cost almost all of my savings. Should I do it? *If nothing else,*

my dad would be happy to see me, I thought. It'd be a huge surprise to him. And Brad - it's worth it for Brad.

It hadn't taken much to fool my mom. I even wrote a letter to a fake historical society and put it in with the mail she was taking to the post office; it was a nice touch, I thought, when I asked her to buy a stamp for it. She didn't seem to notice that I didn't get anything back from them. She was kind of distracted that year. I guessed it was because my stepbrother was turning into a really troublesome teenager and my mom and my stepdad were always fighting about it. My opinion was that they should ground him more often, but they didn't ask for my opinion. They'd always been much stricter with me than with him.

The part of my plan that wasn't so well thought out was arriving at the Maui airport with no one to pick me up. All the intrigue of my secret journey suddenly felt foolish and lonely. It was hotter than I'd ever experienced and quieter, without the Christmas crowds. They were building a new airport and lots of sections were plywooded over. It was like a maze to get to your luggage. You couldn't climb down straight from the airplane anymore but had to use a ramp like any other place. Along the hallways was the same kind of carpet they used on miniature golf.

After I got my bag I didn't know what to do. I had to sit on a bench and collect my thoughts. I started imagining that I was seeing Brad everywhere. What if he happened to be driving by, and asked me if I wanted a ride? And then took me back to his house - and I never saw my dad the whole summer until I introduced Brad to him as my boyfriend? That would be cool. I started to walk along the curb peering into the cars as if I was waiting for someone. I wished I smoked so I'd have something to do while I walked along, and not look like a lost, bewildered teenager. Not look like I felt.

A man who seemed familiar wound down his window. "You need a ride?" he asked me. *He looked like an old hippie*, I thought, *maybe one of the guys who hang out at the P.I.* I nodded. "Yeah. I guess my dad's forgotten to pick me up."

The man laughed. He was about my dad's age. "It isn't the first time, I bet," he said, "Lahaina, then?" When he'd put my bag into the trunk and gotten into the car, I asked, "So you must be a friend of my dad's?" The man shrugged, the split ends on his brown curly hair touching his shoulders. "Sort of," he said. "We've seen him around, sometimes with you."

I stared at him. "I'm only here in Lahaina two weeks a year. I don't live here," I said. The man grinned. We were already on the highway. The man carried on driving with his left hand and reached his right hand into his pocket. Then he undid his fly. With his eyes fixed on the road, he pulled out his penis, which was stiff and purple. I prayed that the light ahead would turn red and I could jump out. I'd have to sacrifice my suitcase, but it would be worth it. The light stayed green.

"Do you want to touch it?"

I shook my head and stared out the window, hoping another driver would look my way and I could form the word "help!" But my lips were too dry and everyone was watching the road.

"Come on. It won't bite."

"I want to get out. Please."

"You know you want it, pussy girl. Suck me off. Do it now or I'll crash the car."

I sat frozen in fear. Was it the dress I was wearing, the Robinson's one my mom had bought me for graduation? Was it too short? The man drove faster and faster around the bends.

"Touch it!" he shouted.

Let me out,+I yelled back. At my voice the man ejaculated onto his hand. The car wobbled towards the center line. Hey, you pervert, let me out!+

As the car straightened out the man zipped his penis away and started to chuckle. He reached over and patted me on the shoulder. I flinched and moved closer to the door.

Just kidding! Whadda you think I am, a creep? You know you were asking for it. You're lucky I didn't make you do anything.+

He yanked the Ford over to the shoulder. I sprang out and ran along the shoulder of the road as fast as he could. In the distance I could see Ollawalu. I'd phone my dad from there. Hopefully he hadn't moved in the last six months. A shout . Russy!+ . came from behind me, and then I heard the car screech into a u-turn and fade away in the distance. Only then did I look back. My blue suitcase . the same one I still had, at age forty-one . was sitting next to the road like a beacon of normalcy in the fading afternoon light.

It took me a long time to track down my dad. I ended up having to get a cab into Lahaina, and find Hardy, who eventually found my dad in that old house on Front Street. I burned the dress in a barbecue in the backyard. That was the summer I had to sleep on the floor of my dad's room; the summer I didn't look for Brad, or talk to any boy, not one; the summer I really did work at the Historical Society, where the old ladies thought I was the most polite teenager they'd ever met. It was also the summer when most of the calories I consumed were in the form of the sandwiches and muffins they delighted in bringing for me, once they saw how appreciative I was. *Thank God for the kindness of little old ladies*, I thought. I'd never have made it through that summer alive if it weren't for them. I was always hungry.

I didn't go back to Maui until I was 21, when my mom sent me there.

The Fans

December 8, 2011

When I woke up in my hotel bed the next morning my first awareness was of a high-pitched *ting! ting!* It explained my dream: there had been a fast car race in a tiny bright green dinky car. Somehow I had fit inside it and was driving on a toy track, another orange car behind, chasing me. Someone was shooting. And then we all became trapped fish in a tank, swimming for our lives. Someone was pursuing us with an old-fashioned harpoon. The noise underwater sounded like the noises of the coral creatures, or of my ears equalizing. At least I wasn't drowning.

With consciousness I recognized the *ting* as the halyard of a beached Hobie Cat, whipping against the mast in the wind. I sat up and saw fast clouds moving across my open window. Rain speckled the louvers and I closed them. It would get hot and stuffy in the room within seconds, I knew, but I had turn on the overhead fan instead.

That reminded me of the last visit with my dad. The fan fiasco. I groaned as I remembered.

In my dad's house there were fans in every room, sometimes more than one, as there were in most homes and workplaces in Hawaii. He and Heather had put them in when they had first moved in, when they had transformed a plain little sun-baked structure into a breezy spacious home. Then they had both become so acclimatized to the heat that they usually left their fans off. I would turn them on when I was visiting.

But on that last trip it had been a battle of wills. I would turn on the fan when I couldn't stand it any longer, sweat beading my face and my shirt stuck to my back. Jess would have little beads of sweat above her eyebrows. Steven didn't seem to

mind it as much. My dad would tolerate it for a few moments before pushing himself up from his chair with a sigh and going to his bedroom. He'd come back wearing warm slippers and a sweatshirt. As soon as I left the room, my dad would get up to turn the fan off.

“We’ve got to save on our electricity bill,” he’d remark. Heather would stand behind him and shrug, a smile on her face, and then walk off to watch TV. I would tolerate the damp hot air as long as I could and then jump into their tiny splash pool. Even that wasn’t particularly refreshing. The little pool would be as tepid as bathwater in the warm summer sun. Steven and Jess didn’t seem to feel the heat as much as I did, and the three of us spent a good part of most days on the beach in the shade.

Nights were the worst. The breeze dropped and we had to cook with my dad overseeing our every move. We offered to take them out to a restaurant or get take-outs but he was adamant he wasn’t eating “that shit”. He would stand with one hand on the kitchen counter, a finger hooked over a giant ashtray, as if it would get away if he didn’t hold it down. The other hand would be holding a cigarette, alternately taking long inhalations and pointing.

“Megan, the soy sauce isn’t in the fridge. Why would it be? It’s there, behind the oil. No, not there, more to the right. Two bottles over! There! THERE!” he’d bellow.

And then he’d turn to Jess, a little gentler this time, thank God, “less, you can’t stir like that, it’ll slop over the sides of the bowl. Slower, Jess. Use a fork. A fork’s better for stirring . the liquid goes through the tines.”

Jess had looked up at him in confusion. She was little, barely older than a toddler, then. I could see tears beginning to form in her eyes. Sweat dropped off the end of my nose into the salad. *I hope my dad didn’t see that*, I thought, an old fear

coursing in my chest. And should Jess know to use a fork for stirring? Did she realize what tines were? Had I neglected to teach her how to do things the right way? I wanted to scoop Jess up and run away into the dark with her. I felt tears in my own eyes.

Steven spoke firmly. *W/ed clean up, Jim. Don't worry.* He came around the counter and grasped him firmly by the arm, picking up his ashtray with his free hand. *Sit down over here and watch the news. Dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes. Relax and let us spoil you. Sit here next to Heather.*

I don't like TV, my dad said.

Just for a few minutes. Steven placed the ashtray on the table next to his chair. Heather watched TV silently, her eyebrows high on her forehead. My dad sat down and raised his cigarette to his lips, his fingers and jaw clamped tight as he inhaled. The end glowed orange and then he stabbed it out.

Where's my pack, Heather? She jumped up and got it for him without saying a word, her eyes never leaving the TV except once, quickly, to get the cigarette carton out of the freezer to remove the single pack. *If only we could serve him a drink, then he'd act like a lamb*, I thought. Two more days and we'd be free to go to visit Clive. And then we never have to come back. When I lay in bed that night, I could hear my dad taking out the dishes from the cupboards and rewashing them, as he had done every night since we'd arrived.

How do you put up with him? I had asked Heather after I'd watched my dad scold her for using the wrong mug for his coffee, the next morning. She'd looked at me and laughed. *I don't mind it. And it's better than him drinking,* she'd responded. Then she picked up the rake and swept up the leaves around the pool, humming a cheerful tune. My dad sat in a chair under the mango tree and pointed out areas that

she missed. A mango fell with a thump. As it hit the ground near my dad's chair, he jumped, dropping his coffee cup into his lap. He leapt up, screaming, "What the hell is going on?" before storming off to shower and change his clothes. Heather and I had laughed until tears were streaming down our faces.

That had been in 2008. In the meantime I emailed Heather, and called my dad on Christmas, his birthday, and on Father's Day, after speaking to Clive with Steven. I received a card from my dad with a check in it on my birthday and presents for all of us at Christmas. But I kept my promise to myself to not spend more time with him; we visited Clive on Kauai without coming to Maui. *Clive was a better father*, I had thought. I had been so lucky to meet him. Clive had improved my life in every possible way.

Now I lay in bed trying to marry the image of my dad helping people with the one I last remembered, lashing out at the least contradiction. Or the one from many Christmases before that, reeling along the hallway, drunk, his pants stained with urine. And then there was also the one when he took me around Maui, showing me new snorkelling spots, or teaching me about its history.

"Why didn't they fight off the Americans when they took over Hawaii?" I had asked him once, on a trip to the Iolani Palace, which commemorated the frequent and vicious battles between conflicting Hawaiian rulers. My dad was still driving then, and sober that year, at least for the two weeks I was with him.

We had climbed up from the parking lot to the needle of rock sticking out above the lush valley, supposedly so fertile because of all the blood spilled on the fields below. My dad lit a cigarette. He had told me earlier that the Hawaiians didn't want to become part of the United States; almost all of them had sent a petition to the government objecting to the plans for annexation. Not that there were many

Hawaiians left by then, he had added: hundreds of thousands had died of the diseases the missionaries and sailors had brought to the islands. The petition had been ignored, and the U.S. navy boats had arrived a few weeks later, with government officials and an American flag to plant above every post office and courthouse. They brought a band to play the National Anthem as the flag was hoisted, while the Hawaiians sat quietly and then danced a *hula* of mourning. The stupid Americans, my dad said, had thought the natives were dancing with joy.

My dad sat on a wall at the edge of the path, cigarette ash growing, while he thought about the answer. Maybe they had become more peaceful by then, he had at long last responded, Or maybe they knew they were hopelessly outnumbered.

I couldn't let someone take my land, I had proclaimed. I'd be too mad. I have to kill someone!

His dad had looked at me, and I noticed his sadness. And, for once, his gentleness.

Megan, sometimes you've got to accept when you're beat, he had said. It wasn't like my dad to say something like that. Usually he got riled up when something bothered him: he'd hit the table with his newspaper when he read something in it about injustice. Or slam his palm down, making me jump. His coffee would slosh over the top of the mug.

The hotel phone on the table next to the bed rang. I grabbed it and answered, my heart racing.

What? I demanded. I sounded just like my dad.

Mommy? Jess asked. She started to cry. Oh, God. What was she doing calling on this number? Where was my cell phone?

My best girl, it's okay. I got a shock. I was asleep, and I was dreaming that the phone was a gun +

A gun . a shooting gun?+She sobbed harder. Oops.

Guess what, Jess? I saw a turtle yesterday, and it came up to me, and looked at me, and told me to say hi to you, Jess. It even blew kisses to you, with its flipper!+

She took a breath. Really, Mom? A kiss?+

Yes. It was a big green turtle, with kind brown eyes.+

Oh, sounds so nice. Were you in the water with it?+

As I said yes to Jess, I realised I'd blown it. Now Steven would know. At least I could tell him about the security guard. As if he was reading my mind, his voice came on the phone.

You've already been snorkelling?+

Why didn't you call my cell?+I countered.

It did. It rang and rang, so I called the number for Lahaina Shores.+I must have left my phone in the bathroom, probably under my dirty clothes from yesterday.

Oh, yeah, sorry. I have to tell you about a guy I met . +

We've got to go to work. I wanted to see if you were okay, and Jess was desperate to talk to you. You could have called yesterday, said goodnight to her, at least.+

I sat up and settled in against the headboard. Yes, I was about to +Then I realised I was talking to dead space.

I walked to the Pioneer Inn and ordered some eggs with a side of pancakes and coconut syrup. The friendly waiter, the sea breeze, and the knowledge that there had been boats bobbing in this harbor for centuries already, all made me feel calmer. During breakfast I called Heather. No news,+she said. I called you yesterday, to see if you wanted to have some dinner here.+

“Oh, thanks,” I said. “I lay down to have a nap and slept right through. Only saw your call a second ago. I met a guy last night, I mean yesterday afternoon, who said he’d put the word out for the locals to look for my dad. He said my dad used to help everyone.”

“He’s a good guy, you know, when he’s not drinking. And it’s been five years since he’s had a drink.”

As far as you know, Heather, I thought to myself. He’s good at lying. “Why has he disappeared then, without even leaving a note?” I sucked in air. I hadn’t intended to get so personal with her. “Wait, don’t answer. And I didn’t mean it that way.”

“Um— He didn’t want me to tell anyone, but now that he’s been gone this long— it’s probably okay.” Her voice trailed off. It sounded like she was talking to her cat.

“Sorry, Heather, I can’t hear you. What is it?” I tried to keep my voice kind.

“He’s got some dementia. He’s had it a while. He made me promise not to tell anyone.”

I had been paying my bill. Now I waved away the waiter and turned away from the sea, hunching myself into a corner of my booth.

“Did you tell the police?”

“We finally got the diagnosis this year— several months ago— I guess it was in April. It’s been coming on a long time, but one day he’d gone for a walk and had a hard time finding his way back, so I took him to the doctor. I pretended I wanted them to look at his foot. It had a sore on it that was taking a long time to heal.”

“Do the police know?”

“Well, I probably made the wrong decision, but I haven’t told them, no. Your dad would be so upset with me.”

I waved apologetically to the waiter, and then gestured to my empty orange juice glass, made a motion of pouring.

"Heather, I've got to think about this. I'll call you back."

I called Steven. His phone went straight to voice mail. *He's either in a meeting or still too mad to talk to me*, I thought. "Please call me as soon as you can," I said.

I wished I could think of someone wise and experienced to talk to. If I called my mom she would sigh and say that he had the dementia coming to him, what with all the alcohol he'd consumed over the years. Clive, my uncle— Both were dead. I didn't have a decent relationship with my stepfather, who would in any case scoff at the seriousness of my dad gone walkabout. He'd probably spend the whole conversation making snide remarks about the time I'd disappeared to Kauai— something he didn't seem to be able to forgive me for. Hardy wouldn't be much use to me right now. He didn't even have a phone. Reluctantly I realised I'd have to make some decisions on my own. I sat for a moment, took some deep breaths, and then called Heather.

"We're going to have to tell the police, and try to get something into the *Maui News*," I told her when she picked up.

"I'm going to look like such a fool," she said. "But I agree with you." She paused. "Can you do it, Megan?"

I paused, surprised. I hadn't thought that I would have to take over so much of the responsibility.

"I should keep the phone line open in case he calls home," she said. "I'll give you the numbers for the police, and for the *Maui News*, there's one right here. Hold on."

I gestured to the ever-patient waiter for a pen, and flipped to the back of the bill to write. When I hung up again, I decided to call George, the security guard from last

night. He seemed like he knew a bunch of locals. And my friend Dave, who lived here . and then I'd go find Hardy. Pull out all the stops, as limited as they might be. The time for wishing that all of this would go away, was over. I'd have to face it.

I called George's number and a genial voice answered, "Aloha."

"George? This is Megan, from last night."

"Hey. You are reading my mind."

"Yeah?+Maybe he thought I was someone else."

"It could be we've found your dad."

"What? Really?+

"I was on the phone with my cousin, and she said she'd heard that an old man was staying with her auntie on Kalaupapa. Cause she found him wandering around."

"The leper colō . I mean, the Hansen's disease place? On Molokai?+

"Yeah. There are still a few old timers there, the ones that were moved there when they were young, and didn't have anywhere else to go when they got cured. Or didn't want to go anywhere else."

"I know about it. My husband's grandmother died there."

"Oh, you been there then?+

"No, not yet. I've been waiting for our little girl to be old enough to understand, to take her and find the grave.+This had been my plan ever since Jess had been born, but neither Clive nor Steven had ever expressed any desire to go there."

George cleared his throat. "That might not be so easyō +He began to say something about records, and a fire at a hospital. What we were doing talking about this place like we were tourists discussing a tourist attraction? What was the situation with my dad?"

I interrupted him. %Have you got a phone number for the auntie? I want to call her and speak to my dad.+

%think I can get a landline. Not much cell reception below the *pali*. I'd have to check with the auntie first. She doesn't know what to do with him, but she told the rangers that he's her guest. She doesn't like all of the rules there, since it's become a national park, likes to break them now and then. The people there have always been suspicious of outsiders, and you can't go there without permission.+

%George, I found out he's got some dementia. Tell your cousin that, okay?+

%That makes sense. I will. I'd call you back. *Aloha*.+

I felt myself breathing easier. This was going to be straightforward, after all. I'd organize to go get my dad in Molokai and bring him back today. By this evening he'd be safe and sound at home. But how the hell had he got to Molokai? On the ferry? It was possible. My dad had told me a couple of years ago that we'd lived on Molokai. I didn't remember any of it.

%You were still in diapers then, Meg. We took the ferry boat. You got mixed up between a ferry and an angel; you know, you thought it was a %airy+boat. You kept calling it an angel boat. Your mom thought it was so cute.+

I had looked at my father incredulously. %Mom was here? When?+

%just told you. When you were little.+

I hadn't been able to recall any of this. I'd been sure my dad had the story wrong.

%Why were we going to Molokai?+

%Umō we thought it would be more laidback to live there than here,+my dad had said.

%Live there? Not a vacation?+

Yeah. Your mom and I lived here together in Hawaii for a while. Molokai didn't work out so great. We couldn't find any work there. We moved back here after a few months.

How long did we live here, all together on Maui, dad?

For fuck's sake, Megan, I don't know exactly. Maybe a year?

When I got back to LA my first question to my mom had been, Did we really live in Hawaii, all of us together, Mom?

She had looked at me and then out of the car window.

You were too little to remember most of it. I had been about to ask something else when she had added, And for some of the time you lived with Grandma, here in California.

Images had flashed through my memory. Lying on a fold-out couch in my grandma's room at the retirement home, watching her get ready for bed. Every night she braided her long white hair and then knelt in her nylon slip to pray. Every morning I helped her fold up the couch and tidy my clothes before they ate breakfast. More prayers and a Bible reading after breakfast. I had enjoyed helping her do the dishes, I remembered, and baking cookies. There had been a blank space around my parents. I never asked my grandma about them.

I finally settled with the waiter, leaving him a large tip, and began to walk through the harbor on the way back to my hotel where I pack a few things to take with me. The sun was already hot, the sea more inviting than usual. It's a siren call, I thought, *like one of the stories my mom used to tell me about. There don't have to be real sirens down there; I want to get in, and never leave.*

The Luau

December 8, 2012

Heather called me as I was unlocking the hotel room door. Her voice was so faint that I had to turn off the fan to hear her.

%Megan, I was thinking, you should stay here. I don't want you to waste your money. I've got lots of food.+

Oh, no. She'd follow my every movement, and force-feed me. And I would be trapped there.

%I don't think I can get my money, back, Heather. It was one of those package deals.+

%Too bad. +she trailed off. %Well, can you come for lunch today?+

I'd barely come back from breakfast; she'd talked to me at the restaurant less than an hour ago. But I said, %That'd be nice. I'd be there around noon, if that's okay. Or a little later. I'm waiting for a call from the security guard I told you about.+

Heather's voice was noticeably more cheerful. %I've got iced tea, and potato salad, and I can make you a sandwich, or some lasagne, or whatever you want. I've got *poke*. I've got steaks if you want to barbecue. and cookies. I've got chocolate chip cookies. The kind Jess likes.+

%Anything is fine, thanks, Heather. And, uh, Heather? Have you got any calls from Steven?+

%No, but I'm sure he would call your cell phone rather than here.+

%Yeah, you're right.+I felt embarrassed: Heather was going to realize that Steven and I had been arguing. I'd always been so proud of our long-term relationship . almost fifteen years of it, believe it or not . like I had figured out something my dad

never would. Now we were barely talking. After I hung up, I tried both Steven's cell and the home phone. Again the voice mail. We hadn't let Jessie have her own phone, as some of her friends did, and so there was no way to reach her, either.

A few minutes later my phone rang. George again. My pulse quickened, and I answered.

"Aloha Megan. Auntie Nora says you can come but she doesn't want to talk to you on the telephone. And the old guy doesn't either. But she'll organize the tour to meet you tomorrow morning if you can take the early flight from West Maui. Unfortunately it's too late to catch the last one today."

"Can I go straight to her?"

"No, no one's allowed in without the tour or a local to pick them up. Auntie Nora doesn't want anyone to know about her guest, so you'll have to come in with the tour. Maybe she's as demented as your dad, who knows?" He laughed. "You'll have to wait a few hours in the airport though."

"That's not a problem. I can do some work. But how do we know it's my dad?"

"She says he's *haole*, pretty short and thin, grey hair, not sure of himself. He hasn't told her his name. It doesn't seem like he knows it."

"Sounds like it could be him. I'll go."

"Another thing. You can't tell the police about this, right? Auntie Nora won't have authorities in her house. She's adamant about that. It's from all of those years of being a prisoner because of her disease, I guess."

After I hung up I drove over to my dad's house and explained to Heather what was happening. She looked doubtful, and shook her head. Jim never left the area, she said. How could he have got as far as Molokai? We ate a huge lunch, discussing the possibilities. While we were doing the dishes, she told me she thought I should

go, but that she would stay behind in case the police phoned or my dad suddenly returned home. There wasn't much doubt in my mind that the man was my dad. How many wandering old guys could there be at any one time in Hawaii?

The Molokai flight left at seven the next morning. I had the afternoon and evening left. There wasn't much point in searching around Lahaina any longer, but I wished I could talk to my dad, just to make sure it was him. I had no choice but to accept the leper lady's rules. People were old-fashioned in Hawaii, and insisted that elderly people be respected: there was no negotiating with that. I would have to be patient.

After I took a nap, I called Dave, to see if he and his wife could grab a meal with me. We'd become friends again, after many years of being out of touch. I still felt shy about him; I'd had a crush on him for so long that I wondered if I'd ever really get over it. 808 661 3577. His number was still the same, two decades on. He always said he'd never leave Lahaina.

As his phone began to ring, I pictured him as he was the last time I saw him. I'd taken Steven and Jess to meet him. Dave had looked tan and in great shape. He'd gained some weight since our twenties but it suited him. His face was broad, his eyebrows pronounced and dark. His long hair, a little bit prematurely grey, was pulled back into a ponytail. In the background was an artificial Christmas tree, flocked pink, and his two poodles were barking. They were pink, too. Dave had been standing in the living room of the apartment he shared with his wife. A really nice place, especially considering it was intended exclusively for lower income people. And the location couldn't be beat: it was a few yards from Baby Beach, not far from the Lahaina Luau, in fact, a block or two at the most. We'd been laughing about the pink trees and the dogs; his wife's idea, he claimed.

The machine answered in Dave's voice. It was more gravelly than I remembered.

%Aloha. Mele Kalikimaka! Mandy and Dave are probably surfing right now, so leave a message. *Mahalo.*+

%Dave. This is Megan here. I'm in town for about a week. Thought it might be nice to have coffee together or something. Hey, and hi, Mandy. I'm staying at Lahaina Shores. You've got my phone number. *Aloha.*+

Why hadn't I told him that I was looking for my dad? And what was with the *aloha*? I hadn't said that in years. It had slipped out before I'd had the time to think of anything else.

We'd met when we were both wait staff at the Deluxe Hawaiian Luau, where we were bullied into using as many Hawaiian phrases as we could. Most of the staff were Hawaiian or at the least Japanese-American, but sometimes they would hire a *haole* like me who was dark-skinned enough to pass. Over the peak season the Luau fed over 500 people a night, so they couldn't afford to be too picky if they were short of staff. When I first started I had wondered if I'd struggle to fit in with the real Hawaiians, but the hardest part had turned out to be serving guests wearing a bikini and a grass skirt. Fortunately I was pretty tan from my first few weeks at the beach, even if most of the time I'd been in the water. Some of the others had *kakau* circling their upper arms and I considered getting one before deciding that I was too squeamish to handle that kind of pain.

I turned twenty-one that summer. I had to have been twenty-one, to serve the *%all-inclusive and unlimited+* mai tais and daiquiris. We waiters had been carefully tutored to offer one round of drinks and then only bring more if requested. Delay that as long as possible. Never offer more. Same with the *%sumptuous Hawaiian buffet+*, I remembered. It was *%all you can eat+* but guests were not really given the chance to

go back for seconds. No seconds for them! Dave had laughed, unless they beg for it!

He had started making jokes with me during the walks to and from our tables with trays of drinks, bread rolls and guava butter, or water glasses. I figured he had to be Hawaiian with that skin and hair. I thought he was the most gorgeous guy I ever seen.

No, I'm from Wisconsin, Dave had answered when I asked him if he'd grown up on Maui. It seemed that he was used to the question. My dad's Greek and my mom's Italian. But I feel destined to live like a Hawaiian. You?

I'm living with my dad and his wife Ming for the summer. Quit college. Well, flunked. Trying to decide what to do next.

Cool.

I nodded and wanted to add, Not really. Ming's cruel and he's an alcoholic, and my stepsister's spoiled rotten, but then the hula show started and we had to rush to clean the tables.

Sometimes when I could, I listened to the narration about the history of Hawaii, but it didn't ring true to me. One of the only courses in college I had enjoyed was on Nineteenth Century Colonial Invasions; it had reinforced what I learned from my dad about how brutal the First World was when it decided to take over someone else's country. In the Deluxe Luau's version, one hula after another seemed to celebrate the various historical eras without discriminating between them: the Hawaiian royals, the sailors, the sugar cane growers, the Americans . all in one happy row. It was for the haole tourists' benefit, so they wouldn't feel uncomfortable on their vacation, I guessed. And not regret the exorbitant price of the luau either.

But it was a job, and I was lucky to be earning some money. And I had no idea what else I should be doing.

Things improved when Dave invited me to go out for a drink after work. I imagined us walking off towards town, the two of us sipping cocktails somewhere quietly glamorous while we watched the sea, but he led me towards a van and told me to climb in. There in the back were most of the other *haole* wait staff, about seven of us, and a crate of beer. We fell into each other as we went around corners. ~~Let's~~ play jello! someone cried. I shed a silent inward tear and then decided to join in. With my history of boyfriends (very short) it had been silly to hope for more.

After a few minutes we arrived at a beach and climbed out. We were at Puamana State Park, a little spot on the edge of Lahaina. Technically it was closed after dark, but the cops didn't bother you if you stayed quiet and didn't light any fires. A few locals fished there at night, and some homeless people were lying low in amongst the trees. We gathered on the picnic benches and passed around the beers. Dave sat on one of the tables behind me, and then he reached down and started to massage my neck and shoulders. I was glad no one could really see us. My face flushed a deep red, I was sure, and my eyes glazed over. I could have sat there forever, but after a few minutes Dave jumped up and asked me if I wanted to swim.

~~It's~~ dark, I said.

~~Who~~ cares?+

We ran in and splashed around. I stepped carefully, trying to avoid the dark shapes of the coral under the water, but there was too much of it to avoid, and we got out again. Dave wrapped a towel around me.

When I got back to my dad's place, he was awake and was standing at the front door.

Wash your feet before you come in. Your hair's wet, Megan! You can't come in and drip on the floor. Wait here.+

He got a towel and threw it at me.

Where did you get wet?+

We're in Hawaii, Dad. Where do you think? The beach, the one near Puamana.+

That's where a lady got attacked by a shark last year. Swam every morning of her life and one morning she didn't come back.+

Maybe she drowned.+

They found one of her arms. Still wearing her watch.+

The next night at work Dave asked if he could come over to my house. My heart plummeted into my stomach. Why couldn't he keep out of my personal life? There was no way I wanted him mixing with my dad and Ming. Or my crazy stepsister. So I told him no.

Why not?+

It's not my house, and it's not very fun there. He smiled at me and nodded. I was grateful that he didn't ask anything else. Maybe I'd blown my only chance to be alone with him; what he wouldn't be able to understand, though, was it would never have worked out at my dad's house. If only I had a car, but they were so expensive here and I didn't have enough money saved up. I could barely afford my share of the food at my dad's place. My stepmother made me pay exactly one-fourth of the grocery bill, even though I didn't eat the same stuff they did. And I ate dinner every night at the Luau too. It was so unfair. I didn't understand why my dad didn't speak up for me.

Around noon the next day my dad shook me from sleep and urgently whispered, Megan, wake up, there's a boy here! I staggered out into the kitchen and found

Dave in floral jams and a clean t-shirt making sandwiches with my stepmother, my father getting drinks out of the fridge and putting ice in glasses. Thank the Lord my stepsister wasn't there; she was probably doing her interminable laps at the public swimming pool up the road. Something else was odd: Ming was *smiling*. She was always in the kitchen cooking, but I never had seen her smile. I didn't like the spiciness of her meals, so I usually got take-out or my dad made me a sandwich. Or I ate Rice Krispies. I noticed how comfortable and interesting Ming's house was (my dad had moved in when they got married), with Hawaiian artwork on the walls and everything calm and orderly. The floor was cool and smooth under my bare feet. I took a deep breath. If they were all pretending we were normal, who was I to act otherwise?

"Anyone for watermelon?" I said.

After lunch I walked with Dave down to the beach. "So why didn't you want me to come to your house, huh, Meg?" he asked me as we headed towards the water. I couldn't bring myself to hold his hand though it swung next to mine and grazed it a few times. After a few moments he grabbed my arm and threaded it through his.

"This is the first time I've stayed with my dad in three years," I said. "And I don't really know his wife. They only got married a few months ago. Her daughter's also here for the summer. She's in some fancy boarding school. I didn't know they were getting married, my dad never told me until I got here." I looked at him to see his reaction.

"Must have been awkward!" Dave laughed. "Yeah, I haven't seen my folks since I left home right after high school. They keep asking me to come back, and saying I should go to college to get a real job, but I don't want to. Guess I'm still a child, *definitely* not ready to take life seriously. That's probably why Lahaina suits me. I ride

my bike around under the palm trees and look at the ocean, and I feel like I'm on an adventure, not like ~~real life~~. He put his fingers up to indicate the quotation marks.

"Get you," I said, but I didn't. I'd been sent here after failing my junior year at college. No one had asked my opinion; they didn't seem to realise I was, legally, an adult. I suspected my mom didn't know what else to do with me, and thought that since my dad had been ~~dry~~ for a couple of years, he might be a good influence on me. So far I hadn't had any ideas about what to do next. I'd yet to have a real conversation with my dad, who seemed possessed with house maintenance, cleaning, and his lame surfboard-shaping business. In fact from my perspective, my dad wasn't as nice now as he had been when he was drinking. I couldn't imagine living *here* the rest of my life that was for sure.

"What's so special about this place, Dave? I mean, for you?"

I turned to look at him. "I guess it all comes down to the *aloha* spirit," he said. "You know, how you can use the one word . *aloha* . to say hello, or goodbye, but it also means love or sympathy or, I'm sorry."

"Really, all of that?" I asked him incredulously. I'd heard *aloha* all of the time . in stores, from my dad's friends, on the telephone, but I'd never believed it was anything more meaningful than "Have a nice day." Come on, I thought, it's one little word. But Dave clearly wanted to believe that there was something magical about this place. I wasn't going to spoil that for him. So I just said, "Amazing."

When I got back to the house, my dad said to me, "Nice guy, that Dave." I said, "He's okay," and shrugged.

Now I tried his number once more. The machine picked up again; this time I didn't leave a message. Heather had asked me to come back for dinner if I wasn't doing anything else. Not a big deal, she'd promised, but you have to eat, right? I

couldn't decide if she was really trying to help me or was desperate for company. I always ate too much when I was with her, as if I was trying to please her by cleaning up everything she put in front of me. We were sitting on the *lanai* after dessert . and I had undone the top button of my shorts . when I got a call from Steven. I'd called him a few more times that day but hadn't been able to reach him.

"Hey, Megan. I've got someone who wants to say good night to you," he said.
"And then I'll put her to bed, and call you back. Is that okay?"+

"Oh, sure, that's great," I said. "I've been trying to get you all . + A little voice came on the line.

"Mommy, Mommy, Mommy," she sang. "This is the song we learned in school today: I love you, yeah, yeah, yeah. I love you, yeah, yeah, yeah." Her little voice carried the Beatles tune perfectly.

"That's so good, Jess! I love it," I told her.

"That's for you, Mom," she said. "When are you coming home? Have you found Grandpa yet?"+

"I'm going to pick him up tomorrow," I replied, "and after that I should be home very soon." Then she was yelling to Steven, "Dad, Mom's found Grandpa!"+

He got on the phone. "Is that true, Meg?"+

"I hope so. There's an old guy on Molokai who fits his description. But it's not completely a sure thing yet." I described the rest of the situation to him.

"God, so cloak and dagger," he said.

"Don't you want to go there, Steven, to see where your dad grew up, and where your grandmother died?"+

"Sure, sometime, yeah," he replied, without much enthusiasm.

Well, I'll take pictures for you, I said. Steven said, That would be great. Well, I won't call you later, now that we've talked. Let me know how it goes, and then they both said goodnight.

When he hung up, I felt abandoned. I had to stare out at the yard, fighting to get my tears under control. I didn't want to cry in front of Heather. Luckily her back was to me, pouring us decaf; by the time she came back to the table I had my face composed. She put the cup in front of me, and a little jug full of cream, just how I liked it, and then before sitting down, she gently placed a hand on my shoulder. Tears sprang up again and I grabbed her fingers. We stayed like that for a few moments, not looking at each other, her standing behind me and me hanging onto her three fingers for dear life. And then she patted me, and sat down, and we drank our coffee.

University of Cape Town

Meeting the Old Guy

December 9, 2011

The plane's first stop was at the main airport in West Molokai, as the pilot called it, to drop off the other passengers from Maui. As we flew towards the runway, the little plane jumping like a bronco in the crosswinds, it looked like the entire top of Molokai was a red dusty plate broken here and there by the dab of a dam. On all sides of the island were green cliffs falling away to the ocean. It reminded me of a giant Aztec temple. We waited at the airport . one runway, a coffee shop open six hours a day, and two dilapidated bathrooms . for twenty minutes and then left for the ten-minute jaunt to Kalaupapa, less of a flight than a vertical drop seaward to a clearing where a tiny airstrip was little more than a concrete stripe down a field. A yellow school bus was parked at the edge of an otherwise empty parking lot. The wind seemed to be the only sound. The pilot took off again after telling me to wait in the open shelter, which was the sole airport building.

The park ranger who had come to log the flight checked that I knew the tour started in two hours time, and that I couldn't leave the airport before then. He then stood reading his phone messages in a corner of the building. Only spot with decent reception, he said. I checked my phone. I don't have any, I said. The park ranger said, You got to have AT and T or you're out of luck. He doffed his hat to me and left, whistling, heading towards a small cottage about twenty yards away. I sat on one of the plastic benches for an hour, reading the *Molokai Dispatch*, then decided to stretch my legs. At intervals surrounding the parking lot and at the entrance of the single road away from it were signs saying NO TRESPASSING. PERMIT HOLDERS ONLY.

I wondered what they would do to you if you didn't have one. Make you leave on the next flight, I guessed. Not as if there seemed to be anyone to care. I returned to the shelter, had a drink from the water fountain, and stretched out on a bench, tired from the early start that morning.

I woke up when another small plane approached, and watched it land. The ranger was standing with an orange flag waving it in, as conscientiously as if he were at a big metropolitan airport. Two elderly women climbed out, their arms full of parcels. The pilot helped them down the steep stairs. Out of nowhere an old Ford sedan pulled up, and the driver jumped out to help them load their stuff. "Happy to be home?" he asked them, and they laughed. I wanted to look, to see if they had any marks of Hansen's disease, but knew I couldn't do it without feeling terribly nosy. And it wouldn't be right.

Or they could be employees of the park. There were more of them than the dozen or so remaining residents, I knew, far more: something astounding like sixty of them. But these ladies were well past retirement age . they were unlikely to be Park employees . and what if they had known Jesse's great-grandma? They would have been children, it was true, but there weren't that many people left here, and they might remember her. I turned decisively to approach them at the same moment the driver slammed the big doors of the car and drove away. After one curve in the road it disappeared into the landscape, as if the huge green tongue of the high *pali* above had reached down and swallowed it.

I did another tour of the room. On the western wall was a framed picture of Father Damien, the priest, now a saint, who had come to help the colony before the government or anyone else did. Next to his was another poster saying "WE HAVE A SAINT!"; it was Sister Marianne who had then joined him in there in 1888 and was

responsible for making sure the people there had regular medical treatment. On the opposite wall was an excerpt from a University of Hawaii Center for Labor Education and Research circular. I read it:

THE *ALOHA SPIRIT* was the working philosophy of native Hawaiians and was presented as a gift to the people of Hawai'i. "Aloha" is more than a word of greeting or farewell or a salutation. "Aloha" means mutual regard and affection and extends warmth in caring with no obligation in return. "Aloha" is the essence of relationships in which each person is important to every other person for collective existence. "Aloha" means to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen and to know the unknowable.

Wow, I thought, that's some heavy gift. Yet I felt moved by the words, and humbled. It was so quiet here, and so lonely. What had it been like to be dropped off by boat, with the barest of belongings, and have to raid the other inhabitants' gardens for food? On the poster of Father Damien, it said that before him the people there had to look after themselves, and that very few inhabitants were even fit or healthy enough to dig graves for those who had died. Digging countless graves was one of the things Father Damien had done that had most endeared him to the Hansen's sufferers.

An hour later another plane landed. The pilot and five others clambered out of the Piper, a middle-aged couple with their two teenaged sons, and a man who walked up to me with his hand outstretched. He wore long khaki pants and a short-sleeved business shirt, tucked in. A name badge glinted on his pocket.

"Yee Yin," he said, and then handed me his card. "I'm leading the tour. I guess you're the woman who's supposed to meet Auntie Nora? "

"Nice to meet you. Yeah, that's me. I had expected a Hawaiian guy, I didn't know why. Yee Yin shepherded the group towards the school bus, got in and started the engine. The passengers tried to peer out of the dusty windows, joking about going back to First Grade.

We first going to pick up the hikers and the donkey riders at the foot of the pali,+Yee Yin said. He pointed out the towering cliff in the distance, adding. %If you don't fly, that's your only way into the settlement. About a five-hour hike. Or three hours on donkey back. You all know you're not allowed here unless you are on a tour or have been invited by a resident.+A shiver ran through me, and I remembered something I had forgotten until then. I'd been standing at the top of a very high hill, looking down a steep cliff, my hand clutching my mother's. I must have been a tiny little girl, three years old maybe. My father's voice was saying, %There are diseased people who live down at the bottom. Some of them are so sick that their feet and noses have fallen off. They can't get out, and we can't get in.+I had peered over as far as I could, my stomach swooning in fear, but I couldn't see anyone with or without noses. It was too far down.

The bus stopped to pick up six people, two very hot and sweaty, the other four complaining about the overweight donkeys and whether they would manage to keep their footing on the steep path back up. It looked to me as if the donkeys would be the ones suffering, not the pudgy family who had been their burdens.

We rounded a corner and saw a few clustered wooden buildings ahead. Hundreds of graves stretched along the road in long lines of weathered grey. %Most of the graves are unmarked by now, because the names are eroded off,+Yee Yin said. %And many of the names were in any case false names, because the Hansen's patients didn't want to dishonor their families. Families of lepers were tainted by the association, you see. Unfortunately most of the records with the real names were kept in the store room which burned down in a fire in 1990 so no one will ever be able to track down where the real people are buried.+I had been planning on taking a picture of his grandmother's grave for Steven. Guess that wasn't going to work.

This must have been what George was trying to explain to me when I interrupted him.

The little bus trundled towards a village where a handful of wooden cottages stood in the sunlight. %Here's the shop,+ Yee Yin said. %And the church. And way over there is the hospital. There are still a few patients, so we aren't allowed to get too close, but you may photograph it. You are not allowed to photograph any people.+

%No pictures of people,+he repeated in a louder voice. %Everyone got that?+

The group all nodded. I didn't see the point of the rule: there wasn't anyone . not a soul . walking, or driving, or working anywhere. It was like a ghost town. No vehicles on the dirt roads, except a 1975 Ford sedan parked in a driveway. Perhaps it was the same one from the airport earlier, but there was no trace of the laughing driver or the two old women he'd picked up. Just the palm trees waving in the wind, and the white caps on the bay, and our bus with its trail of dust pluming out behind it. Along the beach the waves crashed into the rocky shore, where there were signs warning of dangerous currents. Clearly it wasn't safe to swim. Despite the desolation (maybe because of it, I wondered?) it was a picture-perfect setting. What an ideal place for someone to hide out.

%We're stopping at the shop where you can buy water or some potato chips. It doesn't have other food,+ Yee Yin continued. The passengers climbed off the bus. Yee Yin held me back and whispered to me, %Megan, this is where you will meet Auntie Nora. You know she's deaf, okay?+

I nodded, shocked. I'd had no idea. Now that I was here I was filled with panic. And how was I meant to communicate with a deaf lady? I didn't know sign language. Would I have to write everything down . could she read? What if my dad didn't want to come back with me? What if he didn't recognize me? How would I get him out of

here? I wished Heather had come. And Steven. Steven would know how to handle all of this. He should have been here. Werend spouses supposed to support each other in crises?

I climbed down the steep stairs of the bus, longing to be an anonymous part of the tour group, all of whom were happily entering through the low door of the little shop or rifling through the postcards in a rack along the wall. I would buy a Coke and a postcard, and send it to Jess from Maui.

%Wait here. I need to talk to you privately before you meet Nora. Let me first make sure the others are inside.+

When Yee Yin returned, he smiled and rubbed his hands together.

%She wants me to explain a few things.+

I waited.

Yee Yin lowered his voice. %You see, the patients here are not allowed visitors unless the visitor has asked for permission through the park service. It's supposed to protect the patients' privacy, but some of them feel that it's to control them. So when Auntie Nora found this old . your dad . wandering on the beach, she hid him in her house and didn't tell any of the park authorities. She's a pistol. She's angry at how the patients are still treated, even though they're not infectious anymore and how they were treated worse than dogs, she says, when they were infectious. She was eighteen when she was sent here.+

Great, I thought, an angry deaf woman. Sounds like fun.

%So you've got to understand that you can't talk to anyone about your dad being here, or nothing. And to get him home you'll have to be very clever. But Auntie Nora has lots of people on her side, and will help.+

I nodded. Yee Yin continued, %I don't lose my job as a tour guide if the park guys found out about this, but it's worth it to please the residents. They deserve a lot of respect.+He paused, and shook hands with me. %I want to make sure all of the others are paying attention to me inside before Auntie Nora comes. Good luck.+He went inside, stooping to get under through the small doorway, and called the others. I could hear him talking about how the patients used to run the shop, but now it was managed by the National Parks Service.

A few seconds later I saw a slight figure in long dark pants, a floral blouse and a big sun hat come around the corner. She walked slowly but steadily, using a cane for support and concentrating intently on the ground ahead of her. When she neared me she looked up. Her face was deeply lined but not disfigured in any way, *thank goodness*, I thought. In fact she looked quite glamorous, her iron-grey hair cut stylishly blunt and big sunglasses perched on her nose. She took them off to greet me and I noticed that her eyebrows were gone, careful brown lines of pencil in their place. Red lipstick framed her mouth.

%Auntie Nora, thank you for this, I'm Megan Wallace,+I said. Then I remembered her deafness and started to stutter, but she smiled and calmly nodded. Wow, what a smile. *She could have been a beauty queen in her younger days*, I thought; *if this place had had pageants or anything like that, this lady would have won, hands down.* Her smile was like a beam of sunlight, reaching into her eyes and forehead, and causing dimples to form on her cheeks and around her mouth. Merriment and a touch of mischief mixed to animate her face. It was one of those smiles that made you want to keep the smiler smiling, that you missed as soon as it left her face. An addicting kind of a smile.

She touched my arm with her cool fingers and then took me by the hand. Like this we walked along the road. No sidewalks. The sun beat down from almost directly overhead and we didn't seem to cast any shadows. A cat crossed ahead of us and disappeared into some bushes. My hand grew sweaty. I wondered if I could extricate it without causing offense. Fortunately we soon reached a little house where Nora headed up a gravel pathway towards a neat green-framed screen door. When she reached up to open it, I freed my hand, surreptitiously wiping it on my shorts. My heart raced.

We walked through the front door into the kitchen, ancient and sparkling clean. The stove and the refrigerator looked as if they were straight out of a 1960s Sears catalogue, barely worn. Open wooden shelves lined with old newspapers held a small collection of glasses and crockery. The smell in the house was a mix of soap and soup and, I guessed, old lady. I thought of my grandmother for the first time in years, the time I had lived with her as a little girl. I remembered her breath, warm on my face as she tucked me in at night. I remembered that at first I hadn't liked the sour scent, but that I missed it when I was back with my parents, my mom's like lemon vinegar and coffee, my dad's like cigarettes and fresh earth. *Snap out of it, Megan*, I thought. *Come back to the present. You've got a job to do.*

A little table covered with green baize fabric was surrounded by four matching chairs, chipped on their edges. There was no one there. Auntie Nora stepped over to the sink and started to fill a dented orange kettle with water.

"Where's my dad?" I asked her. Oops. Then I went up to her, and gestured for a pen and paper.

"It's okay. Talk to me," she responded, watching my lips.

"Where's my dad?" I repeated.

She looked around, and then pointed to a doorway. "In the living room?" Her voice was hollow and toneless, and when her face creased into a worried smile I realised she was as nervous as I was. She turned on the gas and put the kettle on the hob, then gestured for me to follow her into the next room.

A white-haired man sat with his back to us, reading a frayed *Time* magazine. His elbows were resting on the arms of the chair, which were covered in crocheted antimacassars. My grandmother had had those, and had taught me how to say the word and what it meant: something to protect furniture against Macassar, which was a brand of men's hair oil. I could always win a spelling bee with that word. Airline seats still had them in a modern version. Jessie hated the feel of the fabric and always made me stow it away for the duration of the flight. She wouldn't touch it. It made her feel funny, she said.

I could see the familiar edge of my dad's reading glasses. My heart leapt and I began to smile. I hadn't realised how deeply I'd been worried about the old man, and how much I'd missed him. Involuntarily my arms reached up for his embrace, already imagining hugging my dad's small wiry body and feeling his rough cheek against mine. Edging around the chair into the tiny front room, I touched him on his bony shoulder.

"Shhh, he's sleeping," said Auntie Nora.

"It's not him."

I fell into the other armchair and stared at the sleeping man. Nora looked at me, bewildered. "It's not him!" I repeated more clearly. And then I screamed it, "IT'S NOT HIM." The old guy started and looked around as if waking up on an alien planet. I got up and left the room, stepping outside the front door and staring down the street until

my vision was restored and my fury had partially subsided. It's not her fault, or George's, I told myself, three times in a row, until I calmed down a little.

This whole search was a fucking pain in the ass. Why couldn't I have spoken to Nora before coming here on this wild goose chase? I hated my father anyway. Why not leave him to die somewhere in a gully? I pulled out my phone. I would speak to Steven. He would know what to say, and have suggestions about what I should do next. No reception here either. Fucking shit hole.

When I got back inside, Auntie Nora was making sandwiches and the old man was sitting in one of the kitchen chairs humming tunelessly and bobbing his head to unheard music. I noticed an iPod wire threading up his neck from the pocket of his shirt, earphones plugged into his ears. I wondered if Nora knew what an iPod was. She probably thought it was a hearing aid. What a well-matched pair the two old people would be. They were meant for each other. I had to get out of there.

Nora turned and looked at me. I'm sorry, she mouthed over the head of the old guy. Another one of those beneficent smiles. It made me feel stupid, and shallow. It would be okay. I would have to keep looking. I sighed and pulled up a chair, reaching out my hand to shake the old man's. In a moment I'd take a walk, clear my head, and strategize.

May I use your telephone to call my father's wife? I asked Nora. I would talk long. She nodded and showed me the telephone on a table in the living room. I didn't want the old man to hear me, but he seemed lost in his music and oblivious to my presence.

Heather answered on the first ring.

Yes?+

This is Megan. It's not my dad, Heather. I had to swallow, hard.

“Oh, honey,” she said, her voice disappointed but level. “I didn’t see how it could be. He never leaves Maui. Hasn’t for years. But it was worth a try.”

After lunch I left the tiny house and headed toward the sea, which I could see in the distance. There was still absolutely no evidence of any people, but after the conversation with Yee Yin I knew there were probably eyes on me as I walked along the road. At least I wouldn’t be arrested for trespassing: Nora had given up her resistance and registered me as her guest for the night. The departing flights were full and I would have to sleep over. I got a seat on one the next afternoon, after the last tour of the week. There wasn’t a tour every day. The settlement wouldn’t allow it, and who would blame them? Tourists gawking at them as if they were exhibits. *It would be like visiting Robben Island, South Africa, while there were still prisoners*, I thought. I’d gone there on a diving tour and felt the same shame and awe there that I felt here. How could people . . . the world . . . we! have imprisoned Nelson Mandela for twenty-seven years because of his belief in equality between the races? How could Hawaiian royalty . . . the government . . . we! have exiled and abandoned sick and dying people?

I walked past a Mormon church and a church of Seventh day Adventists. At the end of the road I turned left and passed the Catholic Church where they were busy with renovations in advance of the celebration for Sister Marianne’s beatitude. Bundles of building supplies were lined up in the tidy front garden, fresh off the barge and still marked with their destination in thick black writing: “Church.” I liked how someone had capitalised the word; maybe that’s how they knew which one it was supposed to go to. The Catholic Church was clearly the favored one, with the best location and the most land. But after all, it was their missionaries who came first to help. A community of nuns still lived here as did a full-time priest.

No one seemed to be working now, though; I wondered if everyone disappeared on purpose on the days when a tour was expected, and if life as normal carried on during the other days. On the wharf in front of me was a toilet wrapped in bubble wrap, this destined for someone or somewhere named Henry. No one here either, at least on foot. In the distance another seventy-dollar vintage car, this one green, cruised slowly along the shore road, headed away from me.

Above the *pali* five birds were riding the updraft. They looked graceful and content. I wished I could soar like that. I had to sit down on a white-washed lava retaining wall so I didn't get dizzy while watching them fly against the moving clouds in the sky. When my neck got stiff I looked down the road again and saw the back of someone scurrying into the post office, which, like the other buildings, was off-limits to me. Nora had explained all of the rules to me. There's one forbidding children to come here! she had added indignantly, her lips creased in dismay.

You mean on the tour? I had responded. I can understand that.

No, it's not funny. Even to visit us patients. My grandchildren have never been able to visit me. They're still too young. I'd probably be dead by the time they're sixteen, when they're allowed to come.

Then I understood how she felt. What if Jess hadn't been able to see Clive's home . the famous chickens, the vegetables, the fruit trees . before he died? Never sat on his front porch and watched the clouds go by? She hadn't seen my dad at his best, but she loved him anyway. And Heather was special to her; their favorite thing had been to go to Safeway together and buy fresh cookies from the bakery there. They also spent hours together in the little pool, splashing each other and playing underwater games. Heather would throw pennies into the shallow end for Jess to dive out. She loved that. I should try to get her to Maui more often.

I looked up into the sky again. Four of the birds had flown away. One poor guy was left all on his own. Why hadn't he gone with the others? As I watched it, the bird plummeted straight towards the sea in a spectacularly steep and rapid dive. It hit the ocean so hard I was sure I could hear a thud from where I sat. A fountain of spray splashed up around where it had gone under. Whoever had heard of a kamikaze bird like this? It had to have drowned. Yet a surprisingly long time later it appeared on the surface again with a sizeable fish in its mouth. I clapped and cheered.

Then I caught myself and looked around. No one. A little self-conscious now, I shook my head in delight and awe at the bird's successful hunt, and began to wander back to Nora's house along a parallel road. It was cooler, and the breeze fresher. I could see the yellow tour bus stopped up ahead, the participants milling about outside a little red-trimmed white house. Some of them were filling their water bottles from the tap in the side yard.

I went up to Yee Yin who was standing at the door of the bus. He looked at me nervously, and glanced up and down the road.

"It's okay. Don't worry. Auntie Nora's registered me as a guest," I told him.
"What's this place?"

"How's your dad?" Yee Yin asked.

"It's not him, but that's okay. I'll find him."

"Too bad." Yee Yin grimaced with sympathy, and then resumed his tour guide voice. "This is the book store and museum. Only open for twenty more minutes, and then we're on our way out. You can go in if you want. There's some souvenirs too."

I nodded and thanked him for trying to help me find my dad. I climbed the stairs into the house and looked at the exhibits for a few minutes. When I checked my watch I saw that I only had a few more minutes before the place closed. The tour

members were already filing out, getting back into the bus. I headed into the room at the back where the books and gifts were on display. With no time left to browse, I gathered all of the books written by patients . there were four of them . and one by a Catholic nun who had spent thirty years on Kalaupapa. I'd have something for Steven out of this, at least.

My bag of books in hand, I wandered back to Auntie Nora's. The two old folks were watching TV when I arrived. Nora pointed to the kitchen and asked if I'd like a snack. I gathered some crackers and cheese on a little plate and took it through to the living room to join them. I sat in an armchair eating while they watched a show about the National Hula Competition. The oldsters seemed to be riveted to the different troops of dancers, oohing and aahing over the costumes and the make-up each time a new group took the stage. I wondered how well Nora could hear the music, or if it mattered to her.

The show lasted an hour; I spent at least the last half of it dozing in the chair, my head and arms each resting against their own individual doilies. I woke up feeling relaxed, as if I was a little girl again, without responsibilities. Nora was standing next to me, a plastic bucket over her arm and rubber shoes on her feet. She held a flat knife towards me.

~~Let's~~ go get some *opihī*.+she said. ~~It's~~ low tide now.+

We walked down the street and turned right at the bottom, walking along the coast until they got to a rocky point. Nora gestured to me to follow her as she climbed from boulder to boulder. She was incredibly limber for her age. For any age. I could barely keep up. We finally reached a flat area with a shallow tidal pool, where she waded in and started prying the little limpets from the rocks. ~~You~~ hold the

bucket for me,+she said, %When I can do this faster, get more. Three of us to feed tonight.+

%Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you for letting me stay,+I said, making sure I was standing directly in front of her.

Nora laughed. %Love visitors!+she smiled. %Not enough of them here.+She piled the bucket high with limpets, and then leapfrogged back to the rocks. Before I knew what she was doing, she had darted her hand into a hole and speared an octopus on her knife.

%Ah, hah! Got you this time! Now we will have a real feast, Megan. I will make you the octopus . and we will eat the *opih*i raw . and I have some *kimchee* too, which is the perfect side dish. Pickled cabbage, Korean style.+She plopped the octopus on the top of the bucket, its tentacles draped over the edges. On the way back it grabbed an edge as if trying to escape and she punched it back in, shouting at it, a fierce thrill in her voice, %Oh, no, mister, don't you dare! You're mine now!+Was Nora imprisoning people, too? I laughed at myself and faced her as we walked up the quiet street.

%How long have you lived here, Auntie Nora?+

%Oh, Megan, that is a sad story. In my town, well very small little place on the Big Island, there were bounty hunters, who looked for people with Hansen's. Everyone was so scared, of getting it, always. My brother and my two sisters had already been caught and sent here, so they checked on my family all of the time. One day they saw white spots on me and sent me to the doctor, and that was that. I didn't feel sick. The next week I was on the boat. No children out of four left at home with my parents . all of them sent away. I remember my mom saying she wanted to come too, that she wished she had the illness.

I was about thirteen, and was looking forward to seeing my brother and sisters. I didn't know that it would be for the rest of my life, well until a few years ago. She paused, her eyes sparkling with tears. And when I got here, two were already dead. My one sister lived a few years and then it was just me. I was never that bad. And then they started using other drugs that helped and I got pretty much completely well. Lost my eyebrows though. She looked at me a little fearfully, as if to check if I was repelled. I smiled and asked, "You didn't want to go straight back home once you were allowed to travel?"

"Yes, I went home. But only for a visit. My parents were dead by then. Sometimes I think having four children sent away killed them younger than normal. I was used to life here, it was my home. And I was married too, and had this place, and a job working at the store. They didn't offer us enough money to live anywhere else, really. A little stipend, but things everywhere else were too expensive.

We had a child, but he was sent away right after birth, put up for adoption. Luckily I found him. Not a lot of people could, so many names were changed and the records lost. But I did. It took a lot of work, but I did. He wanted to get to know me. Some of them don't. I think he's still a little mad at me though. And he thinks I should be angrier, fight with the government more, get compensation for being treated like this. But I was lucky to find him. So lucky. And now I have grandchildren! She beamed one of her world peace smiles.

We were almost at the path to the house. I felt like I had entered a different reality, a worm hole. I couldn't imagine a life like this, your choices completely taken away from you by the bad luck of having a disease. Your babies forced into adoption. Worse than becoming a prisoner; you hadn't committed a crime. Yet the worn wooden door handle under my hand and the breeze through the banana tree

and the fresh sea smell from the creatures in the bucket were all real. And all of them were beautiful. While we were making dinner, Nora showing me her way of cleaning and preparing of creatures and me chopping up the cabbage, I realised something I hadn't thought of before. I made sure she was watching me before I asked,

"Nora, did you know someone named Clive?"+

I didn't think her smile could get wider, but it did. But then it switched to something else.

"There was a boy named Clive here, just a little older than me. I heard about him. His mom died a year before I came here, and they kicked him out. There were rumors that he wasn't sick, that he'd never been sick, and then a while later they found the book and it turned out to be true. I wished I'd met him. My friends said he was a handsome boy. You know him?"+

"It's the same one, it's my father-in-law. Well, he's dead now— about a year ago. What book?"+

Nora's face saddened. "Oh, sorry, Megan. So sorry."+ We both stopped working and stood still for a moment, our hands resting against the counter top.

"He was famous for a while here, after his mom died. It turned out that she'd smuggled him in, in a box! That was also in the little book."+

"What?"+ I had to put my knife down, and got my books out of the bag. "A book like one of these, Nora?"+

"Yes, yes, this one!"+ Nora tapped excitedly on the cover of a pamphlet with a picture of an old-fashioned trunk on the front of it, a woman's face in shadow in the background. "You can read it tonight. Find out all about your grandma-in-law."+

"Wow— I knew he'd arrived enclosed in something but I never realised it was literally a box. And we didn't know anything about a book. Or that he'd never had

Hansen. How incredible, I said, feeling faint. I landed in a time warp. How could Steven not know about this? Do you think I can use your phone again, to tell my husband about this? I tried to get cell reception but it doesn't seem to work.

Yes, yes, go ahead. First finish the chopping, please. You know, you wouldn't have known about the book. There's a good chance Clive didn't know. His mom had no doubt taken a fake name when she moved here. The family was ashamed, you know, and she was protecting them.

I finished up, washed my knife, and dried my hands. Then I called Steven. He was probably already in bed. When he didn't answer I left him the land line number, and asked him to call me back. I wanted to save the big news for when we could talk, not leave it as a message. He didn't call back that night, or the next morning. I had to tell him on my return to Maui. I would keep his grandmother's story and read it aloud to Jess when she was old enough to understand it.

Are You There, Dad?

December 10, 2011

George met me at the West Maui airport when I arrived back. The afternoon light was beginning to fade, the sun setting over Lanai. I was still a little shocked from the return journey, not from the almost vertical upward soar at an engine-straining angle to get over the *pali* or the little plane shaken like a salt cellar by powerful winds over the short channel between Molokai and Maui, but by the young (too young?) pilot's nonchalance. He sat reading and writing on a pad, as if he was taking notes for a test. The looming giant clouds hadn't worried him; even when we plunged into a pile of cumulus, he barely looked up. I got up to nudge him and the pilot had said, "We've got it, ma'am. All under control. Please sit in your seat with your seat belt fastened."

"I'm so sorry, Megan. Who would have thought there would be two old men gone missing at once, right?" George walked, limping a little, with me to my car.

I shook my head. "Nah, it's alright, you know I actually enjoyed going there." I realised I wasn't trying to make George feel good. I had enjoyed it. I felt blessed, if you could call it that.

"We've heard it is beautiful, but I haven't been there. Molokai's too quiet for me."

"Sure, it certainly is beautiful. Auntie Nora is a special lady, too." I thought for a moment. "I felt ashamed, that we human beings could have treated sick people that way. Yet I also felt that maybe some of the people there overcame that, and had dignity anyway, you know?"

George nodded, then frowned. %It was expensive, and took two days of your time. Worse than that, your dad still hasn't been found. I want to make it up to you a little bit.+

I waited at the door of my car.

%We've got free tickets to the parasailing for anytime this week. My buddies run it. Do you want to come along?+

%Hey, that's nice, George, but I'd have to get in touch. I don't know how long it'd be before we find my dad. I need to check in with Heather first, and the police, and maybe make a round of the bars.+

George smiled. %Sure. Let me know when you can do it, so I can reserve our spot.+

What did parasailing have to do with my failed search for my dad? I wondered, bemused at the idea. George was doing the best he could, offering me something to get my mind off my worry, I guessed. And I'd meant what I'd said to him: the trip to Kalaupapa had been worth the time and money, even though my dad was no closer to being found. On the one hand, I was sorry that I'd lost two days; but on the other, I had never experienced such a peaceful place. Something seemed to have shifted inside me; I felt calmer and quieter. George didn't owe me anything. He'd acted on good information. How could he or Auntie Nora have known that the old guy wouldn't be my dad? The parasailing did sound awesome.

%Thanks, George, I'd do my best to get there. Thank you very much.+ I waved as I drove away. %Bye.+

%Aloha, Megan,+ called George, waving back.

Tonight was going to be my fourth night away from Jess and Steven. We hadn't spoken since I'd left Maui for Molokai. I pulled over on my way to Heather's house

and switched my phone back on. I saw several missed calls from Dave's number, but decided to call him back later, or tomorrow. Steven and Jess were probably eating dinner right now. I wanted to catch them before the bedtime rituals began.

"Who's this?" Steven always got aggressive at this time of the night. He hated all the sales calls we got between five and seven p.m.

"It's me!" I said. "Megan. Your wife."

"Oh, my wife. Am I lucky enough to have one of *those*?" Steven's voice was light. He laughed a little. "Thought I'd lost her under the sea somewhere."

"Hey, that's not fair! I haven't been deep diving for years," I said.

"It's a joke, Meg. Relax. I want to say, sorry, I love you, you know I love you. I understand that you've got to find your dad. I should have been more sympathetic." He paused. I could hear him swallowing.

"It's okay. I know I'm not the best partner around. I'm sorry, too, and I definitely haven't been a great daughter." I paused. "I haven't had any luck yet, but I've found the most amazing sto."

"Just wait a sec, Jess is calling me from the bathtub."

I waited. Then I realised that it was later than I thought, almost seven California time, not six.

"Look, say hi to Jess first and then call me back and tell me about your dad, okay? I want to hear about it but I've got to put her to bed. Call me in half an hour and I'll be able to concentrate. Here's Jess."

"Is this my mommy?"

Her voice reached out to me like one of those donut things they threw out to drowning people. I grabbed it.

"Yes it is, Jess honey. How's my Jess?"

%Fine, my mommy. School had special holiday cookies today with crunchy decorations. We got to make cards for our parents. That's a secret, okay?+

%I've already forgotten. And who's this?+It was one of our jokes. She laughed. I could hear soft little snorts in between the giggles.

%Could I be back for Christmas, hey Mom?+

%Oh yes, months before Christmas. Years. Decades. A long long time before Christmas. Eons.+

I could hear her giggling again.

%Dad says I have to brush my teeth now.+

%Okay, Jess. Good night. Sweet dreams. I'll be thinking of you and wishing on a star.+

%Hey Mommy?+

Here it comes, I thought. She's going to ask me something about why Grandpa's missing. Or what's missing. Or why he's been so mean to her. Or why I'm away so long.

%Mom? What's an elion, that thing you said?+

%An eon. A very long time, Jess. As long as I will love you. But I will love you longer than that.+

%That's good. Me, too, Mom. Lots of leons! Night, night.+

I clicked the phone off, smiling, my chest warm. I felt revitalized, as if talking to my little girl had conducted strength into my heart, into my search. *We are all connected*, I thought, *Jess, me, my dad, Steven, Heather. Clive too, in whatever form he is*. Our genes kept recycling and building and carrying our souls all over the place. There wasn't much to do about it, other than accept it. There were lines between us, like spider webs. You could fight them, imagine they were strangling

you, or use them to strengthen you, like a net keeping you from falling. Or both. I waited twenty more minutes and called Steven again.

I told Steven about Nora and Kalaupapa and how we needed to take Jess there. He made assenting noises but didn't ask any questions.

'You don't seem very concerned about where your father grew up. Or where your grandmother died.' I said to him.

'I am. I told you I want to go there. But my dad never talked about it. I didn't know about it until you told me. It really wasn't a part of our lives together.'

'It must have been, on some level, I maintained. 'Your dad grew up in a leper colony, for God's sake. Hansen's disease, I mean. His mom died there. That's Jess's great-grandmother.'

'I know, I know. I guess I was lucky that my dad was the kind of person who lived in the moment, right? He worried more about his chickens than his past. You know what he was like.'

For a moment an all-consuming fury swept through me. It really didn't make sense that all of the drama of Clive's life had resulted in such a placid, grounded son. My relationship with my dad had been an intense, bizarre and confusing little island in the sea of my life with my mom, but it had left me suspicious and touchy, always trying to prove myself, and never feeling like I had succeeded. I had to get off the phone.

'We've got to call the newspapers, Steven. And the cops. Check in with them. I'll talk to you in the morning.'

I called the *Lahaina Star* and the *Maui News* and told them about my missing father. They said they'd run a short piece and follow it up a few days later if he was

still gone. Then I called the policewoman who had liaised with Heather. She was polite, but uninformative. There weren't any new leads.

'We've got to be honest with you, Ms Wallace,' she added. 'By this time it doesn't look good. We don't have the manpower to search all the ravines and the national parks. We've put up posters in the post offices and many other public locales. Or maybe he's gone to the mainland. Do you think he has the wherewithal to do that?'

'No,' I said. My fingers tingled and my breath shortened. I imagined my dad's body lying covered with vines and dirt and trash thrown out of car windows. I imagined him opening his eyes, hoping that help had come, and then closing them again when he saw that he was still alone. 'I have to tell you that it has recently come to my attention that he is suffering from dementia. I've started to talk like her.'

'Oh. We should have been informed of that development from the beginning.' I didn't respond.

'Well, we'll add that to the file, and put our officers on higher alert. This happens with some regularity due to the high numbers of retirees on Hawaii. In the meantime, if you hear any rumors, let us know, and we'll check them out.'

'I will,' I said. 'Thank you.'

I went over to Heather's for dinner. She had the table set and food laid out, buffet-style, in the kitchen. There was everything she'd had on the second day, and more: coleslaw, green salad, white dinner rolls and brown bread. Butter in a crystal dish, and three kinds of jam.

'It's too much for the two of us, but I wanted to make sure you had everything you liked,' she said hesitantly. I smiled at her. I hadn't eaten since left-over *opihī* for breakfast with Nora and I was starving.

"It all looks really good," I said, and piled my plate up as high as I could. I didn't know how I'd manage to eat all of it, but I'd try. If there was too much, I'd throw it down the garbage disposal when she wasn't looking.

"And leave space for dessert!" she added. I noticed the first genuine smile I'd seen on her face since I'd arrived.

My phone rang again as we were finishing our coffee. I grabbed it without looking at the screen.

"Steven?"

"No, it's Dave here," he laughed. "You left a message with me a few days ago, remember?"

"Dave, hey." I felt an echo of the rush of attraction I had kept under wraps for all of those months as a girl. Then I recollected myself, and the intervening years insulated me. Twenty years ago. It was nice to hear Dave's voice again, that was all. He'd been kind to me, even while he'd been ending the relationship. I remembered his strong arms around me, his hands patting me on the shoulders like I patted Jess when she was upset, as if it was yesterday instead of two decades past. It had been a terrible day . one of the worst days of my life . but there had been at least that one good moment.

"I've called a few times, but there was no voicemail."

"Yeah, I was on Molokai overnight. I saw a few missed calls from you. I just got back."

"It would be fun to see you, Megan, both Mandy and I would like to, but I'm working days and Mandy, nights. We've got Tuesday off together, want to do something then? You still here on Tuesday?"

“I don’t know. I don’t know what’s going to happen next. I’m looking for my dad. He’s gone missing.”

Silence. I wondered if Dave wanted to ask if he was drinking. Or something else more personal. But he didn’t.

“Oh, wow, sorry to hear that.” His voice was neutral.

“He’s getting old, been sober for a long time. Well, mostly. We don’t know if he’s gone on a binge or got lost. He’s got some dementia too.”

I saw Heather looking at me, shocked. *The more people who knew, the better*, I thought. They can all keep a look-out. The old man needed all the help he could get. And so did I.

“That’s why I went to Molokai, thought he might be there, but he wasn’t.”

“When you probably don’t want to hang out, right?”

“It would be nice to see you, and Mandy too, but I don’t know what’ll happen between now and Tuesday. I’ve got to start over.”

“Look, come down to where I work whenever you can and I can take a break between lessons and we can talk. It’s on the beach, near the harbor, you know the corner at the breakwater?”

“What’s your job, Dave? You still teaching surfing?” I asked.

“Yes, as a matter of fact,” he said. “And I’m really busy. Have a school with a few other teachers so I can take a break if you come over.”

“Is tomorrow fine?”

“Any day’s fine. See how your search goes. I’ll see you whenever you can make it. Look for the big pink and green flags with turtles on them, Honu Surf School. I’ll be there. And I’m really sorry about your dad. Really.”

I said thanks and hung up. I walked over to hug Heather, who was standing on the *lanai*, staring out into the garden. Maybe Dave can help us in some way, Heather, I said. I had no idea how; at this point I was grabbing at straws. I wished I knew more people here.

Tears were streaking down Heather's face. One dropped off her chin, and I grabbed a paper towel and handed to her. She wiped it off.

Why did I listen to him? She walked to the kitchen, threw away the towel in the trash can under the sink and then turned to look at me. I had told them a long time ago about his dementia they might have found him by now.

I replied, probably wouldn't have made that much of a difference. I led her to a chair and sat down beside her. If she only knew how casually I'd taken this thing. I was the one who should be feeling guilty. I'd barely looked around Lahaina where my dad was most likely to be, had instead spent all of my time going to Molokai even after Heather had expressed her doubts. Her very correct doubts, as it had turned out.

What we need to do is mobilize everyone we can. Your church group, posters at the Supermarket, my friends on Facebook. Everybody. I'll get on my laptop tonight and start. And I'll call the local bars and hotels. You call all of your friends and spread the word.

On the way back to my hotel after Heather and I had spent the evening on our computers and on the telephone, I decided I'd drive to one of the few places my dad had liked that wasn't a bar. It was late, but the Bay Club would still be open. It would be more effective to talk to them in person than on the phone. What if someone was off shift when the story had first circulated, and then got back to work, spotted the old man and shooed him back into the darkness . never thinking to call the police or get

him help? I knew how much work it took to keep restaurant staff on top of changes in the specials menu, let alone anything else. I headed North, past Kaanipali.

Heather had said she'd already made sure that the local spots, like the P.I., had posters but maybe these slightly more distant places, off the main tourist route, hadn't got the word yet. I'd often been near there to snorkel at the Kapalua marine reserve, but I'd never been in the restaurant. When my dad was still hale and hearty, during his more sober periods, this was his favorite place, where he came for birthdays and special occasions. Not with me, though. He'd told me it wasn't a good spot to take kids, too expensive.

In my house, on the dining room sideboard, there was a silver-framed photograph of my dad and Heather at the Bay Club, wide smiles on their faces, on the day they got married. Heather had sent it to me with a letter announcing the big event. At that point I hadn't yet met Heather; I didn't know my dad had a new girlfriend, let alone a third wife. He'd done the same with Ming. I wondered if my dad had told them ahead of time that he had a daughter. But I appreciated the picture and Jess loved it. It was thoughtful of Heather to send it. Jess would point it out to friends when they came over, though she had been upset that they hadn't asked her to be a flower girl. To be in a wedding seemed to be her life goal at the moment.

The building was dark; the lot empty except for one dusty car that looked like it had been there forever, its windscreen festooned with parking tickets. I parked, got out and walked to the entrance where a black and white notice said the place had closed down weeks before. My dad couldn't have made it this far from Lahaina on foot anyway, I realised. I wasn't thinking straight. What if the dementia was contagious, or genetic, and I already had it?

I headed back to the highway and drove farther north, not sure where I was headed. Away from Lahaina it got less and less populated. The entire coast up here was fringed with rocky inaccessible coves, and vine-covered wilderness. Surfers hiked down to them, and a few little houses were tucked in here and there, but there were miles of unexplored areas. And then the other side of the island, the Hana side, was endless rainy jungle. Someone could disappear there and never be found. It was pointless to look for him myself. Time to go back to the hotel, get some sleep. I made a U-turn.

But as I got closer to Lahaina, I started looking down each crossroad, just in case a stumbling figure was in sight. Every cane field I passed I wondered if my dad was lying in it. At one point I turned down one of the dirt roads and stopped. I wound down the window and called into the darkness. "Dad? Can you hear me Dad? I love you. Please come home." Then I sat and cried, clinging onto the steering wheel for long minutes, snot streaming from my nose. When I saw another car turn in behind me, I started the engine and reversed out, hoping their lights wouldn't reveal my tear-stained face.

Dave's Apartment

Summer 1991

It should have been an idyllic summer: a boyfriend . well, a boy who was a friend and who kissed me sometimes . a job, friends . well, drinking buddies, at least . but I felt detached and distant, shut off. In the back of my mind was always the question about what to do next, and my shame about messing up my college career. Once I called my mom and asked if I could have another chance at it, but she said, "Maybe next year, Megan, but you'd have to earn some money first and then get a loan or something to help pay for it." I knew my dad was worried about his new business and had no extra money. There was no way he would help me.

When schools went back and the tourist traffic to Maui slowed down, I was fired: "Nothing personal, man. Last in, first out." Dave managed to keep his job. He said it was because the guys could carry more trays than the girls, and said I should have worn sexier bikini tops, or padded ones. But then he added, "Just kidding, I was hired two months before you." After that, it was much harder to stay in contact; he stopped coming over for lunch and he didn't return my calls. At first I would wait for him after work, expecting that we would still go along with the crowd to the beach and for drinks. But soon most of them had left, too. And Dave usually said he was going surfing. Eventually I stopped trying and he didn't contact me again.

Sometimes I met up with Hardy or had a beer with one of the guys from the P.I. My dad would get so mad at me when I came home even slightly intoxicated it wasn't really worth it. "Yes, have a drink. But don't get drunk. It's dangerous. Learn how to say no." It made me so angry I could barely stop myself from yelling at him. Instead I would go to bed, my dad following me down the hallway lecturing me the

whole way. I had to shut the door to the den to get him to stop. Sometimes he would stand outside and carry on harassing me until Ming's daughter would complain about the noise.

She hadn't gone back to high school. Maybe she had graduated. I couldn't have cared less. Her name was Leilani, for shit's sake. As if she was a real Hawaiian. Why couldn't they have named her a normal Chinese name? Or Japanese, or whatever she was. I hated it how people appropriated the names of famous Hawaiian royalty. You should have to get permission from the family, or something. They should have copyrighted them.

Leilani hung around the den on the unmade couch (my bed) and watched television, her collection of nail polish bottles clinking against each other as she chose yet another new color. It seemed like she painted her nails at least three times a day. Or she exercised, sweating furiously to a video of Jane Fonda aerobics. At the beginning I tried to talk to her, but she didn't answer, not even with a yes or no. She looked through me, like I was invisible. So I decided to ignore her. Her being there hadn't seemed to make Ming any happier. In fact she acted angrier by the day. There was an uneasy truce between Leilani and me to stay out of each other's way as much as we could, especially while my dad was away at his factory.

My dad eventually told me that I had to help Ming with the cooking, since I wasn't working any more. "You can't snorkel all day," he said. I hated it and she wasn't too happy either. She would thrust vegetables at me, and then a knife, the sharp end towards me . not the polite or safe way I had been taught . and when I started cutting them up she would wrest the whole bunch away, perform a complicated ablution of one kind or another, rinsing sideways, or in layers, or from the top, depending on the vegetable. I was supposed to memorise which vegetables took which sort of bathing,

and dry them as gently and carefully as other people towelled their new-borns. Only then would she show me how to chop them.

But she was so fast I could barely tell what she was doing. I was scared to look away from her fingers, which she barely seemed to notice. I expected the end of one of them to come off at any instant, so rapidly did the blade slice through the greens. I winced when she looked away or when the phone rang. *Someone should be watching*, I thought. It was like being a passenger in a car when the driver starts texting.

And the chopping, oh my God. First of all, it wasn't just chopping. It was dicing, and julienning, and slicing, and cubing and carving. Each one required a different way of holding the knife. Often a different sort of knife. And the knives required their own babying, having to be washed in lukewarm water, handles not getting *too* wet, but wet enough to get clean, and then oiled and wrapped and slotted into exactly their unique place in the knife drawer. I'd never seen a knife drawer. I used to mumble as I did it: %Get a life, lady,+or some variation thereof, usually much ruder than that. I tried to be as deviant in my *sotto voce* insults as she was with her tools of torture.

The worst part was that I was required to be in the kitchen by nine a.m. sharp, breakfasted and dressed, my hands washed, my nails short and my hair pulled back *in a hair net*. I'm not kidding. Ming liked to cook in the morning and then go out. She prepared as much as she could for the evening meal, in advance. I was free from noon on, but before that I had to try to learn from a teacher who didn't want to be teaching. And my stepsister could sleep as long as she wanted, and then mosey into the kitchen and eat anything she wanted. If she ate what Ming had prepared for dinner, we had to make more.

If my dad came home for lunch, Ming would freak. She would make him a sandwich and shoo him out of the kitchen to eat in the den by himself. She didn't like him in the kitchen. The only day he was allowed in was on Sunday, when he made us all brunch.

If he caught me watching TV, he'd ask, "You quit early?"

"We're finished."

My dad would look at me suspiciously and call out to Ming, "Do you need Megan to clean up?" She wouldn't. She never did. She didn't like me in the kitchen one minute more than she had to. Then he would find me something else to do. Now that he was sober he seemed to be a DIY maniac. There was always sanding, or painting, or dusting the shelves in the garage.

The only benefit, as I saw it, of doing so much work around the house was that it kept my dad from nagging me about what my plans were for the rest of my life. Once my mom had called to check when I was coming back to California, but I'd told her I was doing a cooking course. *And so I was*, I thought, startled to feel a small rush of pride.

One Saturday morning I realised I had learned enough to surprise my dad by helping him with his brunch the next day. I'd still got some money from working at the Luau; I'd use some of it to buy some fancy cheeses and herbs that my dad didn't normally use. Maybe bake some bread. I'd make a salad too; Ming and Leilani would like that.

My dad had his car out on errands and Ming had probably gone to her mah-jong club. Who knew where her zombie daughter was. Probably painting her nails in the bathroom. Or making herself vomit in there. I took my dad's rusty bike. I could put the groceries in the basket.

I cycled slowly through the hot streets, past the prison and the MacDonalds and the tattoo parlor, into the Foodland parking lot. All the rental cars gleamed too brightly in the strong sun. There were far more of them than of the locals cars. You could spot a rental car because it was so clean and sparkling. Locals cars were usually dull and old, the upholstery cracked from the sun. I parked the bike in the alley across from Nagasako hardware, where I could see it from inside the grocery store. It didn't have a lock and I wanted to keep an eye on it. There wasn't much crime but Ming had her purse taken from a restaurant and she would kill me if the bike got stolen.

I got some Roquefort cheese and an Italian one I'd never heard of. I bought myself my own chopping knife, so I wouldn't have to use Ming's when I was cooking with my dad. While I was standing at the cash register in the store, looking out at the bike while I paid for my purchases, I saw Dave walk past. He was heading down the alley.

The clerk looked at me. %Have you got your *kama'aina* card?+

I tore my gaze away from the door. %What?+

%Our locals card? For discount?+

%My dad's got it.+

%What's his address? I'd put it in the book for you. Loco to not get the discount .

12 dollars off if you *kama'aina*.+

I couldn't think of the address. I wanted to catch up with Dave and find out where he was going, if he had any time to spare. It had been a long time since we had seen each other. Maybe we could hang out together for a little while. I imagined him hugging me, the smell of his sweat mixed with wetsuit. I missed him so much.

%16 Adio,+I finally remembered.

The clerk carefully wiped his hands on his apron and slowly entered the address into the book. When I ran out of the door I glimpsed Dave going up the stairs of the same apartment where my dad and I had lived so many years before, the place where Hardy had picked coconuts for me. What a trip.

"Hey, Dave," I called out, my heart pounding.

He was putting the key in the lock and glanced down at me. "Hey!" he said, and then turned back towards the door as if he was desperate to get inside. Maybe he needed to pee.

"Long time no see," I added.

For a moment he stood still, his hand on the door knob. "Maybe you should come up," he said, and I began to wonder if I should've gone straight home. Had I done something terrible without realizing it? Hurt his feelings somehow? Or was he tired of me? I carried the bike up and left it on the landing outside. My legs felt weak.

It was weird to be inside the apartment again. The couch from the Salvation Army had been along the back wall where now there was a table stacked high with surfboards of all shapes and sizes. I'd spent hours and hours on that couch, watching the TV in the corner, having to get up during every commercial to readjust the aerial my dad had twisted out of a hanger. There was a big box of surfboard wax where the TV had been. No other furniture.

"I'm starting a business," he said. "A surf school, where you teach the tourists how to surf. You'd be surprised how many want to learn."

"Sounds good," I said, "at least as good as the Luau." We laughed.

"We've got to tell you something," Dave said. "If we want to sit anywhere it's going to have to be on the bed."

“You know I stayed here with my dad?” I asked him. “For about three, maybe four, Christmases? From when I was about twelve. No, eleven. I must have been eleven.”

He stopped walking towards the bedroom door, and his eyes got serious. He looked sad. *I am truly an idiot*, I thought.

“I guess it doesn’t matter if we sit or not. We need to talk. It’s about your dad.”

Now I knew I shouldn’t have called out to him. Nothing good was going to come out of this.

“I had to stop coming to your house, Megan. Ming told me something. Maybe you know about it?”

“Should I?”

“Ming said your dad’s having a thing with her daughter. Ming’s trying to decide if she should leave your dad. If it’s true. Leilani’s kind of mixed up, she says. But your dad’s worse.”

I leaned against the wall and closed my eyes.

“You mean, a thing, like sex?”

“You didn’t know? Ming said Leilani told her they’re having an affair.”

“No.” I shook my head. The room spun. “I don’t think he’d do that.”

“I’m sorry, Megan. But I thought you should know.”

He came closer and hugged me. I wanted to lie with my head on his chest and cry and cry and cry. Dave took his arms away and kept talking. I held him tighter. He patted me on the shoulders, again and again. The room spun and I closed my eyes.

“I really liked you, Megan. But you were so standoffish. It seemed like you just wanted to be friends, and I wanted more. And then Ming started whispering to me

about this stuff, like she expected me to do something about it, and the whole thing got too much for me. I didn't want to hang out there any longer.

"You liked me?"

He stepped away. "Yeah, Megan, I did. Then I met this girl named Mandy working at the Luau. She's living here with me now."

"Oh, yeah, cool. Yeah, I know Mandy. Blonde girl. Surfer, right?" My vision blurred. "Hey, Dave, I've got to go," I said. I ran outside and dragged the bike down the stairs, cycling back to my dad's as fast as I could. I dropped it on the driveway and headed inside without removing my shoes. I threw the bag of groceries at the mirror in the hallway. I heard the knife hit, and a splinter appeared in the bottom corner. I dared someone to come out and yell at me. The house stayed quiet.

I walked to the den and sat on my bed. I wondered where Leilani was right now, where my dad was. The long errands my dad went on . weren't they usually when Leilani was also out of the house? He'd seemed so energetic; he'd claimed it was because he was enjoying his new shaping business with Hardy. And Ming had been angrier than usual the last few weeks. I'd suspected my dad sometimes had a drink in secret when he was supposed to be dry. He lied about stupid things. How would I know if he was capable of a kind of incest? I never knew when I could trust him. I ran to the bathroom and gagged. I wanted to throw up but nothing came.

Then I stuffed some clothes into a backpack and headed away from the house, towards town. Later I realized I'd packed four shirts and only one pair of shorts, but it didn't matter to me what I owned or what I wore.

As I walked fast down Wainee Street, almost running, I passed the cemetery of the Waiola Church, then of the Hongwanji Mission: rows after rows of burial sites. It was a street of the dead. I noticed how the faded grey of the gravestones, many half-

toppled, as if they had been pushed aside when souls fled their captivity, was a gentle contrast to the pink, yellow and white frangipani blossoms hanging from the trees. Orange earth edged the street, and bright green perfect . as perfect as a putting green . lawns fronted the churches where the ground had been watered and mowed regularly.

Everything popped with color; I felt like I was looking through goggles underwater, into a tank brimming with tropical fish. I swam forward with each stride. The air was thick as water, and there was sweat on my back under my pack, and tears streaming down the sides of my face. Sounds came from afar, as if I was below the surface. Someone honked when I swam onto the street, and I paddled back onto the edge. At the Catholic Church I hesitated. I could see that the main doors were open. What would happen if I walked in and collapsed onto a pew, and waited for someone to help me? Were churches supposed to be sanctuaries? Would anyone come?

What if my dad came after me? Would he be willing to talk about it? Or more likely, would he pretend there was nothing wrong? I wouldn't be able to face that: I started to hurry, my impulse to find somewhere to hide. I had to get off the streets, so no one could find me. I remembered the place where I'd come across Brad, all those years before. I wondered if people were still living there. It was somewhere near Mala Wharf.

At the next street I turned left and headed towards the beach. I knew a few guys who hung out at the bottom of the royal canoe pavilion, now nothing more than a thatched roof and a trickle of water; some of them had shared a house with me and my dad on Front Street. They would be able to find me somewhere inconspicuous; but then I'd have to talk to them. No. I swerved away from the beach in case they

were in their regular spot, playing volleyball. Kids' voices rang out from King Kamehameha III Primary School as I walked past. The crossing guard, an old lady wearing a neon vest, stood ready for the kindergartners to go home. Her feet were encased in bright orange shoes, almost as big as her stop sign.

I skirted under the giant banyan tree, the emaciated, bearded man as usual standing on one corner preaching, spit spraying from his mouth. When I walked past the Pioneer Inn I wondered if I would find any of my dad's old drinking buddies inside. What would happen if I went in there and told them all that my father was f-f-fō ? I couldn't say the word to myself. My brain jumped around it, refusing to spell it out. The only thing I could imagine saying to them was, *My father is doing something with my stepsister!* And trying to explain what I meant by *something*? They'd laugh themselves sick. I felt tears gather in my eyes. The parrot guy was staring at me. He wouldn't remember me posing there, three parrots on my shoulders, for a picture to take home to my mom. That had been years ago, when I still wanted to impress my mom, and please her, and make her jealous of my trips to Maui, too, all at the same time. I wished I was a little girl again.

In four more blocks the beach would begin again. I needed to get through the Front Street crowds, and then turn down at Baby Beach. I would look like another tourist, a European backpacker maybe. The smell of burgers wafted out from Kimos, where the hostess knew me. She'd worked at the Luau for a while. Maybe Dave had told her; maybe she knew all about it. I looked her in the eye and nodded, pretending I was fine. She looked at me quizzically, and I called out to her, *I'm going snorkelling,* waving casually as I passed, as if my time was precious. She shrugged. I felt hungry, and wondered how much cash I had with me. I had some money left

from working, but most of it was in a savings account at Bank of Hawaii, and I hadn't brought my bank book with me. It was in the house, in the closet in the den.

When I got down to the beach I pulled out my wallet. I had fourteen dollars and some change, but there was no way I was ever going back to my dad's again. I'd call my mom and see what she could do. Maybe she could wire me some money and arrange a plane ticket. But right now I wanted to find somewhere quiet and curl up in a ball.

Near the end of the beach, next to the Buddhist graveyard, were a few wispy trees clinging to little bits of earth mixed in with the sand. I sat with my back wedged against the exposed roots. I watched the boats bob at their moorings. Cars drove over the bridge to the new Safeway mall; probably time for the *keiki hula*. Tourists loved to see the little girls all dressed up in their bikini tops, grass skirts and *leis*, moving to canned Hawaiian music. And not have to go outside, but sit inside the air-conditioned food court of the mall, eating shave ice, thinking they were acting like real Hawaiians. Buses from the big hotels up the coast came there in droves.

Creeps.

At first I felt numb and stupid. Then as time wore on . I didn't know how long . I felt rage build up inside me. I leapt up and kicked the tree, again and again. Finally I felt pain in my foot and crawled back to my seat next to the roots. Within a minute I was asleep.

When I woke up, the sun was low in the sky in front of me, sliding down into Lanai. Though I could tell my face was sunburnt, I felt rested and happy for a few seconds until I remembered what had happened a few hours before. Then my stomach knotted and my head ached. My foot throbbed. I needed to find a phone and try to make a collect call home. And get something to eat. But when I started

gathering up my belongings, I saw that my backpack was open, my wallet with the driver's license, thank God, still there, but gaping open like a dead dog's mouth. I considered walking into the valley and going back to sleep. It would be warm at night. Lots of people were homeless . you saw them all the time. You could probably get food from the dumpsters behind the rental condos up near Kaanapali.

Instead I did something I had never done, and decided to use my mom's American Express card. She'd given it to me years ago, for emergencies only, Megan! Thank God it still worked. I bought myself a sandwich, asked for cash back, and then called a cab for the West Maui airport. At the counter I bought a ticket for the next flight out. Any island, I said. It was going to Kauai. The sooner I could get somewhere, the sooner I could get a job and pay my mom back. I sat in the lounge and folded and unfolded the card until it broke. I threw the pieces into three different trash cans around the waiting area and then sat down to wait the two hours until the flight was called. I had forty-nine dollars and seventy seven cents in my pockets. *Kauai*, I thought to myself. *I've never been there. Let the adventure begin.*

Surfing Lessons

December 11, 2011

I woke up the next morning with acid in my mouth. Last night, after drying my tears, I had headed to Blackie's and ordered a drink. I expected to see someone I knew, but none of my old friends or any of my dad's old drinking buddies were around. I guess most of them had left town, or died. Probably died. A lot of time had passed since my dad had been a regular at any of the bars around town. Even longer since he'd been at the P.I. He'd been pretty much sober for years and years now. Why had we thought he might have gone off on a binge? It probably wasn't the case at all. We needed to look harder. I asked at the bar if anyone had seen him, and left a poster so that they could check if anyone matching his description came in. They'd told me they had one already, but I'd insisted pretty loudly that they take another, just in case. I guess I'd had one too many glasses of wine.

I lay in the bed a long time without getting up. There were people I still needed to contact and more posters to print, but I wanted to put my head under the covers and sleep the whole day away. Calling Jess and Steven seemed like too much effort; instead I texted a cheery message, promising to call a little later. A faint sound of singing drifted in the window. I realized it must be Sunday. Heather would be headed for church at Holy Innocents. I hoped someone had cleaned up the playground. I looked at my watch. It would be a good time to walk to the beach, see if I could chat to Dave.

I had to walk by the church to get to the corner of the beach where the surf school was situated. I hoped Heather would be facing the altar and not notice me skulking past. The congregation inside was chanting a prayer:

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us + The words repeated in my head as I followed the sidewalk. A few times I had to step off onto the verge to let groups of Tongans get around me; most of them were too big for both of us to fit on the pavement together, the men in expensive three-piece suits and the woman in fancy dresses, heels and hats. They must be on their way to Holy Innocents. They used the church every Sunday after the Episcopal service; in exchange they trimmed the coconut trees and picked the coconuts, which was an essential task. More people were injured from falling coconuts than from car accidents, or so went tropical lore.

Dave was in the water when I got to the pink turtle signs poking out from a camp of surfboards, towels and cooler boxes. I could see him pushing two little kids on bright foam boards, encouraging them to paddle. A young boy turned into the wave and surfed it towards them. Dave seemed unfazed. The boy appeared to be in control, turning away from the kids and falling back into the water just when I started to panic that he was getting too close to them. Dave hadn't glanced at him. And he looked so graceful. I wished I had taken up surfing earlier, when I still came to Maui every year. I'd tried it a few times, and found it really difficult. I felt comfortable under the surface, but not on it. Not enough coordination, I guessed. Maybe Jess would enjoy it. I should sign her up with Dave next time we came here.

Want to book for lessons?+A teenager stood with a clipboard.

No thanks. I'm a friend of Dave's. He knows I'm coming.+

Boss!+the helper called. Our mates here?+I heard an Australian accent.

Dave looked up and waved. He gestured to me with two fingers up in the air. I nodded. It meant either two minutes or a peace sign; either way, I would sit on the

sand until he came in. The sun felt warm on my face. The Australian brought me a cranberry Snapple from a cooler box, and then walked off to approach some other onlookers. Dave had trained her well.

On the way up the beach to join me, Dave grabbed a towel from a pile near the cooler box and wrapped it around himself. He handed off the kids to their parents and then plopped down next to me. When he leaned over to give me a damp hug, I could smell the salt in his hair. My cheek came away wet. I wiped it off with a sandy hand. Dave laughed. Use the edge of my towel, he said.

Maybe this was what it would be like to have had a big brother, I thought. Someone you felt good around, but didn't make you nervous. Who kind of took care of you without expecting much in exchange.

So tell me what's the story with your dad, Dave said.

And who wasn't afraid of getting straight to the nitty-gritty, I added to myself.

We've got nothing. I don't know what to do now. I didn't take it seriously for the first day, and then I went to Molokai on a wild-nene chase, and I'm back at square one.

I filled him in on the police's lack of progress, and the newspapers, and my dad's dementia. I told him about the phone call that had seemed to have started it all off. Or maybe it was a coincidence, who knew?

Dave looked out to sea, his face wistful. My dad died last year, did I tell you?

Hey, sorry, Dave. I rubbed his brown arm, which was warm and strong under my palm.

You don't realise how much they're part of your life, until you can't talk to them again. Especially when you don't get along that great. I hadn't seen him in eight years, since Mandy's and my wedding.

That's too bad.+

Anyway. He sat up straight. What can I do to help?+

We've got some posters up but I'm going to print some more, take some to the other side of the island. Maybe you can help me put them up. And tell everyone you know. Someone must have seen him. I've posted it on Facebook.+

Yeah, and Mandy knows a lot of people. We'll share it on Facebook, too. Get more locals involved.+

Anything I can help.+

Dave looked toward his assistant, who was standing with a pale beer-bellied man. Guess it's time to go back to work. I see my eleven o'clock is here. We stood up and dusted the sand off our butts.

I faced him and gave him another hug. I wasn't normally a big hugger. *Heather must be wearing off on me*, I thought. After a tiny, surprised moment, he hugged me back. Then he patted me on the shoulder a few times, and stepped away.

It's strange that that girl, well, woman now, Leilani, is here in Lahaina at the moment, too, he said. Does she know your dad is missing?+

I stared at him. Leilani? Leilani?+

Yeah. You know, that Leilani who was, or is, your stepmother's . I mean your ex-stepmother's daughter? The one who lived with you guys that summer we worked at the Luau? The one who said your dad, uh, your dad, you know? +Dave's face was scrunched up in distaste.

I'll never forget her. The toenail Leilani. We laughed at the memory and then stood awkwardly for a few seconds, remembering everything else that had happened that summer.

Yes, yes, that one.+

"You're kidding me, right? You've really seen her?"

Dave was in a hurry, eager to end the conversation. He kept looking towards his client, and waving at him reassuringly. The Australian was holding up a long surfboard, measuring it against the man's body, and he was shaking his head, gesturing that he wanted something shorter.

"Oh, God, an ex-surfer. They're the worst," Dave sighed. "Gotta go, Megan. No, I'm not kidding."

"Just tell me where she's staying," I said. "Or at least where you saw her."

"I ran into her at the P.I. I think she's working there for the Christmas season. That's all I can tell you. She's good riddance, anyway. Hey, we'll be in touch. I'll call you later. *Aloha*."

I thanked him and watched as he jogged across the sand to the man, who was smoking a cigarette, a frown on his face.

Hearing Leilani's name again was like hearing the rumbles of an earthquake before you felt it. Scary. Displacing. Made you want to run, but all the while you knew there was nowhere to go. I had thought she was out of our lives forever. Who the hell did she think she was, coming back here?

I stood on the beach for a few minutes before heading towards the Pioneer Inn. Dave waved to me as I walked away, and winked. He was still on the beach practicing jump-ups with his client, the poor guy's beer belly getting in the way. So far he'd only managed to get up once.

It was a short distance to the P.I., too short; within five minutes I was negotiating my way through the tourist crowds clustered on the pier in front of the fishing and whale-watching boats, shaking my head at the crews sales pitches, not today, not today, thanks. I climbed the ramp to the street and found a tap where I washed my

feet and hands free of sand. The P.I. was directly in front of me. It was a wonderful building, an old-fashioned colonial mansion, surrounded by a shady porch and wooden balustrades. I knew it had been around since whaling days. It had certainly been preserved well. I tried to make an overnight reservation for Steven and me once, for our tenth wedding anniversary, only to discover that it was booked up for months in advance. The nightly noise from the rowdy crowd in the dim, scarred-wood bar and the parrots' continual screeching added to the place's appeal for people searching for a whiff of authenticity. *No wonder my dad loved hanging out here, I thought. It must have been hard for him to give it up.*

The reception area was off the veranda. A wooden statue of a pirate stood guard. The woman at the desk was asking an elderly couple if they could manage their own bags, or if she should call a porter. *There's no elevator in the building, she warned, but I've given you a room at the back over the courtyard. It's slightly quieter there.* They smiled gamely. The husband hoisted the suitcases onto his skinny shoulders and began to stagger up the polished stairs, his plump wife grasping the shiny brass rail with each step, her knuckles white with the effort and her forehead glistening with sweat. The desk clerk hovered behind both of them, making waving motions with her arms as if to waft them upwards. I wondered what would happen if they lost their footing and tumbled backwards onto her. She was so slight she would hardly break their fall. I watched with unconsciously held breath until the three of them safely reached the upstairs landing. The clerk pointed them in the direction of their room and headed down, smiling at me.

Could this woman be Leilani? She had dark hair and looked Asian, but she also looked healthy and happy. Nothing like the scowling temporary stepsister I remembered.

'You checking in?' she asked me. I stared at her. Maybe this wasn't her. It could be, though. It might be.

'Can I assist you?' she asked again, looking at me with curiosity and what might be a tiny edge of hostility. But then she smiled and I thought I'd been imagining it.

I realised I didn't know what to say, or ask. 'Is there somewhere I can get some, uh, tea?' I asked.

'You're looking for tea?' I nodded, avoiding her gaze.

'You can probably get it at the coffee shop on the corner,' she responded. 'You walked right past it on your way in here. Didn't you see it?'

'Oh, yeah, that place on the corner. Yeah, I guess that's the coffee shop. Right!' Nodding and backing away, blushing now, I thanked her, my thoughts confused.

What the hell was I doing? What did I think I could achieve?

'Hey, wait a minute. Aren't you Megan Wallace?'

I looked at her, my pulse racing. She stepped closer to me. Curved black lines of make-up outlined her top eyelashes, and a thin fine peachy powder covered her skin. Her lips were shaped like rosebuds and coated in a sparkling pink gel. *The kind of thing Jess would love*, I thought. Little twinkling diamonds sat on the lobes of her tiny ears.

'Hi Leilani. I used to be your stepsister, or something. Don't you remember me? Mings' daughter?'

The parrot squawked in the bar next door, 'Bolly wanna beer!' It was either the same parrot. They lived up to ninety years, the African greys. Or they had taught it to say the same things as the old one had. I felt trapped. Heat rose to my face.

"Oh, hey, wow. Leilani! I didn't recognize you. What are you doing here?" I immediately regretted the question. It wasn't strange for her to be here. She'd grown up in Hawaii somewhere, hadn't she? But she didn't seem offended.

"I've got a vacation job, for a couple of months. Just broke up with my boyfriend, in Texas. Wanted to have a change of scenery. You?"

Could she have forgotten that my dad lived around the corner? That she'd lived there, too, for at least a summer, possibly being assaulted, until she and her Mom had run off with my dad's money and his reputation? I looked at her, and she smiled a friendly smile, nodding encouragement for me to answer.

"I'm visiting my dad, you know" and I gestured inland, towards the house. There was no way I was going to tell her about my dad's disappearing act. She'd think he'd abandoned us, or gone on a bender, and that he deserved to be lost. She wouldn't understand how old and frail the guy was, how serious the situation was. She'd probably laugh.

"Still on Adjo?" Leilani asked me, shaking her head in wonder. "How long has it been. Like, over twenty years?" Another glittery smile.

"Yeah, yeah. Still on Adjo."

"Creatures of habit, the old ones. My mom too. She's lived in Honolulu since, uh, well, uh, a long time." A brief spasm of dismay wrinkled across Leilani's face. Then it smoothed out again. Another warm smile. "Anyway, great to see you, Meggo. Or I guess you always preferred Megan? I've got to get back to work." She looked towards the reception desk where a woman in a big sun hat was waiting. "I'll be with you in a moment, ma'am," Leilani called out. She touched me on the arm and hurried off.

Assuming that Leilani was too busy to notice if I really went into the coffee shop, I went the other way around the Inn, back towards the open space on the corner. A great place to watch the boats exiting and entering the harbor, the Hauloa stone in the tiny park was supposed to be a sacred healing place, where royalty had given birth, but the town officials had a hard time keeping the homeless from camping there and stopping library goers from parking on the patchy grass. I stood quietly for a few seconds, taking deep breaths. A ferry going to Lanai hooted its horn as it left the protected channel behind the breakwater.

I felt rattled after the encounter with Leilani. Why had I bothered to seek her out? And she seemed so friendly, so, well, normal. Not my type, with the make-up and bling and little black heels. But maybe not a bad person. Certainly not the wreck I remembered shivering on the couch, the reek of acetone her harsh signature scent.

I headed into the library. Maybe I could sit a bit and read the paper for a few minutes. After my dad and I had visited, I had often been here on my own, but couldn't check out any books; my dad had lost the form for the library card and then got mad at me when I nagged him to get another one.

One of the posters advertising his disappearance was pinned to the community bulletin board. In the picture he looked old and vulnerable, his eyebrows wild and his teeth crooked, the light in his eyes more crazed than cheerful. I wondered whether anyone would notice how much I looked like the man in the poster, and if they would feel sorry for me if they did. Or were they thinking *why's this woman sitting here reading when she should be out looking for her poor addled father?*

I headed towards the door to go back to Heather's. On the concrete path back to the road I noticed a bank of pay phones where a ragged figure was fingering the returned change cups, hoping for a forgotten quarter. They snapped shut with an

almost musical metallic clang as the man worked his way down the row, shaking his head in despair each time one came up empty. Wasn't this where the phone call had originated . the one Heather said my dad had answered the day he disappeared? I called her. She answered before the second ring.

"The ones near the library? Yes. The call came from one of them. Early afternoon on November 28th," she said. "I brought my fold-up chair and sat in that park for a few days after I found that out. I watched those phones for hours and hours but I never saw anything suspicious, or anyone I knew. The cops made me move eventually. I felt too foolish to admit what I was doing."

"Why hadn't she told me that? My dad wasn't the only one getting forgetful. Heather was fifteen years younger than my dad but she wasn't a spring chicken either."

"Do you know what Leilani looks like, Heather? Ming's daughter?"

"No. I never had met her or Ming. But your dad showed me some pictures of them once."

"Would you be willing to come over to the P.I.? Go into the reception area and look at the woman working there? But don't be too obvious. I want you to get a look at her."

"Why? What's the point of that?"

"Maybe she's the one who made the call, Heather. Then if you know what she looks like you can remember her if she comes back or tries to call again. Get her to talk to you so you'd recognise her voice too. It's worth a try."

A pause.

"All right, if you really think so. I can be there in fifteen minutes. Should I meet you?"

“No, I don’t want her to see me with you. She’s a petite Asian, about five years younger than me, sparkly earrings. I’ll wait in the art gallery, the one at the back of the parking lot behind the Historical Society. Come there after you check her out. Make sure she doesn’t follow you.”

I felt invigorated. I imagined Leilani calling my dad, demanding cash, in fact, yes, blackmailing him, my dad angry, furious, yelling at her, stomping out, getting angry, running, running, blindly running and collapsing in a heap somewhere, nowhere to be found. And the whole time Leilani calculating how much she could get out of the poor, decrepit, addled old man, how long she could live off of his hush money and his shame. I was going to bring her down.

While waiting I texted Dave to find out how long Leilani had been working in Lahaina, if he knew. He answered back, “Before Thanksgiving. Maybe mid-November?” Half an hour later I saw Heather strolling towards me as I sat in the shade next to the art gallery. She was shaking her head. “I can’t tell you if she’s the same one as in the picture or not. I’m pretty sure I would remember someone like that, she’s so pretty. But I don’t. It could be her. I can’t tell you for certain.” Her face was pale and there was sweat running down her neck from her hairline. The top of her shirt was damp.

“Let’s get a drink at Coolers,” I said. We walked up the block to the little restaurant and found seats in the courtyard on the street. This had been one of my dad’s favorite restaurants in years gone by. When the waitress came she asked if we’d found him yet. “I ask everyone who comes in to keep their eyes open, and show them his picture,” she said. “Even tourists. You never know.” We thanked her and ordered iced teas and I asked for some water as well. I remembered my dad

always making sure I had enough to drink, warning me about getting dehydrated, especially during the vacations when I was snorkelling for hours every day.

I love that gift shop there. That's where I buy Jess and Steven's Christmas presents every year. Yours is easy. Heather smiled at me. For the last few years, since Heather was in the picture, I guessed they had sent me an expensive new snorkel and goggles, carefully wrapped in garish red and green Hawaiian gift wrap, the kind with a Hibiscus flower motif. It was a perfect gift. On the *Mele Kalikimaka* card was always written, Love from Dad and Heather. Though the Dad was the only part scratched out in my father's shaky handwriting, less legible with each year, I never fully realised until now that Heather was the one making all of the effort, from the shopping to the wrapping, to the boxing and sending. Always on time; in fact, usually early. Getting the gifts from Maui was the official start of Christmas as far as Jess was concerned. No doubt they were on their way to California as we spoke.

Heather read my mind. I've been a little slow this year, with your dad missing and all. But I managed to get them in the mail just before you arrived. They should get there any day now.

I patted her hand. That's very, very kind and loving of you. Jess will be so excited. Thank you. For a few moments we watched the passers-by. Some were licking cones from the Italian *gelateria* across from the restaurant. It hadn't been here last time I was here; by next time it would probably be gone again. Afternoon Mass at Maria Lanakila Catholic Church across the intersection had recently finished and a few people were making their way to their rental cars.

"You know that church is where Clive . Steven's dad . came when he left Kalaupapa, where they found him some food and a job until he could get back to his family on Kauai? I think he was still a teenager. Did you ever meet Clive, Heather?"+

She shook her head.

"He was a wonderful guy. I miss him. He never saw his dad after his mom and he went to Molokai. They think his dad might have died in California, in an internment camp, the ones they had for the Japanese during World War II, but they're not sure. He, the dad, left Kauai right after Clive's mom was taken to Kalaupapa. He said he wanted to enlist in the 442nd Regiment, the one that was mainly Japanese people from Hawaii, but no one ever heard of him again. Maybe he never knew that his son was alive and back at home. Or maybe he died in Europe. Those guys had 800 casualties in one battle alone, in France. Luckily Clive had lots of aunts and uncles around who took him in. It was a very close family. "+

"That's sad. It seemed like he was a great father to Steven. "+

"Yeah. He's still shocked, can't believe he's really gone. "+ Saying it made me see how much I'd underestimated Steven's grief, how I'd expected him . my confident, capable Steven . to snap back much quicker than I had after my mom died. And how terrible I'd feel if my dad died. When he died. I hoped it wouldn't be anytime soon. At least not this trip. Not on my watch. I felt tears come to my eyes again and forced them away.

Heather sipped her drink. She looked healthier now, her face back to its normal color and little dots of salt sprinkling her forehead where the sweat had dried.

"I guess we won't know if it was Leilani who phoned, or who did, until we find my dad, "+ I said.

Heather looked at me, her eyes serious. %an not sure if hed remember, Megan. Hed not in great shape. I mean, he wasnt, before he disappeared. Who knows what condition hed be in now?+She blew her nose on the napkin and looked away, trying to keep her face composed. She added, %We might never know what happened. You have to accept that. Maybe its one of those puzzles thatll never be solved.+

%Wed find him!+I noticed how panicked my voice sounded.

She nodded. %We will. I just dont know how, or when. It seems like weve done everything. I call the hospital and the police every morning and evening. Weve put up a hundred posters. My whole church is praying for him, and at this point it seems like the only positive thing left to do.+

A few days ago I would have scoffed at her faith. What was prayer in the face of the solid fact of someone either being found or not? But by now I was less confident of what was possible and what was not, game for anything. I felt tender and a little flayed, but also more open-minded and kinder. Id started to realize that each person who talked to us had had tragedy in their lives, and the light in their eyes was sympathy, not curiosity: that they werent just being polite when they expressed their concern. That light held me up, make me feel stronger. But it hadnt found my dad. Not yet.

Plate Lunch: Kauai

1991

When I look back on arriving in Kauai I see how lucky I was. I didn't realize it at the time, as none of us do. I had stopped in a coffee shop to eat, as soon as I got off the plane. A chalkboard outside had advertised Loco Moco Plate Lunch for a really good price. I knew it would be lots of calories, and so would probably last me the whole day. The waitress handed me a giant mess of two mounds of sticky rice, gravy, hamburger, eggs and macaroni salad, and then went back to talking to one of the locals sitting a few seats down at the counter. "We need another cook, she was saying, and then we can serve breakfasts too." I knew I'd got her attention with my order. Not many *haole* girls would have ordered plate lunch. And so I'd asked her when she came around again where I could apply for the cook job.

Princeville was a tiny town in those days, still is really. There were very few residents. There weren't many of them who knew how to chop and clean like I did, and fewer who would have done it for the salary they were paying. It didn't take much to get a trial run, and less to be hired permanently. Luckily for me I got paid in cash, daily, during my audition period so I could rent a room at a motel. I didn't have much left over to eat, but my appetite had vanished. I drank Cokes whenever I had a break. I was happy cooking in the hot little kitchen of the diner but I had no interest in making something for myself to eat.

Once I was hired permanently I started looking around for a place to live. The few apartments and houses for rent were out of my price bracket, more aimed at tourists than locals. In the evenings I had about half an hour after work to look for a place, before it got too dark. I started walking around the neighborhoods I liked, the ones

where I felt comfortable: small houses, unkempt lawns, kids' bikes rusting on the porches. One day I walked past a front garden that was like a commercial farm, full to bursting with vegetables in rows, tomatoes on vines, fruit trees on tidy espaliers and chickens rummaging underfoot. A small Asian man was on his knees weeding, but looked up at me as I walked by.

"What you want?" he called out.

I stopped walking and smiled at him, wondering if somehow I'd offended the old guy. "I'm looking for a place to stay," I said. "Sorry if I bothered you."

"No, maybe you found it." He laughed and pointed to the place next door. "They looking for a renter of their *ohana* house."

And then I saw the sign tucked in under the guava tree in the neighboring front garden. There was a phone number on it, and a price. I checked it twice to make sure I was reading it properly; not only could I afford it, I'd have something left over to buy food. Maybe I could buy a bike, or get a telephone line, eventually.

The Asian man got up off his knees and followed me into the neighbor's garden. "You don't need to call, just knock, they home," he encouraged me. When he saw me hesitate, he strode up the front walk and knocked firmly on the door. Someone called out from inside. I couldn't make out what they said.

"It's Clive!" the old man shouted back. "We found you a nice young lady for your *ohana* house. And that's how easy it was for me to find a home. It was a tiny place, like a little wooden shack, but clean and with running water. There was one bedroom, a bathroom, and a living space with a kitchen in the corner."

With my second pay check I bought a cheap bed to put my sleeping bag on, and a table. Anything else would have to wait. On the mainland you could usually take furniture when people left it out for the garbage trucks, but here you had to be

careful. People put out tables and chairs on their driveways, or sometimes flat screen TVs, where they would sit with their families in the evenings and talk, eat, play cards and gamble. Sometimes they'd watch TV. Often they'd sit in the dark and do nothing. I'd be walking down a dark street and been startled by a chuckle, or the flare of a match. It was amazing how quiet some of these big Hawaiians could be, like jungle cats.

In the evenings I usually slept, exhausted from the long strenuous hours spent working in the hot cafe. I wasn't ready to make friends yet; in any case most of the other employees were married and some had kids. I tried not to feel or think. I paid attention only to the things that made my body happy. My day revolved around them: the instant coffee in the morning, the iced tea with extra sugar I had instead of lunch (lemon was a fruit though, right?), the beers I had instead of dinner. Slicing the tomatoes as fast as I could until they were lined up like bloody corpses on the wooden chopping board, or using the food processor on pulse, *bah bah bah bah* like a machine gun. My favorite was turning something solid, like potatoes or carrots, into neat rows of uniform slices, soldiers from lumps. I liked snuggling into my sleeping bag at night knowing I was going to sleep solidly for at least several hours, no dreams, just the satisfying lack of consciousness one gets from day after day of using your body to its maximum.

My boss told me he liked my style. I think I'd won him over on the very first day when I'd arrived already wearing a hair net. He reminded me a little of Hardy, quiet and Hawaiian and solid. He would stand and watch while I chopped and cleaned, but instead of bothering me, it made me feel relaxed. When he told me he'd never seen anyone treat their knives so well, I felt like I was going to cry. No one had complimented me on anything in a long time. In a few weeks he added me to the

lunch shift. It made for longer days but I needed the money and I would rather work than think. I would never have imagined that Ming's sense of discipline would have resulted in me getting ahead in life, but in a tiny way, and when I needed it most, it was. I nodded a small thanks to her scowling spirit and wondered what had happened after I left.

Every time I thought of my dad I felt tired, my eyelids heavy and my brain filled with that kind of lethargy you feel when you are a millisecond away from sleep. I couldn't think about him without feeling woozy. I'd have to lie down and close my eyes, or if I was at work, lean against the counter and take deep breaths. I wanted to know the truth. I thought that if I knew the truth, I would then somehow know how to cope with the information. I would exist in this state for hours, or what felt like hours, occasionally rousing myself enough to try to think rationally about the accusation: testing what I knew of my father against the possibility of such an evil act. It made me crazy mad that I didn't have enough to go on. I wanted to be able to tell myself that there was no way he would have done such a thing, but the truth was I didn't know him well enough to be able to do that. We had spent little more than two weeks together, every year for eight years, and then this summer. Over and over again I analysed things he had told me, or things he had done.

One moment stuck in my head more than some of the others. My dad and I were eating late breakfast at the Pioneer Inn. It must have been a Sunday and one of the years when he was going to church, so he must have been sober too. Those years were the years we always had pancakes after church, when he was working and had enough money to go out to a restaurant now and then. He hadn't married Ming yet. He'd finished eating and was smoking a cigarette and had a far-away look in his eyes. I'd thought he was watching the boats chugging out into the ocean from the

harbor but then I realized he was watching a group of young women walk by, their hands full of shopping bags, laughing with each other. He lowered his voice and started to talk to me without turning to look at me, his tone a little bit bewildered and speculative. I felt like he wasn't talking to me, but to someone in his head.

"You know, Megan, I never had a sister, only my brother. I never had a girlfriend in high school. I guess I was too shy. And my parents were so strict."

"Yeah, Dad, me too. I mean, I haven't had a boyfriend yet."

He carried on as if he didn't hear me.

"The summer after my senior year, I had a construction job. I got into college and I was saving money for it. We were on a break. A group of girls walked past us, like those girls. Laughing, tossing their hair. I watched them and thought how foreign they were to me, like exotic animals in a zoo. The foreman must have seen me looking kind of dazed."

I laughed and he glanced at me and kept talking, still in a dreamy voice.

"He looked at me and said to me, they shit just like you do, you know. And the whole crew laughed and laughed. I turned red."

My dad glanced at me. I didn't know where to look. An image of a young woman sitting on a toilet, farting and then wiping her dirty bottom, filled my head. My face turned bright red and I felt trapped in the corner of the booth. Why couldn't he talk to me like a normal dad? God, I hated him.

But my dad acted like he didn't notice my discomfort. "You know, that guy really had my number. I don't know what I thought women did, but I had never imagined them doing *that*." Then he laughed, and waved at the waitress to bring the check, threw some money down and we left the restaurant. I avoided him for the rest of the day and at dinner we acted like nothing had happened.

I analysed all of our bad times together. The times he would mislead me about where he was going, if he had a job, if he was sober or not, when he didn't need to, when he was going to the market for a quart of milk. The days he promised me we would do things we never got around to. The nights when he brought a woman home and I had to pretend I was asleep while they grunted and sighed above me. The nights he drank himself to sleep. It wasn't a pretty picture, but none of it was enough to weigh in on one side of the scale or the other. None of it proved that he'd assaulted Leilani.

But gradually, moment by moment, I realized that I would never know the truth. Even if I could ask my dad, or Ming, or even Leilani, their answers might be lies. In this way I learned to shut it out of my mind, and kept working, and gradually made friends and became part of the life of the little village of Princeville.

After a few weeks, I bought goggles and a snorkel from a hardware store, but soon they were both leaking too much water to see or breathe. I threw them into a ditch at the side of the beach, and then retrieved them the next day to chuck into a trash can. My dad's voice in my head, successfully stilled in most other ways, nagged me about the littering. Finally I saved a little money and was relieved when I walked into a dive shop and saw some second-hand equipment, the stuff left over from rentals. It came back to me how to choose one that fit my mouth best, though these designs were far superior to the ones I'd used as a kid. After that, I was hooked, back in the bliss I felt when I was ten. One morning I found myself stirring some home-made ketchup and daydreaming about being underwater, unaware of my surroundings, and I had to wrench myself back into focus. On my days off I started spending so much time in the water that I got dehydrated and the back of my

neck burned, the rest of my body pale and pickled from the salt and from working inside all day.

What I really wanted to do was to learn to scuba dive, but there was no way I could afford the course. One day during break I was reading the local paper and saw an advertisement for a family fun day at the dive shop. Everyone welcome, it said. After work I had another shower and used deodorant. I still hadn't bought any new clothes except the closed shoes I had to get for my job, and decided a clean t-shirt had to be ok. For the first time in a while I washed my hair.

Clive was, as usual, working in his garden when I walked past. A little *hibachi* burned a few feet behind him. He always waved to me, but I hadn't talked to him again since he had helped me find my house. Now he called out, "Hey, Megan, come over for a burger!"

For a few seconds I hovered indecisively at the edge of the sidewalk. I didn't want to offend the old guy, but I felt like I had to make it to the dive shop; I felt kind of desperate about it, like it was a party I had been invited to. There wasn't much time left before the store would close. Before I noticed what he was doing, Clive had walked over to me and put a package in my hand, all wrapped up in foil.

"Um... I mumbled.

"I can see you're on your way somewhere. Take it for the road. Come another time. There's mayo and ketchup on that, and pickles. I felt such deep gratitude I was afraid tears would come to my eyes. I reached out my free hand to Clive and said, "Thanks. Thank you so much."

Two hours later I pulled it out of the bottom of my purse and heated it in my one pan on my little stove, eating it right before bed. Though it was all squashed it was delicious. The dive shop event had been a little disappointing; no solutions to the

money problem, but at least I had met a man who had told me about his new hobby of free diving, which sounded cool. At first I had thought he was telling me about a free-diving course, as in no cost; when I finally understood that he meant without extra air, I was both frustrated and intrigued. The guy had invited me to join in, had said he'd call me. I didn't admit that I didn't have a phone, told him I'd call him. He smiled and wrote down his number on a dive shop business card. People were pretty chilled here in Kauai. It suited me very well. I wanted to take my time about making new friends. I didn't want anyone to know my story.

Clive had a pattern. On Friday and Saturday evenings, he pulled out his *hibachi* and made food outside, sitting with his plate on the little *lanai* overlooking his garden. If he saw me walking back from work, he would call out, "Hey, Megan!" and waggle his beer at me, his eyebrows lifted quizzically. If it was hot, he'd be fanning himself with his large white hat. If I nodded, he would bring a beer to me and we would stand near the fence, leaning on it and chatting about the weather or the local news, or food. As time wore on, we began to walk through the garden, Clive commenting on the different fruit and vegetables. Now and then we would make it as far as the *lanai*, where we would sit with our legs up on the retaining wall, Clive eventually pressing food on me. I learned that one beer was Clive's limit. At first I suspected it was a matter of economy, yet when I brought along a six pack of Clive's favorites, Clive portioned them out over most of the rest of the month. I sensed that it was an unbendable rule: the way Clive did things, as carefully and with as much discipline as he tended his garden.

In early March, I left the restaurant kitchen, where I'd been washing pots and pans, to find a gale blowing outside. The sky was dark and the rain unusually cold. I waited on the porch for over an hour but it didn't abate. I peddled home on my

bicycle through the drenching rain as fast as I could. Water pulsed deep in the gutters. I was drying myself off when there was a knock on the door. Clive. I felt embarrassed about bringing him into my empty home; indeed, Clive looked around wildly, as if searching for all that was missing. Clive's smooth brown forehead was beaded with sweat or raindrops, or both.

"You got any crates, Megan? Boxes?"+

"Sorry . nothing like that. Why?"+

"We gotta evacuate. I can't leave my chickens."+

"Evacuate?"+

"It's on TV. Hurricane coming. Got to evacuate to the shelter. They let the animals come if they're in crates. No pigs though. Lucky Flea died last year . he'd be upset."+

I stared at him.

"My miniature pig, Flea."+

"Clive, wait . do we really have to evacuate? Isn't this just a big storm?"+

"Sometimes it's like a wall of water, Megan. Then the wind comes and almost blows your house down. Floods it. Better to be in the shelter, safe and with lights and water."+

We couldn't find any crates in the garage. The owners of the house were gone. We decided to put the two chickens in the trunk of Clive's tidy old Datsun. He wanted to spread newspapers down first, but the wind blew them into his face and he couldn't get them to lie flat. The chickens kept trying to escape from my arms where I was holding them gently pinned in a towel. I could feel their hearts beating furiously against my chest. The rapid swish-swish made me feel panicky.

"Forget about the paper, Clive, let's go!"+I shouted.

Clive nodded. He let go of the newspaper and it blew away down the street in a flash of white, like a ghost. I had to stop myself from running after it but made myself turn away. It was more important to get going. "Go to hell, Dad," I said to myself. I bundled the chickens into the trunk as gently as I could and then quickly closed it on them. I had seen how fast they could move if they wanted to.

We drove up the hill to the high school cafeteria. I wondered if this building was really going to be much stronger than my little house. It seemed less windy there, it was true, and the driving rain was less biting. The big windows, normally slid wide open, rattled as the wind gusted against them. On the leeward side of the building animals in crates barked, clucked and oinked. The prohibition against pigs had clearly been ignored. I thought I could hear a cow lowing. There were goats and ducks, too. A few owners hovered near the crates.

"Should we ask someone if Milly and Billy can share their crates?" Clive fretted. *The old man must be seriously distressed*, I thought. I'd never seen him so jumpy.

"They're safer in your trunk," I said to him. Surely the hurricane wouldn't blow the car away? "Let's go inside." I led Clive through the swinging doors.

It was then, while we sat at a picnic table, everyone around us eating or drinking coffee while kids slept on cots and blankets on the floor, the radio blaring with updates on the hurricane, that Clive told me the story of his childhood. Maybe he'd been reminded of it by our situation, or maybe he'd decided that it was time to tell me, or that I'd benefit from hearing it. Or maybe it was one of the stories he drew on when he was facing a long night with a new friend. He told me in one long stream of words while I listened, mesmerised.

"It was 1941," he began. "I woke up, jolted and in the dark, I felt that the bedroom walls had shrunk and were surrounding me as closely as a blanket. The whole room

moved, like it was a box being carried with me inside of it. Was this an earthquake, as my grandparents had experienced, long ago, in Japan? I cried out and my voice felt muffled. No one heard me, but I could hear voices, indistinct, and a washing like waves outside the walls of my cocoon. I was a little boy, and I had always felt safe. Why would I believe that anything was wrong? I went back to sleep.

In the morning I found myself in a new place. Through the window I could see a steep green mountain and, close by, a yellow hibiscus bush. Someone had moved me in my sleep, and I was lying on a blanket in a small room I had never seen before. I sat up. My mother rushed over and held her finger to her lips.

"Shhh, Katsuro-san," she whispered. "I'll bring you food as soon as I can." My mother wasn't Japanese; this was the name my father had given me. She used it whenever she was sad and missing my father. Her usual name for me was Clive.

More than anything I needed to pee. I grimaced and tugged at the sheets, pointing at my crotch. She brought me a bucket and I peed into it. I was young enough to enjoy this as an adventure. The noise was loud in the quiet room and my mother looked worried. She held her skirt over the top of the bucket to muffle the splashing.

I was 12 when my mother died, her face stretched tight, almost beyond recognition, and most of her fingers and toes gone. I had loved my life in Kalaupapa. It was great for a child who wasn't feeling sick. Everyone knew each other and the grown-ups doted on the few children, having left theirs behind. Even my being half-Japanese I was treated like a Hawaiian. We had to go to school and help tend the vegetable gardens but other than that were free to roam. Most of us surfed. The men taught us how to fish and the women taught the *hula* and how to make *lei*. At night we played cards and talked. We had feasts sometimes though food was pretty

scarce. There were a lot of funerals, but I remember most of them as being like parties. The adults made their own alcohol out of pineapples and hid it in the ravines, sneaking it out when the authorities and the nuns were gone. I was never bored.

My mom was healthy for most of the time, what they call being in remission. She only got sick at the end of her life, and then it moved fast. I was no longer able to play freely, but had to help her walk and to feed her. I was secretly glad when they moved her to the hospital: I thought I would finally be able to go to the beach again. I didn't understand the finality of death; when she died I was shocked at how lonely I felt. She had always been there; suddenly, she was not. Perhaps this is how every doted-upon child feels when his mother passes. Even now I can feel the pain of knowing that she is gone. Everyone in the community hugged me and cried with me, but the officials told me I would have to leave our little cottage and leave Molokai, that I wasn't sick and could fend for myself in the other world beyond Kalaupapa.

The man at the desk said he had known for a long time that I was in Molokai under false pretences but they had let me stay because my mother needed me. They needed the cottage for new arrivals. There was always a shortage of housing there. They booked me a ticket to leave on the November ferry for Maui. I thought it would be better to go to Kauai and find my uncles and aunts but I couldn't tell the official about them; it might get them into trouble. My mother would never forgive me. We had lost touch with my dad long before. No doubt he had been devastated when he realised his wife would never be able to join him, and that his son was gone, probably forever, but he never tried to reach me. I don't know what happened to him.

The Molokai official had given me a lunch and a letter to the Catholic priest in Lahaina. He would help me find a job; there was a school there too. The first thing was to find the church. They did help me, and I was okay. Within a year I moved

back to my family here and they eventually accepted me, once they believed me that my leprosy was truly cured. Whenever I hear the rain, hard like this, it always reminds me of those hours as a little boy, crossing the sea in a trunk but somehow still feeling loved and protected. Maybe like Milly and Billy, hey Megan?+

University of Cape Town

Aloha, Dad

December 11, 2011

Heather and I paid the bill at Coolers and started walking back to her house. It had been a long time since I walked along Wainee Street. The last time was when I run away, and that had been in the other direction. When Steve and I started coming here, we often drive up and down this road, either to get to Foodland or Starbucks, or at Christmas, to look at the crazy over-the-top decorations at 29 Wainee, but we rarely walked. Heather and I had gone about a block when I spotted the walls of the prison.

We've been past here so often, and I've never gone in. You want to have a look? I asked Heather.

We've never been there either, but I'm too tired now. I'll go home. You go in. It's free, she responded.

Wow, it'll be long.

Take your time. I'll see you at the house. There's really nothing much more we can do now, to find your dad. We've got to wait it out.

A man sitting in a chair asked me to sign a visitors register, and then waved me on. I wandered through the opening, a square cut out of the wooden building housing the prisoners, into a grassy yard surrounded by the high stone walls I walked past so many times before. *Not very high, though*, I thought: *they looked pretty easy to scale*. There was no one inside, only the big empty square of patchy grass.

The mystery of the low walls was solved when I toured the cells. Prisoners had been shackled to their beds. On a bed sat a dummy of a man, like a giant blackened Raggedy Andy propped up in corner, the restoration society's creepy attempt at

reality. When I pressed a button on the wall, the thing spoke. I jumped. It listed the rules which included how and when to wash and that spitting was not allowed. I was alone in the building, it seemed, with the prisoner for company. The talking droned on, his voice buzzing a little, me mesmerised by his monologue. When he started repeating himself I pulled myself away and went out into the sunlight.

There was a list of offenses for the year the prison opened, 1852, in order of numbers of offenders: the biggest number had been incarcerated for drunkenness, then fornication, riding wildly on horseback (reckless driving?) and drinking moonshine. On another plaque I read that the king had ordered the prison built mainly to hold wayward sailors, who had overrun Lahaina with the advent of the whaling trade.

There's always been coyness about the arrival of the first white men on Hawaii. A kind of wink-wink about the friendly natives and how they were naked and unashamed. That the women were bare-breasted seems to have justified the fact that the sailors had sex with them. Add to this the fact that the Hawaiians died like flies during the decades after whites started arriving in Hawaii, many of syphilis, and anyone can put two and two together. Or was it me, seeing sex in everything? But what I always really wondered was: had it been rape or had it been consensual? What had really gone on here?

It was getting too hot to stay outside much longer, especially in the baking sun trapped behind these dark walls. I nodded and smiled to the guard and walked back to Heather's. On the way I picked up two sweet voicemails from Jess and a simple 'Let's talk later,' from Steven. There was also a message from George, saying I should call him, to make arrangements for parasailing later that day. It was a relief to get into the cool house.

How was the prison?+Heather asked.

Kinda abandoned,+I said. Just me and the guard. Not a lot to see.+

I asked her how she felt about me going with George, and she was emphatically determined that I should go. It sounds so fun. You need that. Your dad would want you to do it,+she proclaimed. She made my dad sound kind and supportive. Maybe he'd really been like that, at least some of the time, and I'd forgotten.

George picked me up at three and drove me down to the stretch of beach near Mala Wharf. It was a perfect afternoon for the outing, he said, clear, warm and a light breeze blowing. The parasailors would launch me from the beach: I'd sail over the sea for a few minutes, they'd let me down (gently, they promised) into the sea, pick me up with the boat, and then come back to the wharf. Easy, man. It seemed to me that the two young men helping me get into the harness were high, or a little drunk, or both. I hoped they knew what they were doing. I couldn't ask them if they were sober: George stood next to them and didn't seem to find anything awry. They were his friends, after all.

They strapped me into a complicated diaper of metal and canvas and spread the vast silky parachute behind me on the sand like a giant jellyfish, my body playing the part of its tentacles drifting below. The tentacles were the venomous part, weren't they? When they finished, George's friends left me stranded in the contraption and climbed into the boat. When we tell you to run, run as fast as you can!+

Without a countdown they were off, revving the little boat across the protected flat part of the sea enclosed by the reef. Run, RUN!+they screamed at me. The ropes pulled at the harness, bulky and chafing between my legs. I felt like my legs were going to separate from my body, and for a split second, I was terrified, sure that I'd made a fatal mistake in deciding to do this. And then I was up in the air, gradually

gaining height, a gentle breeze fanning the hair back from my forehead. The wharf fell away below, looking like a thin toothpick of wood, while the strip of sand shrank into a beach towel decorated with a pattern of colorful cocktail umbrellas.

From here I could see most of Lahaina Town. This was my father's fiefdom: the entire orbit of where he had lived and walked and struggled and celebrated for the past three decades. It felt as if I should be able to see him now, to spot his tiny figure, crown glinting in the sunlight, or at least see him waving to me like a father watching his child on an amusement park ride. I wondered if I was close enough to decipher individual people, to see their features and recognize them as real humans, but before I could check, they were bringing me down. I could see fish scuttling away from my looming shadow and a turtle swimming leisurely in the breakers. I landed softly into the warm water and clambered onto the boat.

I spotted Heather waiting for me at the parasailing dock. We were far enough away that she looked like a tiny figure, a Barbie. The guys were joking about printing a parasailing certificate and that I should frame it and put it on the wall in my office at work. George was egging them on, telling them about my free-diving, which we'd talked about on the drive over. "No, guys, I don't do it anymore. Too dangerous, I had been telling them, while secretly proud that they knew I'd been so hard-core, that I wasn't some normal lady tourist who worried more about her hair than anything else. When we'd finally docked the boat, we were close enough to see Heather's face. She was smiling but there were tears in her eyes. I got out and she handed me a towel. We walked away from the others, who started cleaning the boat, their faces averted and their chatter muted.

"We had a call from Maui Memorial. They've got a patient there who sounds like your dad."

I said, "Hallelujah. Finally!"

She shook her head. "He's not doing so well. Seems he's got pneumonia.

They're worried about him. I came here so we could go together. It's about forty-five minutes drive. I've got dry stuff for you in the car so you don't have to go back to George's car. It's mine but it should fit."

I called out to George and the parasailing crew. "Gotta go, George, guys. Thanks, I really enjoyed it. Sorry, an emergency. My dad might have been found." I felt fake and hearty, as if I was playing some kind of weird role. How were you supposed to act when your dad was in the hospital? Were you supposed to look stern, or sadder?

On the way there Heather explained that the man they thought was Jim had been admitted three days before, and that he'd been getting weaker ever since. The only thing in his pockets was a card with "Donald Duck Coffee Club" on it. There wasn't such a place on the island, she went on, and one of the nurses realised only today that this man might be the one in the posters. "It might not be him," she added, "we can't think of the worst. It might be someone else. Not that I would wish it on anyone to be sick."

I interrupted her. "It's my dad," I said. She looked at me, confused.

"It was an old game of ours. A Disney version of Monopoly, kind of. Something he made for me. That was one of the trading cards."

The last few miles we drove in silence, me trying not to gasp when Heather overtook car after car on the highway. I tried to work out when my dad had been found, and where he might have been. Three days ago I had been in Molokai. Where had my dad been before that? Finally Heather pulled into the emergency room entrance, immediately behind an ambulance with its flashing lights still on, the driver

filling out a form. I knew we wouldn't be allowed to stop here, let alone park. The security guard started walking towards us.

"You get out and find him. I'll park in the other lot," I told her. She jumped out and ran towards the sliding door, her expression intense and her body bent in a forward angle. I got in the driver's seat and finally found a parking space in the far corner of the crowded lot.

By the time I entered through the regular hospital doors, Heather had disappeared. I asked at the reception for my dad, then realised they wouldn't have his correct name yet. When I started to explain, the woman there told me to sit down, that she would let me know as soon as she had the necessary information. I called Heather on her cell phone and it went to voicemail. The receptionist waved at me, pointing at the sign that said, "No Mobile Phones. Quiet Please."

"I can't find you," I said quickly, and then sat down in a hard blue seat next to the vending machines. Across from me were five women of varying ages, all dressed in black lycra shorts and t-shirts. Some of them looked wet and cold. I could hear their conversation and found myself leaning forward to listen.

"Who should we call? Did anyone know her family?" One of the younger ones was asking. She was shivering. It looked like there was a patch of someone else's blood on her shoulder. Her helmet was still on her head.

"Shouldn't the police do that?" an older lady responded. Her legs looked as strong as trees. "We can't contact them out of the blue. Imagine the shock. We don't know how the accident happened."

As I strained to hear more, my phone rang. The receptionist's ears tilted up like a runner eager for the starter's gun, and I stepped outside while I answered.

"You were right, it is your dad. He's in room 313," Heather said. "Go down the corridor to your right, and follow it to the pulmonary ward. He's in the high-care section."

Footsteps loud on the grey vinyl, I followed the directions. Nurses conferred with doctors and peered at computer screens. Flowers were delivered. Trays of food and drink rattled. Open doors into patients' rooms revealed metal trees of medicine being fed into arms. There was a lot of white: sheets, pillows, blankets, walls. When I reached the cubicle with the number 313 on it, I saw Heather standing next to a bed laced with tubes and wires. I had to look twice to recognize my dad under the oxygen mask, his face smudged with tufts of grey beard and so thin. No wonder they hadn't recognised him as the man on the poster. He seemed to be sleeping.

"He looked at me," Heather said. "I think he knows it's us." We stood quietly together for a few minutes. My father's breathing was choked and irregular. "We got to go to the bathroom. I held it in too long on the way here. I'll be right back," Heather said.

I edged up to be closer to my dad's head. I touched my hand on the only open place on his chest that wasn't occupied by a needle or a monitor. My dad's eyes opened and he groaned, struggling with a noise that sounded like "Megan," but could have been "please" or "gone." I smiled at him, and carefully reached my arm through the wires and under my dad's shoulders to give him an awkward hug. Through the opening of the blue gown I could feel my dad's bare back. A surge of contentment washed through me, the comfort of touch, for just that moment, outweighing my knowledge that the cold and clammy texture of my dad's skin wasn't a good sign.

"Aloha, Dad," I said. "Aloha."

Meeting Steven

December, 1996

I met Steven at Clive's, of course. He hadn't said anything about anyone coming to visit, but he'd had a twinkle in his eyes for a few days; I thought it was his new crop of eggplants or something. Clive was obsessed with his vegetables, his chickens and his fruit trees. Now and then he'd mentioned a son who lived in California and had a job in Los Angeles in an office. I'd imagined him as a mid-thirties clerk who looked like a miniature Clive: half-Japanese, neat, compact, stooped. His wife had died a long time before when Steven was still quite young; they'd only had the one child. He missed her, he'd said.

At Christmas he'd gone to see Steven, most of his battered old suitcase filled up with his home-grown fruit and vegetables. I'd barely persuaded him to leave the half-dozen raw eggs behind, and had had to promise him endless times that I'd water every day and look after Milly and Billy as if they were my own, including making sure they were locked up in the henhouse every night.

%Something could attack them, Megan.+

%I promise.+

%Or they could be stolen.+

%Really, Clive, I promise. Every night.+

%Maybe a young woman shouldn't have a responsibility like this. It's not fair to you.+

Then I took him into my place and showed him the post-it notes on my bathroom mirror and my refrigerator respectively: FEED CHICKENS 8 A.M. CHICKENS TO BED 5 P.M. There's no way I can forget Milly and Billy. I'd treat them as if they were

my own children,+I told him. %See . when I brush my teeth in the morning I'd remember to feed them and when I get home and open the fridge I'd put them to bed.+He had nodded but I could see he was still worried. Only the prospect of seeing his son finally made him get into his car and leave, barely in time to make the flight.

When he returned to find his garden thriving and his chickens safe and sound, I rose in his estimation. Maybe it was then that he started plotting for me to meet Steven; or if not plotting, at least planning to surprise me with his visit.

I was cycling back from work on a Friday afternoon. It was June, and starting to get a little hotter. Though the temperature doesn't change much in Hawaii, and the sun only sets a little bit later as summer comes on, the humidity does get more intense and the heat stronger, especially when the breeze drops off. I could feel sweat on my hairline and was already tasting my Friday beer with Clive. Tomorrow I'd be going on a deeper free dive than ever before, with the guys who had spotted a cave on Koakea Point. I'd been invited to a barbecue with one of the waitresses, who was trying to set me up with one of her friends. I'd dated no one since living here, and the waitresses were always trying to get me back in the game. I had a spare fifty bucks in my account and nothing owing to anybody until rent in two weeksqtime. I'd lived here for almost five years, and it felt like home.

There was a guy standing with Clive in his garden, a beer in his hand. What I felt first was a sting of jealousy: how did this blonde boy get *my* beer? *He's nothing more than a surfer dude*, I thought. Clive's so easy, a sucker. I had to stop myself. This was Clive, after all; the man who had fed and befriended me. I had no reason to be so territorial. Immediately I felt my face relaxing, even creasing into a smile as Clive

beckoned me over and his visitor looked up at me with welcoming interest on his handsome face.

"Hey, Megan," he called. "Come meet Steven."

My heart stopped in my chest. It really did. There was no way this tall, blonde, young man was Clive's son. His blue eyes danced at me as he reached out a hand to shake.

"Are you adopted?" I asked, and then cringed. "Oops, sorry. I'm really sorry."

He and Clive were bent over with laughter, but within a few moments his good manners asserted themselves and he stood up, looking at me with a straight face.

"My mom was *haole*, didn't you know? And my grandmother was too."

I realised I did know. Clive himself had told me, that night in the hurricane shelter. I hadn't quite absorbed what that might mean in terms of his son. I had imagined Clive's wife as a dark short woman very like him but without the Japanese eyelids. What an idiot I was. And I clearly didn't have much imagination, since I had pictured both of the people related to him looking like his clones. But now that I looked closely at Steven, I could see his resemblance to Clive, in the shape of his face and his smile. His skin tone was a shade lighter than his dad's, a gorgeous sunshiny color that I had mistaken for a tan. Lucky man.

"Sorry, yes. I'm an idiot. Don't take me seriously."

"Want a beer?" Clive asked.

What I wanted was to do was to go home and hide but it wouldn't have made the situation better. The only thing to do was to carry on as if everything was normal.

"Hey, you don't look serious enough to be working in an office," I said when we were all sitting on Clive's *lanai* under his banana tree.

First I'm adopted, now I'm a lightweight,+replied Steven with a touch of sarcasm. Actually I've got a PhD; I'm a psychologist.+But then he smiled at me. I do work in an office, but at least it's not for a big corporation. I can wear pretty casual clothes to work because my patients prefer that, and so do I. They're kids, mainly.+

Shit, I thought to myself. Why do I talk to guys like I used to talk to my stepbrother? Why didn't my parents teach me how to be nicer and more socially acceptable? Damn them. I cleared my throat and vowed to start over.

Things got better from there, a lot better. The next day I took him snorkelling and he treated me to lunch. By the end of Steven's third day visiting Clive we'd gone out for dinner, and swimming, and sunset cruises. By the end of the fourth day we'd kissed like we were the last living man and woman on earth. And by the end of the week we were sneaking away to my *ohana* house to make love while Clive thought we were at the beach. Not that he tried to stop us being together. Clive, God rest his soul, shooed us off happily every time we hatched another plan. He didn't seem to have a jealous or needy bone in his body. I sometimes wondered what the matter was with him.

The week went by in a delicious daze and suddenly Steven was standing in front of me with a suitcase, saying Clive had wondered if I could drive him to the airport.

Is your dad okay?+I asked.

He's fine, he's great.+Steven said, I think he wants us to have the extra time together.+

We were halfway there when Steven asked me when he could meet my parents. I looked at him with horror. I hadn't talked to my dad since fleeing Maui, and my mom and I had sporadic telephone conversations about once a month. She

thought I left Maui on an irresponsible whim. Most of our conversations consisted of her asking me when I was coming back to California or starting college. I never told her about Leilani and my dad. I wasn't going to get her started on him. I never told anyone, to tell the truth. I had no idea if my dad was alive. My mom never mentioned him; she naturally assumed that I was in contact with him. And now this.

I joked about how serious my job was, and how hard it was to take time off, while I tried to think. I'd been hired on to chef at a fancy new restaurant so I wasn't completely kidding. . but mainly I wanted to buy time. Blood rose into my chest and neck when I finally figured out that Steven meant he was serious about our relationship.

"I have to talk to them. My bosses, I mean. I haven't left Kauai since I arrived, you know, so I haven't seen my mom in years, I garbled.

"They haven't visited you?+

"Well, you know it's a long way to LA, and it's expensive. You haven't made it to Clive since I've been here, right? That's almost five years.+

"Yeah, sure. But Maui isn't far. Didn't you say your dad was on Maui?+

"Right. My dad. He doesn't like to go places.+

We were at the airport by then. I pulled up to the curb. Unlike most other places, Princeville's airport was so quiet that you could park at departures for as long as you wanted. No one was going to chase you away. You could probably leave your car there for a whole weekend without a fine. We sat in the car for a few minutes, listening to the breeze blow through the palm trees, holding hands. I stared at the birds gliding on the updrafts.

"Please look at me, Steven said. I turned. His eyes were as intense as the deep sea, green and blue all at once.

Meeting you is the most incredible thing I've ever experienced. If you feel the same way, Megan, let's not mess it up," he said.

I don't know what I'm supposed to do next," I said, feeling tears gathering behind my nose. I swallowed.

Let's start with me calling you when I get back home, okay?" Steven said. He leaned over to kiss me and opened the door. He went around to the trunk to get his suitcase out but changed his mind and walked back to the driver's side. I looked up at him, squinting in the afternoon sun and craning my neck to see his expression. He squatted next to me so that our faces were level. "Love you," he said. "I'll talk to you tonight." Then he pressed his lips against mine, squeezed my arm, gently, and walked into the airport. I watched him go and wondered if I'd ever see him again.

But Steven kept his word, and called me that evening. We laughed and joked and said we missed each other. Over the next few months we developed expertise in phone sex, but eventually stopped doing it, preferring instead our fantasies and memories: long-distance sex felt so cheap compared to the real thing we had together. He convinced me to come to L.A. for a long weekend, and I called my mom and told her what was happening. We had lunch together and I told her that I'd left Maui because a boyfriend had broken up with me. She seemed to accept that my cooking job (she didn't call me a chef, and never would) might be considered a good one, if not the career she'd envisioned for me. What really turned her tide in my favor was that she liked Steven and approved of his profession. But I still didn't tell her about my dad.

Nor did I tell Steven. He finally agreed to drop the idea of us visiting Maui when I told him that my father and I had argued over a boy and he'd made me too mad to ever want to apologise. I also told Steven about the alcoholism and my

teenage Christmas vacations with my dad, the good ones and the bad ones. He knew almost everything there was to know about my dad and me. Almost.

By the time I moved back to the mainland and we were married and then had Jess, it felt too late to tell him about the alleged sexual abuse. Heather had started sending us cards, and I actually missed my father. Then she mailed me an article from the *Maui News*, saying that he had won some sort of good citizenship award, and showing him standing up straight and proud while some lady put a *ti leaf lei* around his neck. I studied his face with a magnifying glass and seen that his eyes looked sober and clear, his hair clean and trimmed. I mumbled to myself when I saw the clipping, % only he had been like this when I was young,+but I kept it on the fridge for weeks until it turned yellow and food stained. I wanted him to meet Jess. It would be fairly easy to go to Maui when we next visited Clive on Kauai. Clive was a regular part of our lives, and doted on Jess: we saw each other twice a year at the very least, either us going to Kauai or him coming to L.A.

What if Steven imagined that my father had abused *me*; maybe he decide that that was what made me so jumpy and defensive, and I hated the idea of him having such a tidy (and incorrect!) psychological pseudo-understanding of me. I could imagine him listening to my denials and nodding in that way he had when he didn't believe me. It might make him feel worried about my dad being around Jess, and I couldn't stomach hearing his suspicions. I would make sure she was never alone with him, but I was not going to admit any of this to Steven.

Longing for the Deep

December 11. 14, 2011

A woman had picked up my dad wandering on the Honoapiilani Highway. We worked out he must have been pretty close to home, maybe on his way back, but when the driver asked him where he wanted go, he couldn't remember his address. He must have been sleeping outside for a few days by that point; maybe that was when Hardy and the others had spotted him in Mala Valley and at the church. In the car he'd started coughing so badly that the driver decided to take him to the emergency room, and the only one was at Maui Memorial, across the island, where she was headed anyway. When he'd arrived he'd given them the wrong name, perhaps his last attempt at getting lost for good. Or maybe he didn't know it any more.

I sat with him while Heather went out to make some calls to let the police and her friends know that he'd been found. He'd been sleeping soundly for the last few minutes when I looked at him and saw that his eyes were open. His hand flew up to his face and fumbled with the oxygen mask, and he looked at me with desperation.

"Are you having a hard time breathing, Dad?" I asked, trying to help him get the mask resettled on his face.

He shoved my hands away, and shook his head. The alarm sounded as he pulled the mask off.

"Lanie fofanie," he said. And then he closed his eyes. The nurse came in and looked at me as if I'd been causing trouble. She snapped the mask back on, and reset the alarm.

"He wants to talk, I think," I said.

Well, he can't. And if you disturb him we'll have to intubate.

I had no idea what she meant by that, but it sounded bad. I stayed quiet, and the nurse left the room. Heather came back in.

I think he said something about Leilani, Heather, I said, patting my dad's hand while I spoke to her. His hand grabbed mine and squeezed it three times. Our old signal for let's get out of here, the same one I'd taught to Steven. Was he trying to communicate something about Leilani, or the hospital? Heather looked at me distractedly.

The doctor came in while you were parking the car, she said. Jess not really responding to antibiotics. They don't know how much more they can do for him.

I looked at her, stunned. I'd wished my dad dead, but not like this. Not this pallor, or this helplessness, or this gargling in his lungs. So many times had I wanted him out of my life, but as a hero would go: suddenly silenced while defending my honor, or making an important speech. His body should have disappeared . poof! . not struggled on in this demeaning way. Now I felt as protective over him as I felt over Jess, as if it was my job now to shield his soft vulnerable flesh. He had fallen asleep again, and his breath seemed more regular.

Let's see how he does tonight, and make a decision tomorrow, I told her.

Maybe now that he's seen us, he'll rally.

I'm not leaving the hospital until they kick me out, Heather said. I'm going to sleep here if they let me.

We decided that I'd drive back in her car to Lahaina after I'd got us some dinner, and then come back first thing in the morning with some clean clothes for her. I promised to feed her cat, and make sure the oven was off, and the toaster unplugged, and the trash put out for collection.

When I got back to the hotel after doing what I had to do at the house, I called Steven. I checked my phone for the first time in hours and realised I put it on silent when I went into the library, and never looked at it again today. There were four missed calls from him.

"Do you realize how late it is, Megan?" a growly voice answered.

"I'm, midnight?"

"Couldn't you have called today sometime?"

I hardly thought about Jess or Steven. I had been so consumed with the Leilani encounter, and then the parasailing, and seeing my dad again that it hadn't occurred to me to call. Once I got to the hospital I had been feeling dazed. I had to concentrate extra hard to drive back. I felt like I was a world away, way too far away for us to reach each other. For me to think about them.

"I'm sorry, my phone was on silent and I didn't notice. My dad's been found."

"Oh . Megan, sorry. Where? Is he okay?"

I sat on the bed and sobbed. I stayed composed until this second, and now I felt as if my heart would break.

"Megan? Is he alive, Megan?"

I nodded, remembered he couldn't see me, and spoke. "He's alive. He's in Maui Memorial and not so great, but he's alive. He's got pneumonia."

"Where's he been?"

"We don't know, really. We might never know. He can't really talk right now. Is Jesse okay?"

"Oh, yeah, all fine here. Don't worry. I can hold the fort for as long as you need."

"Could you guys come here?"

There was silence on the phone. Steven yawned, and said, "Let's decide tomorrow."

Fresh tears ran down my face. I gulped. I need you, I wanted to scream at him, but I said, "Tomorrow makes sense. I'll call you after I see how he is, in the morning."

"Bye, honey. Sleep tight."

I was so tired that I thought I'd fall asleep as soon as I got into bed, but I lay there for a long while. An overwhelmingly full gallery of images paraded through my head, from Leilani's earrings sparkling in the sunlight, to the poster of my dad's grizzled face in the library, to the abandoned prison, to my dad's blue-tinged lips mouthing words I couldn't understand. What stood out the sharpest, however, was something I hadn't expected; something that I felt kind of guilty about: the pleasure of feeling the water close around me when I'd landed in the sea after paragliding and the memory it had triggered. It had been so long since I'd felt the comforting embrace of the deep ocean. I thought I'd put it aside when I'd decided to be a grown-up. Now it rushed back at me, as sharp and warm as an orgasm. I wanted to dive far down into the ocean, back into the quiet forgiving space where at least for the time I could hold my breath I felt more mermaid than human, liberated into my own element at last. But I'd promised Steven that I'd give up free-diving when I got pregnant with Jess. It was too dangerous. We'd compromised on him letting me snorkel.

During my years on Kauai I'd learned the mechanics of diving deep with the help of a weight belt, and how to wait through the alarm signals that the body sends out before it really needs to. Your body tells you that you need to breathe long before you are truly running out of oxygen, and the trick is to override the panic. If you train yourself to re-read the body's signals as an indicator instead of an S.O.S., you can

go without breath for much longer than you can believe. Gradually I increased my time: three minutes, four minutes, almost five minutes. The world record was close on seven minutes. I learned about how the body works under the pressure of the water: the lungs and organs squished and then releasing loaded red blood cells, which pump extra oxygen into the blood.

I also absorbed the mantra of the free-diver: it feels so peaceful underwater because we are returning to where we humans had originated. Sometimes we immerse ourselves in a pod of dolphins or whales, or big, theoretically deadly, manta rays, and always I had felt welcomed by them, that I belonged there with them, more at home there than I ever felt anywhere on solid ground. It was so quiet. The mere minutes I had while my breath lasted seemed to go on for hours, as if time itself had stretched. It was always hard to go up.

But there was no getting away from the fact that there are many deaths of free divers every year, and that it was too risky a sport for a young mother. Still I longed for it, and resented Steven for forcing me to agree to stop. He hadn't actually forced me, but he laid out all the facts in a way that had made me do the rational thing. I didn't want Jess to grow up with only one parent, did I? Finally I got to sleep. I dreamed again of drowning.

I woke up in the morning with drool coming out of one side of my mouth: I hadn't slept this soundly since I arrived on Maui. I reached for my phone and called Heather. Nothing had changed overnight, she said. They wanted to keep my dad in the hospital for another few days, and were trying a new type of antibiotic. But they had also given her the number of Hospice, and told her to get a hospital bed, a commode and an oxygen tank for when he could come home.

A door slammed somewhere on my floor and I heard voices getting closer. It sounded like a family. "Did you get the beach umbrella and the sun lotion?" a woman was asking when they walked past my door. "Let's get ice cream," a child was saying. Someone was skipping, their sandals making little clicking noises under their heels. A man shouted, "Be careful. Slow down!"

"I'll be there in just over an hour," I told Heather. "I'll get dressed and come right away. Give my dad a hug for me." While waiting for the coffee to filter I texted Dave and George, emailed the last address I had for Hardy, and I updated my Facebook status. I called Auntie Nora's house, too, but no one answered her phone. I'll try again later.

It took about forty-five minutes to get to Maui Memorial. It was crazy that this was the only hospital on the island. En route I pulled in at a drive-thru Starbucks in Kihei and bought some coffee and muffins for Heather and me, and I was walking into my dad's room by 9:30 a.m. There was a visitor standing next to the bed with his back to me. Heather was looking at him with an expression of impatience on her face, but what I felt was relief and pleasure. I would recognise that build anywhere. My dad was awake and looked like he was trying to smile a little.

"Hardy!" I said, and hugged him from behind. It was like being a little girl again, when Hardy had come over to keep me company. On his head was a straw hat with rare Copper Pheasant feathers around the brim. If Hardy was wearing his *humu papa* hat, it was a special occasion indeed. I could smell that his clothes were freshly ironed, too.

He turned around. His face was streaked with tears, and I felt myself go cold.

"What's the matter? I mean, is there something new? Something I should know?" I hadn't meant to sound so callous. Of course something was the matter: my

dad was dying. I just hadn't felt or completely believed it yet, and the sunshine outside and the coffee had made me feel like today was a day like any other.

"We've been giving your dad a message from the Hawaiian community," Hardy responded. I had never seen him look so serious, or so calm. "We want to thank Jim for being an eagle for us, for taking us under his protection."

I looked at Hardy, my head cocked. He spread his arms out like wings.

"He always offered us jobs, when he could. He helped us, and he respected us. And we want to say thank you and *aloha*."

Hardy let his arms fall back to his sides and the three of us turned to look at my father. He shrugged, looking at me as if to ask, "Who the fuck is this character?" in the nicest possible way. I held his hand and felt his Mayday grip again. I leaned over and spoke clearly, "It's Hardy, dad. He's saying thanks for all of your help, from the Hawaiian community." My dad looked up at me and lifted his shoulders up again, with a little smile on his face, polite and friendly, but puzzled, as if he'd never seen Hardy in his life. "Never mind," I whispered, and then I squeezed his hand three times. He smiled and closed his eyes.

I walked with Hardy to the end of the hall.

"I wish I'd told him that a long time ago," he said.

"Maybe you'd get another chance," I said. "We're taking him home in a few days, and being back in familiar surroundings may help him."

Hardy looked at me as if I was the one who was confused, then nodded and gave me a hug. "See you soon," he said. "I'll come to the house and visit your dad if he goes home."

The rest of the day we spent at my dad's bedside. He seemed to be breathing a little easier, and by the afternoon they told us he could probably go home soon,

that he seemed to be responding to the latest dose of antibiotics. I convinced Heather to take the car, go home and have a rest and a shower, that I'd call her if anything changed, and that I'd sleep in the hospital that night. We took turns until they let us take him home two days later.

Once he was home he seemed to get stronger by the hour. In his body, not his mind. He wasn't able to talk coherently, and didn't quite know where he was, but he recognized me and Heather and he seemed happier than he'd been for quite a while. He was off oxygen now, and had started to eat better, complaining over breakfast about the mush we'd been giving him. We'd been told to make sure his food was soft so that he wouldn't choke, and he didn't like it. Right now he was sleeping in the hospital bed we'd set up on the *lanai* so he could watch the birds.

The phone rang, startling him. His body jerked as if he'd been shot. Heather, who'd been in the kitchen humming quietly while she worked, rushed to answer it before it could ring again. "6-1-9-0-4-4," she sing-songed. After almost a decade of living here, she was starting to sound Hawaiian in her cadence, though she'd grown up in Ohio. Her eyes widened and she gestured to me, pointing at the phone with hurried jerky movements. I'd been reading next to my dad's bed, listening to his ever-improving breathing, marvelling that instead of dying, he was recovering. Everyone was sure that his death was imminent, but he had fooled all of us. Heather was confident that she could manage him, so I'd be going home to Los Angeles in three days. I wanted to stay long enough to make sure he was stable. I sat up and watched while she continued to listen to the caller.

"Yes," Heather said, "he . . . ess. Okay. Okay. We will be here." She hung up and whispered to me, gesturing to the other room. "We've got to talk! Come into the bedroom."

I doubted my dad would notice or even hear us, but I followed her obediently into the master bedroom. I'd never been in there before, and felt a bit awkward. A huge king-sized bed filled up the space, with barely enough room left to walk around it. Heather's cat slept plumb in the middle of the navy blue quilt. I leaned against the wall, and she stood next to me.

"You'd never believe who that was." Her hands covered her mouth. "Leilani! She wants to come over."

"When?" I asked. "Why?"

"She didn't say why. But she wants to come this afternoon, if we're going to be home."

"Does she know how sick my dad is? Is it a good idea to let her come?" The peacefulness I'd felt this morning had vamoosed in a flash. That little bitch with her perfect make-up was the last person I wanted to see now.

Heather looked as if I'd kicked her. She stepped backward and sank down to perch unsteadily on the edge of the bed.

"She knows. That's how the grapevine works in Lahaina. Maybe it wasn't a good idea, and I don't have a number to call her back. But she said she wanted to see your dad, and she sounded so kind. She said she was going to bring us some lunch."

"There's no need for that. I'm a chef. I can make lunch, for goodness sake."

"I don't know what I was thinking. She sounded like she wanted to help." Her eyes looked bewildered. The cat raised his head and stared at me without blinking.

I took a deep breath. "I'm being ridiculous, Heather, sorry. I really don't want to see her."

Wellō you could leave if you wanted to. She only asked about your dad, if he was home. She doesn't know you're here. At the house, I mean. Heather's voice trembled.

Mmmō it's okay. I'll stay.

Oh, good. I was hoping you'd keep me company.

Within half an hour we could see Leilani walking up the path to the screen door. She slipped off her heels and knocked softly on the frame. In her other hand she was carrying a picnic basket with a bunch of flowers slung over the top. Heather opened the door and helped her with the things, introducing herself in the process. I nodded at Leilani and then stood in the background, my arms on my hips. The two others talked politely about the weather, until a noise from my dad on the *lanai* stopped them.

Let me see what he needs, Heather said. I'll be right back.

Can I come with you? Leilani asked.

I stretched my arm in front of her like the crossing guard at King Kamahamaha Elementary School. Let's first see how he's doing, I said.

Heather came back and told Leilani she could come through, that my dad was awake.

You know he's got dementia, right? He won't be able to say much that makes sense to you, or understand you. He might not remember you, I said. I hoped he wouldn't remember her.

She walked to the *lanai*, on her toes like a ballerina and as delicately. My dad's eyes followed her as she crossed to his bedside. With a shaking hand Leilani pulled a piece of paper from her pocket and started to read, first licking her lips several times. There wasn't any lip-gloss on them today, I noticed. Today she looked

pale. Her hair was greasy and there were some pimples on her cheekbones. My dad smiled at her like he smiled at everyone. I had no idea if he recognized her or not. As she began to read, I tingled with displeasure. This was going to be one of those Twelve-Step rituals. She used the template of an apology letter you might need to write during Step Nine. I know she did because I looked it up on the AA website after she left.

Dear Mr Jim Wallace,

I am writing to you today because I am making amends to people I have harmed as a result of my addiction to heroin and other drugs. Specifically, I know that I harmed you by accusing you of sexual abuse. For this, I am deeply sorry.

I know that sometimes apologies are more of a burden than a blessing, but I would like the chance to apologize to you in person. This will allow us to discuss how I harmed you and what I can do to make things right. If you do not feel that you wish to forgive me, or you do not wish to have any contact with me, I understand. However, please know that I am deeply sorry for what I have done to you and would like to do whatever I can to repair our relationship.

If you would find it acceptable for me to make amends in person, please contact me at bestlei@gmail.com. Otherwise, rest assured that this letter will be my only attempt to contact you, because I do not wish to impose on your life.

Sincerely,
Leilani Hoover

When she finished, Leilani sighed and gingerly placed the letter on top of my dad's stomach where it moved up and down with his breath, like a stranded paper airplane. He was still smiling at her, his eyes sleepy and vacant now. Then she looked at Heather and me, who stared back at her, our faces frozen. I called my sponsor when I heard that Jim was home from the hospital and he told me to come here, she said. I'm sorry if it's a bad time for you. She waited a moment; when none of us reacted, pivoted sharply and left the room.

"I'll pick up the basket another time," she called out cheerily as she left. "Enjoy!"

The screen door slammed behind her.

"But she was here in person," I said. "She said, the letter will be her only attempt to contact you, but she was here. She wouldn't impose on us, she said. And her email address is best.lay@ What was this, a joke?" I felt like my head was going to burst open. My heart beat so hard that it filled my chest and took my breath away. I strode to the door and wrenched it open.

"Hey, Leilani," I shrieked. "What about me? What about what you did to me?" I ran into the street with the picnic basket and hurled it after her Honda. A bottle of champagne rolled out and smashed into the curb. "I hate you. Do you hear me? I HATE you!"

The little car rounded the corner and was out of sight. I stood in the middle of the road, sobbing and beating the basket into the tar. The wicker splintered satisfyingly. One of my dad's neighbours came outside and started heading towards me, but Heather got there first and shepherded me back inside, picking up the remnants of the lunch as we went.

"She must have called him that day he disappeared," Heather said as we went inside. "That was her calling, trying to set up the time to see him. He wouldn't have known that she wanted to apologize. That's why he ran away. Probably."

Without looking at Heather I grabbed my snorkelling things and got my car keys. I was still trembling. "I'll see you in a little while," I said, and I left.

There'd been a rain squall earlier this morning but by now the sky was clear and the sun was warm. I drove to Baby Beach on auto-pilot, hauled my stuff out of the car and scurried down to the water. Behind my towel I changed into my bathing suit and donned my gear. I threw my clothes down on the beach. I usually locked them

away in my car, but today I didn't care if they got stolen. They could have my purse too, though I had locked my wallet in the glove box.

As soon as I could swim without scraping my knees I headed directly out to the reef and found the part where I could slip across into the shipping channel, Lahaina Roads, beyond it. I hadn't planned on going deep. I had just had an overpowering urge to get wet, but now that I was here I found myself drawn to where the edge of the island fell away and the sea bottom was so far down that it was out of sight. I hyperventilated, held my breath and dived down. In that infinity of ocean I felt cradled by the welcome pressure of the tons of water all around me and as weightless as an astronaut in space. I looked down and I could only see blue. Up, the same. For a moment I wasn't sure which way was which, but then a turtle swam by and I regained my bearings. I followed her to shallower water, closer to the reef, and went up to the surface to breathe. I'd have one more look around, and then I'd go back.

I finned slowly along the outside of the reef gazing at the fish and the beautiful coral combinations. An eel darted into an indentation in a mound of rock, then turned to look at me, its mouth markings unintentionally threatening. Under it, on another layer of rock, lay a helmet shell in a deep pink and brown colour. Jess would love it. I went deeper. As my hand was about to close on it, the shell slipped into a crevice. A wave of tightness filled my chest, as if a tiny bird was trapped inside. I knew I still had plenty of time. It was only the first warning. I'd have to be careful now; I didn't want my hand grazing against the coral, which was incredibly sharp. I should have worn gloves.

I reached my fingers carefully into the gap and grabbed the shell. It must have taken me more time than I'd realised, because I felt another little signal telling me I needed to breathe. As I swam away, I looked up. I was only fifteen feet under at the

most, relatively very close to the surface. And I knew I had plenty of time to get there. I sat on the sea bottom and looked at the shell, its whorls and spots perfectly styled and coordinated. Stunning. How intricate and astounding Mother Nature was. I didn't need a father. Maybe I could find another treasure here, one for Steven, and one for Heather, and a big one for my dad. I started collecting shells, tucking them into my armpits for safekeeping. I was surrounded by treasures here. It was my real home, where I belonged: where I was comfortable, where I could truly breathe. At that thought a tiny voice spoke in warning.

"Breathe, Megan, you need to breathe. Get out of there, girl." But I knew this voice, and I knew I could ignore it. I spoke back to it.

"I'm fine. All is well. Don't worry," I said. I looked around me again. It was calm and blue and so, so lovely. *I really could live here*, I thought.

"No, Megan, you can't live here!" The voice was more insistent this time, but fainter, as if it was calling from inside a cave. Was it the eel who was speaking to me? Oh, God, I had to get out. I pushed off the sand and swam furiously for the air.

When I broke the surface, I gasped and gasped. I had to drop my shells and use my hands to keep myself up. I'd never taken shells, or anything else. I'd never considered it before. My nose started bleeding, not from pressure but because that's how I sometimes reacted to stress, and I retched. As soon as I could I got myself across the reef and into the shallows on the other side. I stood there, tears streaming down my face, my body bent over and trembling. Once I'd rested for a few moments I started wading back to the beach. I could see the Mala Wharf off to my left. The palm trees grew larger as I walked closer to the shore. My towel and my clothes were still there, thank goodness, and I fell down onto them, sitting as quietly as I

could so I wouldn't disturb the families playing near me. I dabbed at my streaming nose with my t-shirt.

I didn't know what had just happened, or why I had survived. It hadn't been rational or logical. I'd come up when something said I should. I hadn't chosen life over death, not consciously. My body had decided for itself. I was alive, and for now I was going to stay alive.

Being in the water was part of me, an essential part: though I'd be more careful in the future, I wasn't going to give it up. It was my refuge and my place of renewal. Here on this same beach thirty years ago my father had yanked goggles over my head, pulling my hair so painfully in the process. I was going to go back to his house and thank him for it. I hoped he'd understand at least some of what I said.

University of Cape Town

Epilogue

My father died almost exactly a year later, right before Christmas 2012. I'd seen him twice in that year, and had brought Jess to visit, and all of us . Steven and Jess, too -- were at his side when he died. I miss him so much, still. Tears fill my eyes now, as I look at my face in the bathroom mirror. I wish I'd loved him harder, and respected him more, and let him have more of a chance to love and respect me.

I am sure that's how everyone feels when someone they love dies; they know they'll never have another chance to talk to them, or feel the warmth of their breath.

I told Steven about Leilani, right after I left Maui in 2011, in time for Christmas together. He looked at me in astonishment, and said he had something to confess, too. He'd been feeling angry for the past year, struggling with jealousy, and knowing he shouldn't feel the way he felt. He'd resented Clive for telling me about his life on Molokai, when he'd never told Steven anything, and he was upset that Clive had left his savings to both of us.

When his son, after all, he'd said, and smiled awkwardly, as if he knew I couldn't understand.

By this point both of us were in tears and holding onto each other as if our lives depended on it, which they did.

Jessie walked in then and burst out crying herself. "What's the matter, Mom and Dad?" she asked worriedly. I pulled her into our embrace, and said, "We're crying because we're happy, and silly, and we love you. Isn't that funny?" We all laughed.

I've finished brushing my teeth now. Just before I snap off the overhead light, I look at myself again and see my dad. I'm so glad I look like him, even if his aren't the most attractive genes on the planet. I smile at both of us, and go to bed.

APPENDIX

(Pamphlet published by University of Hawaii Press, Kalaupapa archives project from a journal found posthumously.)

Clive's Mother's Story

THE BETRAYAL OF THE SKIN

Molokai 1950

My name is Caroline, and this is my story. I am writing it down so that those who read it someday can begin to understand that we lepers are also people. I am leaving it in the locked trunk I used to carry my son here. I have given a letter to one of the nuns to read when I am gone, and save it somewhere safe. Someday the day will come when it will be okay for my family to acknowledge me as one of them, and I hope they can read this then. I hope it is sometime soon.

When I was a child I had bouts of bad eczema. My older brother used to say, Caroline, it doesn't look as bad as you think; but the children at school in Honolulu would point at me and laugh and no one wanted to be my friend. They probably thought it was contagious. Or that I was an evil person, not to be trusted. I didn't look like a person, more like a lizard with human eyes peeping out from behind swollen and cracked cheeks. When there is something wrong with a person's skin, it's natural to believe that there is something wrong with their soul as well. It's not rational, but it's how we humans are. I understand now how the other kids must have felt, but I was so lonely. I hated them. I tried not to scratch the terrible itchiness,

because I was told that it made the rash worse, but sometimes the scratching was the only thing that kept me company.

I wonder why my mother didn't try to soothe me more, to rub me lightly or distract me. Maybe she tried. My memory is that none of our family, my parents and my three brothers and me, were affectionate with one another. They didn't tuck me in at night. I was sent to my room on my own.

It would get better for months and then worse again. I remember once when I was home on vacation, I woke up and knew I was in trouble. My whole body was itching. As the morning wore on, my face, my arms, my neck and my chest rose up into welts. My skin was hot and red, as if I'd burned it. My cheeks swelled up and my eyes became slits. I kept looking in the mirror, hoping that the next time I'd look normal or at least better than I thought, but each time more of an angry devil mask would stare back at me. I wanted to hide in my darkened bedroom. I wanted to scratch my skin off, all of it, to break things, and scream. For a few hours I read and, except for the burning of my face, I forgot about my skin. But when I left the book to have lunch, the agony surrounded me again, a wall of thorns or a suit of studded armor turned inside out, imprisoning and pricking me instead of protecting me. I walked into the dining room to join my family.

My mother cried out, "What happened?"

"I don't know, Mom."

She looked at me as if I didn't belong to her. I looked at her smooth porcelain skin and thought that she looked like a china doll. There aren't any wrinkles around her eyes.

"We have never had anything like this in my family," she said to my dad. "I really don't know what to do with her."

He looked at me from the other end of the table. You should take her to the doctor, he said. Then he smiled at me but his eyes slid away from my face as if he was scared of what he saw there.

I felt like a creature jinxed into another form. I'm still me inside of this! I wanted to shout at them. But I ate my lunch. It was very hard not to touch my burning face because my cool hands felt good on it. Yet when they were on my face they also wanted to scratch the itch below the burning.

Stop that, my mother said. I put my hands underneath the tablecloth and scratched the backs of my knees. I wasn't able to scratch too vigorously, or she would notice, so I used one finger to scratch as hard as I could in one place. It was the strangest feeling, both relief and its opposite: good but not good enough. More, my skin screamed at me, MORE! My mother was raising her eyebrows at me, so I gouged my skin with one last stab and forced my hand away. A few seconds later I saw that there was blood under the nails. The pain was much better than the itching.

My mother was still looking at me from across the table. She asked, What did you eat? Or did you touch something?+

Nothing, I said. I mean . nothing new.+

She narrowed her eyes. You didn't go to the corner shop?+

She knew I loved to go there, but I wasn't really allowed to. It's full of dust, she said, and the candy has flies on it. I shook my head.

After lunch she made an emergency appointment to see the doctor. She put make-up on my cheeks to cover the redness but it made the itching so much worse that I couldn't help myself and started to cry. Her face finally softened and she let me wash it off. Instead she put a big hat on me and lent me her sunglasses.

“Have you seen this on her before?” the doctor asked my mom. To my surprise, she nodded yes.

“It started when she was a baby,” she replied. “When I stopped breastfeeding her.”

“How long did it last, then?”

My mother pursed her red lips. “She had a nanny then. It was Christmas time.”

He gazed at her as if not noticing that her response made no sense. There was a pause and then he said, “Well it doesn’t really matter.” My mother smiled at him and he blushed.

“I had it again in primary school,” I told him. I didn’t remember being a baby but I did remember that.

“Your mother is a pretty lady,” he told me without looking at me, “I am sure someday you will be pretty too.” I smiled at him because I knew he meant it as a nice thing to say but my eyes filled with tears and I quickly ran to the bathroom saying that I needed to pee. When I came out, he was telling her that I’d probably grow out of it and to use the lotion he gave her. He handed me a sucker, and winked at me. Soon after that we went away to the pineapple plantations on Lanai and camped there with some friends and something in that seemed to make me healthier.

He was right, though, the eczema did get better as I grew older; but it would still flare up every month when I had my period. It seemed that it was always there, lurking below the surface, a mean part of me that hit me when I was down, almost like a voice in my head reminding me that there was something wrong with me. Always something to worry about. So it was a surprise when other teenagers started treating me as if I were normal, asking me to study with them or go on a picnic. I would honestly look behind me to see if they were talking to someone else. It helped

that I went to a new high school where no one knew me as I had been. One day when I was about sixteen, at the beginning of junior year, I noticed with surprise that I had friends. Maybe you had a more normal childhood and might think I am exaggerating, but for me truly it was like that; I was so used to being on my own that I hadn't registered that I no longer was. There was a little knot of us sitting on the grass outside the classrooms: Cheryl, me and a Japanese girl who I didn't know very well, Mai. She had recently been sent over from Kauai to go to school in Honolulu, and was still shy and scared of city life. For the first time in my life I recognised someone else's sense of isolation: I could see it in her eyes, which were a little watery and didn't want to look at you, and in the way her head was bent away from the group. She had shoulder-length dark hair pulled back in the regulation ponytail. Some of it fell forward in her eyes. I wondered if she knew that if the teachers saw that she would get into trouble, and that she needed to pin it back and maybe use some hair spray. I felt sorry for her but I also felt happy to be the one who knew how things worked. I leaned over to pick a Plumeria flower from where it had fallen on the grass and I gave it to her, smiling.

"Let's take a picture," Cheryl said. She didn't have any siblings and so her parents spoiled her with new gadgets. This one was a little Brownie camera. She leapt up and walked a little bit away from us. "Look into the light," she demanded. "It makes the photograph look better."

"Everyone say cheese!" We leaned towards each other and laughed into the sun. I felt blinded and dizzy for a second.

"Cheryl, Mai asked quietly, "Is it expensive to develop the photographs?"

"My mom has them done at the pharmacy when I go home for the weekend," Cheryl said, "Why?"

My family would love to see a picture of me and my new friends,+Mai said. I felt a shock that she was already calling us her friends. A wave of heat travelled up my back and I wondered if my armpits were going to break out in a rash. Why had it taken me so long to see that these girls were my friends, when she understood that in a few short weeks? Maybe she was more secure than I had imagined. I felt angry. Eczema had wasted so much of my time.

I am sure my mom will be happy to make one for your family. Then you can put it in your letter home,+Cheryl told Mai. But it takes a while to finish the spool, you know.+The bell rang for the end of lunch. I kept looking at Mai. She seemed so shy, but she walked as if she knew where she was going, straight to our classroom, straight to her desk. She sat down and waited for the lesson to begin. She didn't look at anyone else, and looked forward into space. *Maybe it was because she was Japanese, I thought, that everything about her seemed very calm and still.* Then right when I was feeling like I was looking at one of the exhibits in the Bishop Museum, a plaster mask without life, she turned toward me and smiled a big warm smile. I wiggled my eyebrows in warning about the teacher who was coming in the door, and Mai faced forward again.

From that point on we were good friends. I went for weeks not even thinking about my eczema, when it would flare up again, where it would appear. It was like learning for the first time how to ride a bike: this was learning how to have fun. After dinner we would walk around the school grounds and talk about movie stars, or hairstyles, or sit together in the library doing our homework. Most weekends she would come home with me. My parents liked her and so did my brothers, but the best part was that they pretty much left us alone. I felt wealthy and privileged all of a sudden. We would walk around the streets of Honolulu imagining having jobs and

sharing an apartment, or we would go for an ice cream float at the soda fountain, or to the beach for a swim. I had always hated swimming . the salt water used to make my skin sting and itch unbearably, the combination like being on fire . but now that my skin was whole I enjoyed it hugely. It was like being a child again, pretending to be a fish in the swells of the sea. I hadn't played like this before. I had been the one at the edge of the playground, staying away from the taunts and dirty looks of the others. One day Mai and I were walking down the street near the drugstore and I noticed a boy looking at me. I was wearing a light blue skirt and Mai's navy blouse, and sandals with heels. For the first time I wondered if maybe I was a pretty girl. I'd never forget the thrill that gave me. I felt like I was on top of the world.

Only after several months of being friends did she tell me that her parents were dead, and that she was raised mainly by her aunts and uncles. They had died in one of the wars with China, she said, and then she had been sent to live with her mom's family who had lived on Kauai since the nineteenth century, when they had been recruited to work on the farms there. I felt sorry for her but I also felt, secretly, a little bit envious, and it added to my feeling that she was a strong and special person.

Shortly after graduation she wrote to invite me to come visit her on Kauai, for part of the summer. I had got a job at the main library but I hadn't started yet. She was enrolled in a college on the mainland, in Chicago, but only started in September. Maybe that was why my parents agreed to pay the cost of the ferry ticket; they knew better than I did how far she was going. (Or maybe it was to keep me out of their hair for a while.) For me the mainland meant somewhere else, and I'd never been anywhere else. Five thousand miles+was a mere number. I didn't quite realize that it meant not seeing the other person except, maybe, in the summers. There were very few flights to the islands then, mainly the Matson line cruise ships and freighters. It

took three weeks to get to Hawaii from Los Angeles or San Francisco, and it was very expensive.

I stood on the deck of the ferry as we docked in Princeville. I scanned the crowd, looking for Mai's shiny dark head. There were a lot of them. It seemed like every second person had hair like hers. When she called out to me and ran over, twenty or more of them ran with her. They stood in a circle around us as we hugged. Mai introduced each one: her brothers, her cousins, her aunts and uncles.

They couldn't all come, she laughed, believe it or not.

I felt like royalty. I shook everyone's hand as I turned from person to person. Everyone smiled at me with warmth. Many of the men were wearing white shirts tucked neatly into long khaki shorts, and the women, printed dresses with long sleeves. Everyone had on large floppy hats . well, everyone except a few of the younger men. In inimitable Japanese style they managed to look cool as cucumbers. I also felt embarrassed. I wasn't special enough to warrant such a welcoming committee; they would find that out soon enough.

Mai seemed to read my mind, as she often did. Don't worry, she said, it's normal for our family to meet the ferries. We own some shops and the supplies come on them. Today you were an added attraction!

She had the gift of reassuring me without making me feel idiotic . that I had presumed that they might be there for me. One of her brothers was standing nearby. He grabbed her arm and stopped her from leading me away to get my trunk from the pile of luggage on the dock. Whoa, he said. I'll get Caroline's trunk. I looked at him. His glossy hair was behind his ears and his neck stood strongly out from his collar. I found myself gazing at the hollow below his Adam's apple.

His name was Shoichi, but everyone called him Ichi . pronounced like %tchy+. Not a nice name for a handsome young man, but he was the kind of person who was bigger than his name, who made a silly nickname desirable. Later I used to think it ironic that both of us were itchy, in two very different ways.

It's a cliché to fall in love with your best friend's brother. It was only when I read about Margaret Mead in *National Geographic* magazine that I realized that half the world does it, in some form or other. I was one of the lucky few who fell in love with a truly great guy, who loved me back. Mai didn't mind, after her initial shock and, let's admit it, a little bit of jealousy, wore off. At first I was worried about my parents accepting a Japanese son-in-law, but, despite all their other forms of pretension, they weren't worried about that issue. My suspicion is that they were relieved that with my eczema and my less-than-perfect looks, someone loved me, someone else was prepared to %take care of me+, which was what husbands were expected to do for their wives. (Always sounded like an old-style mafia hit to me, but then I was a pretty cynical person.) What are the chances of all of that working out so smoothly? But the hard part of my life was still to come; I didn't know that yet.

Much later on, Shoichi told me that his aunts and uncles had been dead set against our marrying. But, partly because his parents weren't alive, he managed to hold out and insist on it. Apparently they were angry with him for a long time, at least until we had our son and they could see what a good mother I was. (Or something along those lines; at any rate they never showed dislike of me and, I suppose like with a puppy you start to love because it is so loving and dependent, they were warmer and warmer towards me the longer I lived near them.) Here I had been sure my parents would be against *him*! It made me see how prejudiced I was, underneath it all, that I had expected the whites not to like the Japs, but never the other way

around! I guess I was too naïve to think that prejudice worked both ways; I never imagined that they might not like me. *Or, actually, I thought they might not like me but not just because I was hhaole, because of some other part of my personality.* I floated on a wave of euphoria and didn't know how unusual our relationship truly was.

In any case, after a year of being engaged we were allowed to marry, and I moved to Princeville. We scheduled our wedding for July, when Mai would be home from college and she could be my maid of honor. It was a lovely wedding, with the reception in Honolulu at the Plantation Inn, (we couldn't have it at the country club because Japanese weren't allowed). Well it looked lovely, anyway. I didn't care much for my parents' endless friends and their business associates (though I was happy with all the gifts!) but I soaked up being the center of attention for once. What I mainly longed for though was to be married and living with Shoichi. His family's sense of fun and laughter eclipsed mine's sedate behaviour, and made me keener to get away.

At first Ichi and I worked in one of his uncle's stores; we were saving to buy one of our own. That first store was a little place, with a wooden floor. Containers and boxes were stored in jigsaw arrangements in every nook and cranny. Uncle refused to let us reorganize anything, so whenever a customer came in looking for anything new, I had to search through all the boxes to see if we stocked the item. Eventually I memorized where everything was. Of course I also got really good at the card game Snap, which we played with the nieces and nephews.

My life there was so different from the quiet, detached life at my parents' house: every weekend there were family events. Crises and achievements were constantly discussed and celebrated, while a stream of babies, graduations, illnesses, and

deaths kept us entertained and intrigued. His ninety-year-old grandmother's death during our second year of marriage seemed painless. I didn't know yet that death at almost any age is, at least at first, unwelcome, at least to the one dying. You know how it is when you are young: you feel philosophical about death if it isn't happening to you and the person's old enough. And you assume that a person with an illness will duly get better in a matter of time. Now I see that Mai's and Ichi's quietness about their parents' deaths was perhaps not because they'd come to terms with it, but because they had nothing more to say about it. In my youthful exuberance I often forgot that they had lived through those tragedies, long before they had come to Hawaii. They seemed so at home and comfortable there, not like orphans at all.

We wanted children, as soon as possible. It seemed like the natural thing to do in amongst all the family fecundity. In those days it was assumed that it was part of marriage and there wasn't any highly reliable birth control, anyway. But it took me three years to get pregnant. I didn't understand then about ovulation. No one talked about it. Imagine discussing that with Ichi when he and I didn't talk about sex! Not that we didn't enjoy it, you understand. Sex, I mean. Whatever the reason, I was getting a little bit worried when I noticed that my periods had finally stopped. I had been secretly wondering if my eczema from days gone by had been a sign of something awry with my whole system, something buried and unbalanced, a dirty secret. I had never told Ichi or Mai about it, it had hardly flared up since high school and when it did, a little bit of *Kukui* oil seemed to soothe it. If it turned out to be a symptom of something worse, wouldn't they be angry with me for withholding that kind of information from them? I found myself terrified. Then the rash got worse, redder and itchier. It stayed behind my knees mainly, so usually it was hidden by my dress, or my pyjamas.

I waited as long as I could to tell Shoichi that I thought I was pregnant. It wasn't all that long; I rapidly felt so queasy that I couldn't help groaning at the sight of food, and he pestered me to go to a doctor. That's when I told him my suspicions. After holding me a few moments, he stood back and said, "All the more reason to go to a doctor, Caro. But a happy one, I hope!" My normally down-to-earth husband got a faraway look in his eyes. I wanted to talk about hospitals and cribs and schools and prams and he wanted to dream about having sons and daughters.

I have to admit that I didn't enjoy being pregnant, though I wanted kids. I felt sick most of the time, and my eczema got a lot worse. I couldn't hide it; it came out on my elbows and my cheeks and sometimes my nipples. Not as bad as before. It cleared up a little after I stopped breastfeeding our son . he was almost two then . and then seemed to come back in new places a few years later.

All of this about my eczema is to explain how I didn't realise that I had leprosy. Yes, I know we are supposed to say "Hansen's disease", but if you use that, then most people won't know what you are talking about. I guess I had eczema and leprosy at the same time, and sometimes in the same places, and that's why I didn't notice why some of the flaky, red places on my body itched and the others had no feelings at all. Gradually as the leprosy spread it became obvious that it wasn't eczema. When I noticed that I couldn't feel parts of my feet I took myself to the doctor. I thought I must have a pinched nerve. And at the worst, that the *Kikui* oil had maybe made my skin numb. (I am ashamed to admit that every time I went to a doctor I expected him to take one look at me and remark how pretty I had become: yes, I know it doesn't make sense. He wouldn't have known either me or my mother from before. I was that confident at that phase of my life.)

The confidence didn't last beyond the first moments of disbelief at the diagnosis. Not only was I not as pretty as my mother, I had a disease that only dirty people got. I would become an outcast. People would be afraid to get near me, let alone touch me. A lot of feelings crowded into my brain, each one more strident than the previous. How could this happen to me? Why had I gone to the doctor? How could I escape? I wanted to hide again, and never be found. This was when they were still shipping most lepers from Hawaii off to Kaluapapa, on Molokai. What would happen to our son? Children weren't allowed there unless they had it too. And Ichi? And my whole life? I knew I had been happy in my married life but now I realised it was the best possible life I could have had, magical, dreamlike . . . and all about to disappear. I could scarcely breathe I felt so much panic.

We had always gone to church and because of my eczema I had sometimes identified with the story of poor Job. I found Jesus's phrase repeating again and again in my head, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" It was what Jesus said on the cross but I believe it was first said by Job, even if no one wrote it down. Imagine the miserable fellow covered with boils and whatnot and having the faith for seven years that any day he would be cured. This after his family and all his belongings were destroyed. And waiting and waiting. Well I wasn't going to let my son be taken away from me, even if I had no control over anything else.

What also kept going through my head was the phrase, "thick skin". As a little girl my mother had always said I was too sensitive, that I needed to grow a thicker skin. I had imagined it literally, as kids do; I thought she meant I needed some extra layers. And I had prayed for that. I had thought it might make my eczema go away. Images of lepers paralysed my brain: rubbery faces with thick lesions loomed into my thoughts. Had I brought this upon myself, I wondered?

Whether I was either being tested or punished by God, it was not fair. How could the same person suffer from eczema most of their childhood and then get leprosy on top of that? I knew that some people had much worse situations but mine seemed too difficult for me, when all around me seemed to be healthy people with whole skins. I was horrified. I couldn't sleep. I had made my doctor promise to not tell the authorities for 48 hours, which he agreed with since my kind of leprosy was the slow-acting sort. In my desperation I sent a telegram to my mother to ask her for help, something I rarely did since she hardly seemed interested in Ichi or her grandson, let alone in me. This is what she wrote back:

"My poor dear Caroline,

I can't believe one of our family has Hansen's. We never have known anyone with it. Do you think it could be the conditions on Kauai? Or in the store?

I have made some discreet enquiries and there is a possibility that you can be hospitalised in Honolulu rather than be sent to Molokai. If your disease does not respond to treatment there, though, they will have to send you to Kaluapapa, so it is best to make other provisions for your son in the meantime. Perhaps one of the aunts and uncles can adopt him? His father won't manage on his own, I don't believe, and is sure to marry again in any case.

Let me know if you want to come back to Honolulu and I will meet you at the ferry.

Your,

Mother.”

In some ways her letter, horrible as it was, freed me to charge ahead with my own plans. There was no way I was going to Honolulu, even if it would have been a better life for me. I worked out that the only way to have a chance of succeeding was not to tell anyone, not even Ichi. I loved him so. I felt like a traitor and for the rest of our short time together I couldn't look him in the eyes. Then I would remind myself that my life was at stake, and my child's. And that Ichi couldn't take away my diagnosis, no matter how much he loved me. I did imagine running away with him, somewhere no one knew us, but I didn't think we could manage to do that without me getting sicker and being a burden on him. And I am also sorry to admit that I considered suicide, but I never tried it; the life force was too strong in me, I guess. I was both ashamed that I had thought of it and that I couldn't carry it through.

One good thing about the eczema flaring up, especially on my face, everyone staring at me, was that it made me start to think of Kaluapapa as maybe a relief, a kind of refuge. Everyone there would have disfigurements: I wouldn't stand out. In a tiny way I began to look forward to that. Or maybe that was my way of coping with the inevitability of it.

One of the hardest things was trying to find out how children were treated there. I knew babies of lepers were sent back to the mainland at age one, and then never reunited with their parents until they were well again (which was, let's face it, never). Most of what I could find out was through the charity organizations that raised money for the colony. I found out that there were some children too, who had been banished when they were diagnosed: there was an orphanage for them, where they lived. They had schools; they were fed and clothed. Usually they lived longer than the adults, but not always.

I knew it was a bad idea to take our son along with me, but I couldn't see reason. I succeeded in smuggling him in only because of the timing: it was the very end of 1941. Pearl Harbor had just been bombed. The US government didn't know what to do about Hawaii; so close to Japan, so full of Japanese! On the mainland, they sent them all to concentration camps; if they had done that here, the economy would have shut down. Mai told me about it because I was too distracted to have listened to the news or read the paper. Back from college, she was my link to the world of ideas. I was too busy with the baby to care much about anything else. Japan bombed the American naval base, Carols, she said. Some of the pilots crashed themselves onto our boats . killing themselves on purpose! Can you imagine? She thought for a minute. Ichi had still been in Japan, he might have been one of those *kamikaze* pilots, you know. They specially recruited many first sons. And . guess what . his name means soaring+

Martial law was declared, and only a few boats were going to be allowed each year to Kaluapapa, instead of the normal weekly ferries. The next one was in a week's time, and I had to be on it. Family members, who had been allowed to visit occasionally, were forbidden to come. Once again the colony was cut off from the

rest of the world as effectively as it had been in the 19th century. It had always been isolated, but the isolation had gradually decreased over time, then snap, Pearl Harbor, and back into the past for it again. Ironically the increased isolation and disarray actually helped me in that it was possible to secretly remove our son from his home.

I left for Molokai in the middle of the night after packing him into a big trunk, when he was fast asleep. We were only allowed one case each, so I could hardly pack anything else. I would have to rely on good fortune to help clothe and protect us: it was about time it smiled on me a little. I didn't leave a note. No one wanted a leper in the family. People wouldn't shop at our shop if they knew a leper had been packing out the goods and handling the money. I was doing the best thing I could for Ichi and his family. Except for taking the boy, too, I know. I always told myself that if Ichi had really thought I was doing the wrong thing, he could have told on me to the health authorities. But to do that he would have had to reveal that he'd been married to and living with a leper all of those past months. In any case I never heard from him again.

In the panic after Pearl Harbor the authorities didn't try too hard to find my son's documentation, once I'd allowed him to come out of my room. Add that I had used make-up to make his skin look spotted and no one was the wiser. (Thanks to Mai for all the times we played at putting on different types of cosmetics, including horror movie make-up.)

We'd only been here about five years before they started trying out new treatments which, for some people, were effective. Not for me, but it was a way for the boy to be declared well. Luckily the drug didn't hurt him much, though he really was healthy already. He didn't ever know better. I couldn't tell him that he had always been healthy, or he would have given himself away. He was too little when

we first arrived. When I would refresh his make-up, he thought I was painting on more medicine.

And then I started going downhill, and they let him stay on for a little while longer. I really think he has loved his life here, and had a good time. You would never have suspected such a thing was possible if you hadn't lived here yourself. If nothing else, life was better for him than for the kids they sent away from their Kaluapapa parents, who were adopted by healthy people. Usually the parents allowed the adoptive family to put the new family names on the birth certificate, to erase all the stigma of being born of a leper. Those children will never know their real names. At least my son has lived with his real mother. And he knows who his father is, or was. I pray that he will be able to find him again, out there. Ichi has stopped communicating with me, but he will want to see his own child, I am sure.

Glossary

Hawaiian words and other terms used in the manuscript

aloha

greetings, hello, goodbye, farewell, alas

Aloha

love, affection, compassion, mercy, sympathy, pity, kindness, sentiment

da kine

slang for best quality

haole

white person, Americans, Englishmen, Caucasian

hibachi

(Japanese) cast-iron or metal barbecue or cooker

honu

turtle, tortoise

hula

to dance the hula, a hula dancer, the hula dance

humu papa

flat sewn lei, often made of feathers

kakau

tattoo, write, sign, print

kama'aina

native-born, host, local

kapu

taboo, prohibition, forbidden

keiki

child, offspring, descendant

lanai

porch, veranda, balcony

lei

garland, wreath, necklace of flowers, leaves, shells, ivory, feathers, etc., given as a symbol of affection

luau

Hawaiian feast . not an ancient name but dating from 1856

mahalo

thanks, gratitude

makai

on the seaside, in the direction of the sea

Mele Kalikimaka

English version of Hawaiian Merry Christmas+

muu muu

a woman's loose gown, so-called because the yoke was omitted and the sleeves were short, as *muu muu* also means: cut-off or shortened

nene

goose . the Hawaiian state bird

ohana

family, relative, kin, group

pali

cliff, precipice, steep hill or slope

P.O.G.

drink made from a combination of passion fruit, orange and guava juice

poke

cubed raw fish prepared with onion and other flavorings . from Hawaiian word to slice or cut fish

pupu

appetizer, canapé, hors d'oeuvre

shaka/ hang loose

slang for hand sign of unknown, modern origin, meaning %everything is cool+

talk story

slang for chat . from oral tradition of telling stories, tales, yarns, chronicles

ti

plant . leaves used for various purposes including sandals and skirts

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