

## MANŌWAI

Victoria Nālani Kneubuhl

20 June

Dear Frank,

*It was my error that in the beginning I ignored your egocentric personality and your self-promoting ambition. It was my error to think that somehow love might transform us both. I am, however, leaving you for two other reasons. Just so there is no misunderstanding, they are as follows: I am sorry that you aren't what you want to be, and at one time there was a lot I would have given up for you, but I will not sublimate what I know to be my real voice to satisfy your idea of what you think I should be writing, or what you wish you could write. Furthermore, I am sick of pretending that your "critical analysis" is really anything more than thinly veiled abuse.*

*It has recently been called to my attention that you are, again, screwing one of your students. I learned this from one, Esmerelda, whom you apparently used to be screwing, but dropped for (and I quote Esmerelda here) "the bimbo-slag from Vassar." At this point, you are lucky I am leaving you and not slicing out your heart while you sleep.*

*Kanoe*

The Kona sun shines without mercy. As Kanoe raises her hand to shield her eyes from the bright light, the strap of her heavy bag digs into her shoulder. Her friend Charlene arranged the rental of this house. It belongs to Charlene's uncle, Robert. Robert met Kanoe at the airport and is now lifting her suitcases out of his blue pickup. Looking up at the cracked wooden steps, at the screen door, the weathered green boards, the dark veranda and the large

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*Pacific Studies*, Vol. 30, Nos. 1/2—March/June 2007

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open windows, she thinks for a moment that the house would like to swallow her up. It doesn't matter. What matters to Kanoe is that it is far away. She feels exhausted by the heat and the anger gnawing at the back of her neck. On the veranda, the shade offers her immediate relief. She opens the screen door for Robert who seems miles away out in the blinding sun. Slowly, he makes his rickety way up the stairs.

"Too hot today," he mutters.

"Pardon?"

"The sun, too hot." He blinks, stepping through the door.

Kanoe watches Robert's truck rattle down the dirt road, throwing up a veil of dust over the naupaka and coconut trees as he vanishes down and around to the house he shares with Luisa. Minutes later Kanoe stretches out on the veranda puné. With the sound of waves breaking across her thoughts, her heartbeat slows to a different rhythm. Relieved of the heat and the sun and Honolulu, she easily tumbles into sleep.

#### *24 June*

*At first, he told me I was like the moon, and I was flattered that someone saw me as a splendid, illuminated being standing out in the darkness. Later I transfigured into the shadowy twin, the taunting reflection of his own voice. I accept, I accepted, out of gratitude and guilt, but now we both face the lives we cut out of each other: our paper doll selves with detailed outfits that we can put on and take off by means of shoulder tabs, constructed by such complex needs, that we hardly know anything except what the other isn't giving.*

The hot spell with no trade wind continues. Heat cuts through everything. Kanoe can't focus. The sun has become a fat, round, inflated dictator, burning on her brow, moving her eyes, her thoughts. Turn here. Look over there. See, I am the sun. I am all powerful. After sunset comes the softer light of the moon, transforming the lava into its spirit landscape, and twisting the ocean into a honeycomb of silvery mirrors. Here is the night. Kanoe steps off the stairs, into the new world.

While Robert and Luisa are snug in their house, they talk it over. "What I want to know Robert, is how come she's here by herself?" Luisa won't drop the subject.

"Luisa, she's okay."

"How you know that?"

"If my niece Charlene *says*, then she *is*. Charlene said she just needs to get away." Irritation creeps into Robert's voice.

“From what?”

“I’m not nosy, Luisa.”

“What you know? She might have one boyfriend who like kill her. Then he comes and shoots us all up.”

“You watching too many cop shows.” Robert heads for the refrigerator and a beer.

“I saw her walking around at night. I don’t like it.”

After a long cool swallow, Robert recovers his calmness. “Go over, talk to her. She’s a nice girl.”

Following Robert’s suggestion, the very next morning, Luisa makes cornbread and marches off in the direction of Kanoe’s house. The smell of Luisa’s cornbread hovers above the table as Kanoe pours the tea.

“Eat now, while it’s hot,” Luisa urges.

“Thank you.”

Yellow crumbs sprinkle on to the table. Kanoe puts a pile of papers on top of her typewriter.

“You writing letters?”

“No, poems.”

“Oh, so you write poems?”

“And stories.” Kanoe wipes the cornbread crumbs into her hand.

“Stories, oh good, I like stories. You know, I thought you was one haole girl, cause I only saw you from far away. You know, I thought you was one of those local haoles whose madda thought would be cute to give her baby girl a Hawaiian name cause she was born here.”

“Have you and Robert been here long?” Kanoe grasps for a polite, get-acquainted type question.

“I was born here, little ways down the coast.” Luisa begins fingering her spoon. “But I met Robert in Honolulu where I went for work after . . . I mean *during* the war.”

“It must have been nice to grow up here,” adds Kanoe.

“Not like Honolulu. You know anyone out here?”

“No.”

A fly comes into the room. Kanoe watches it on the table, rubbing its front legs over a crumb. The heat rises out of the still morning. Light strengthens in the room reflecting off the white window sills.

“Why you come here all by yourself?” Luisa can’t help herself.

Kanoe feels the knot in her stomach rise up to her throat. The sunlight flashes. Her mind forms the explanation she has kept in reserve, prepared for just such an occasion, but her voice can’t say the words.

“I wanted . . . to get away from him . . . my husband!”

Luisa reaches over to wipe the tears from Kanoe's eyes. "Shh. Never mind me. I just one old busy body, cannot mind my own business. Here, you have some more tea."

Later, outside, Luisa shows Kanoe the remains of three house sites and a canoe shed. She says that most of the people, in the old days, lived up mauka where it was cool and the streams flowed easily with water. Only a few families lived here on account of the heat. People who loved and worked the sea.

"My grandmadda's house not far from here. Stubborn old woman. She never even like to go Hilo. Waste time, she said, everything good is here."

"When did you say you left?" Kanoe asked.

"Me? I went Honolulu, wartime. I went to help my Auntie. She had one store down Kaka'ako, you know, family store. I only worked little while for her. You know, family business, bad pay, long hours. I got a job dancing hula in Waikīkī. Wartime, get plenty jobs like that for girls. Good job, you know, good pay, I never knew I could make so much money. Nice people, nice costumes, all daytime work too, cause had blackouts then, yeah?"

Kanoe imagines Luisa young, smiling and fresh, swaying to a hapa-haole tune, her movements eagerly devoured by servicemen, those short-haired boys from the mainland. Boys, wanting a glimpse of an exotic, imaginary Hawaiian paradise. Is this the theme, with a more sophisticated twist, that Frank really wanted? Luisa was excited by her paycheck. I was in love with a brilliant and well-known academic. Innocent with love and success, we didn't know what we were exchanging. Kanoe watches Luisa's shifting expressions as she talks on about her surroundings. Kanoe sees her as ancient one minute and young the next as the sunlight and palm shadows alternate across her face. I didn't notice at first how beautiful she is, thinks Kanoe. She knows it too, and she only lets it out a little at a time. Maybe she knows, maybe she always knew what those boys were thinking, and maybe she chose to act out their little visions of paradise. Maybe she knew how to guard the truth, the truth that lay just under the skin of being Hawaiian. What truth?

Luisa's voice slices through her thoughts. "So maybe we come over tomorrow and you can eat fish with us because Tiny always brings too much."

"Oh, sure. I love to eat fish." Kanoe's good girl responded instantly.

Kanoe found a path in the lava. She thought she was only wandering when her feet began to follow something, and the following turned into a trail. Barely discernible, it led over the desolation of lava. Beyond a sharp hill, she arrived at a spot of black sand big enough to make a beach. There stood a grove of coconut trees and the eternally pleasant sound of the tradewinds rustling through long, sinewy leaves. Under the stand of trees, the earth held

fresh water that had found its way from the distant mountain rain forest. Being close to the ocean, somewhere underground the fresh water joined with the sea and surfaced as a deep pond, a cold, brackish water pond. In ancient times, just as today, this pond would not be used for drinking water, but for the pure pleasure of immersing the body. Kanoe takes off her clothes and dives in. Body heat collides with coldness and produces a delicious sensory shock. She swims. She is swimming. She is swimming everything away. Exhausted and laying on the warm black sand, images of Frank descend. Frank, tenderly brushing back the hair from the face of the Vassar bimbo. Frank, breathing his warm breath in her ear, the way he did. Kanoe thinks of these things, and for the first time in months, she is not consumed by rage.

Robert turns the fish over. The hibachi's grill sizzles, sending up a small burst of sea smoke. He leans back in the lawn chair, takes a swallow of his beer and muses, "Tiny always brings too much fish." Kanoe puzzles over the fact that she instinctively knows that Tiny is not tiny at all but immensely fat and continually has to work at keeping his pants pulled above his butt line.

After dinner, the three sit on Kanoe's lanai. She and Luisa slouched down against the wall on the punē'e. Robert sits grandly in an old wicker chair, smoking a cigar and blowing rings. The rings float slowly out and disappear on a backdrop of stars. Auntie Lu (Luisa now insists Kanoe call her this) is going on about her daughter who married someone (Bob) in the service and now lives in El Paso, Texas. The daughter, Lilia (Lily in Texas) has three kids. Auntie Lu obviously feels cheated because she can only be a real grandmother for two weeks every year. Robert tells her to talk about something else. She tells him to shut up. He tells her she's a yappy old myna bird always boring everyone with senseless chatter. Kanoe asks Auntie Lu if they have any other children. Robert fixes a look on Auntie as two smoke rings float out of his "o"-shaped lips. Auntie's eyes get larger and brighter, captivated by the translucent doughnuts. Kanoe's seeing shifts from Luisa's shimmering stare to the pale white circles expanding and drifting out. Luisa's answer seems far away and as soft as the air the smoke is floating in, "No, only one."

Robert's voice pulls her back. "Kanoe, try go look in your ice box. Us country folks always thirsty."

Days pass in idleness. Kanoe drifts in and out of her own anger, sometimes so far out that she finds herself staring at the blank page and not knowing how much time has gone by minutes or hours. At other times, she engages in little activities that distract her, looking for shells, watching for birds, counting the waves in a set. Her tolerance for the heat improves, but she usually feels the

best in the cool early morning hours. On one of those mornings, Auntie Lu and Robert came to see if she would like to go to town.

“I was going to that pool to swim,” she informs them.

“What pool? What you talking about?” Auntie’s voice is sharp.

“That one by the lava, you must know it.”

“Oh, that one,” she says slowly.

“Kanoë, you shouldn’t swim alone,” says Robert as he shifts his feet in the sandy dirt.

“Yeah, you come with us to town instead, and I’ll go with you this afternoon.” Kanoë feels slightly annoyed and invaded but agrees to go.

Auntie Lu says she’ll get car sick with three in the front, but of course she refuses to let Kanoë be the one to sit on the truck bed. Robert spreads out a mat for her, and before they drive off, he kisses her tenderly on the cheek, a gesture which embarrasses and touches Kanoë deeply.

Town proves uneventful. Robert gets his social security check and a tank full of gas while Luisa makes the weekly shopping and gossip rounds. Kanoë buys some food and a Time magazine. On the way home, Kanoë falls asleep until they hit the bumpy dirt drive that takes them over the lava to the shoreline. Between the bumps and clangs of the old truck, Kanoë asks Robert if the pool has a name. Robert turns his smooth, round face toward her. His hair is white like the moon.

“Manōwai. They say it’s place for ‘aumākua. It used to be kapu to everyone but one family, big ali’i. Even today, nobody around here like swim there. Luisa no like that place.”

Manōwai, Manōwai, thinks Kanoë, the shark’s water. There are no sharks in brackish water. It’s my place. It’s my place now.

### *June 27*

*Got home from town. Too cloudy to go to the pool. Fell asleep, again. Dream: I’m watching a hula show with Frank’s lawyer friend, Jim. Jim really likes it, and says Frank told him all about it. I realize that I’ve forgotten I’m married to Frank and have been away a really long time. I panic. I quiz Jim about where Frank is. Jim says Frank now lives with one of the dancers. I ask him for Frank’s phone number, and he hands it to me on a little scrap of white paper all squashed up like a ball. It feels like my only line to the real world, but then it starts bouncing. I chase it as it bounces into my desk trash can and as I reach for it the trash can spreads out into water and the paper disappears.*

In the following days, the wind picks up and the sea turns choppy. White caps fly everywhere, unusual for a June sea. Robert says, “Auntie Lu is in one of

her moods. She no like nobody for talk to her. You can help me pull in the net?”

They walk a short ways over the lava to a small cove. Kanoe slips on her tabi and enters the windy sea. They are chest deep in the water gathering up the net. Kanoe watches Robert, his back toward her, a brown freckled back like the one her father carried her on when she was small. Kanoe used to try to count the number of freckles on her father’s back, but always gave up because there were more freckles than she had numbers for. She remembers Kawela Bay on the north shore of O’ahu, the house where her family went in the summer. She would help her father with laying, checking, and pulling in his fishnets. Sometimes she would help him repair them when they were torn. Once she watched her father, spearing and killing an octopus. His back moved in a rhythm as his arms pounded and pounded the life out of the slippery creature while ink spilled all around. He must have seen the discomfort on her face when he came back to the beach.

“It’s okay, baby, this is to feed us. We don’t do this because we like to kill things. We only take what we need to eat.” His voice was gentle and reassuring.

She remembered what her father said, but later when the octopus was cut up and cooking in a big steaming pot, she wondered about how the octopus had lived under the sea, if it had neighbors and things humans have, little things that made it happy. As the steam from the pot rose faster and thicker, it suddenly occurred to her that living, just living and minding your own business, could be dangerous. When it was done, she ate pieces of the octopus from a blue and white Chinese rice bowl, and felt guilty about how much she enjoyed it.

Frank hates octopus but can eat it in public quite naturally. Frank thinks he loves the ocean, but Kanoe knows his love is tainted with arrogance. Frank will never be at home in the sea. He is not related. Instead of a kindred spirit, he is a conqueror, wanting to rise above and tame the elements. He loved it when his old friends from the midwest came to visit and he could reveal the Pacific to them: sailing, kayaking, wind surfing, an endless round of water activities in which Frank could set himself apart from them and, best of all, could tell them things they didn’t know. Kanoe could never bring herself to trust Frank in the ocean. Her focus returns to Robert and the sea and the net and the familiar task she lovingly performed every summer with her father at Kawela Bay. As Kanoe watches Robert, she misses her father who has been dead now for several years. Robert, my father, and me, she muses, we are Hawaiians in the sea, and it is different.

In silent partnership, they take the net up on a flat part of the lava and begin to pick out the limu and small fish entangled in the nylon mesh. A chill

moves through Kanoe. She turns to see the slow moving fin of a shark slipping into the cove. A trickle of water from her wet hair runs down the left side of her face, down the curve of her neck and off her shoulder.

“Robert,” she whispers.

Robert looks up from his work, tracking the movements of the shark. The fin moves closer. Robert picks out one of the best fish of the catch and walks out to the edge of the lava. The shark is very close now. Robert throws the fish. She can see the large fin. Gliding in, the shark takes the fish in one fluid movement, barely disturbing the water. They watch as he circles a few times then returns to the deeper sea. Quietly, they return to cleaning the net.

“No tell Auntie, okay? She just get more upset.” Robert speaks without looking up.

“Has the shark come before?”

“Yeah, used to come plenty. Not so much now.”

Robert still doesn't look up, and Kanoe returns to silence.

At home in the shower, Kanoe smooths the soap over her limbs with her hands and thinks about being a shark with blue and silver-black skin, with sharp teeth and a fin cutting and gliding through the water. She imagines herself in a shark body and Frank paddling in his kayak. She makes a pass, overturning his flimsy vessel in the water. He tries to recover it, but the wind blows it quickly beyond his reach and out of sight. Now he is in her element, completely vulnerable, with nothing to hold onto. He sees her crisp fin cut across the water. She circles him for some time, relishing his fear as it vibrates toward her, and then, she moves in. How would he see her if there was nothing he could do to hurt her? How would she look at him if she had the power to annihilate him?

After dinner, she finds an old book about Hawai'i just after statehood. There are pictures of Hawaiian women in tight pareu printed holokū and big red hibiscus flowers in their hair. One of them looks like it could be Luisa. They are singing by a grass house near the sea while other women dance in ti-leaf skirts. There are other pictures too of the happy, new state; someone surfing with a dog on the board and Diamond Head grinning in the background; streamers and the harbor on boat day. The pictures make it look like nothing bad ever happened in Hawai'i, like people live vacation lives free from worry. Kanoe has a feeling something is missing, not just from the pictures, but everywhere. Something's being left out on purpose. She closes the book, drops it on the floor next to the bed and pulls her old kihei over her, the one she's had forever. Everything gets farther away, Frank, their life, everything. Everything is just a small floating island moving toward a horizon. A coolness passes through her as if she were hollow. There is the last sound of a single wave breaking, and sleep takes her in.



Along with the blustery wind comes a swell from the south, and the sea heaves and turns. The sound of the breaking waves drown out everything. Kanoe tries to have a conversation with Robert on the beach, but they both end up yelling so they give up. Kanoe takes a walk along the coast, her thoughts struggling in volume to be heard over the sound of the sea. One thought, she thinks, all I might need is one thought. At this particular moment if I could only have the one perfect thought, a bolt of lightning would cut through everything and leave me clean and fresh. Her mind begins to turn over and over like her surroundings to look for that one perfect thought. Squinting her eyes she looks out to sea and thinks she sees a fin in the water. Her eyes scan the white caps. She walks a few steps, looks and thinks she sees it again. She's not sure and strains to find it, but soon every shadow appears to be a fin and a great army of fins are conjured up on the restless water, a thousand sharks swimming in force to an unknown destination. Without really knowing why or how, Kanoe finds herself at the pool. The sky has clouded over, and she is staring at her inky reflection. Picking up some small black pebbles, she drops them slowly, one by one into the water. The little circles grow wider and wider, and the whole pond reverberates to her intrusions. A slender brown hand with long graceful fingers gently touches Kanoe's shoulder.

"You shouldn't come here by yourself," Auntie Lu whispers. Kanoe is struck by how young and perfect her hand looks.

"Why not, Auntie Lu? It's so beautiful. The wind isn't here."

"Something could happen, an accident, something like that. Who would hear you?"

It strikes Kanoe, that it's not just Auntie Lu's hands that look young, but something about her whole being. It's like she could be my sister if you just felt her presence. Yes, she thinks, my sister who is worried about me and wants to tell me to be careful. Auntie Lu and Kanoe sit on the edge of the pool.

"This is beautiful, you're right." Auntie gazes at the rocks and palms that encircle the pool.

"Very, romantic, if you ask me." Kanoe's feet, moving in opposite directions, make circles in the water.

"Why you say that? Romantic. Not good."

"I don't know. It just came out, Auntie. Tell me why people stay away from here."

"Cause so many stories. People say this place kapu, religious kind stuff happen here, you know, chief kind. People say they still come here at nighttime. People say they seen lights, hear chanting, that kind stuff. Then, there was that time. Was some women coming here for pick limu. One of

them was pretty young, and she had one baby. Just one young mama with a sweet baby. They put the baby down under that tree on one blanket and they went pick limu. They wasn't very far away maybe ten yards something, not far. They was talking and laughing and picking limu and then one looked and couldn't see the baby and the mama was screaming and she ran over and they saw one trail like somebody come from the ocean or the baby went crawl down to the water and then they saw one shark swimming slowly out to sea with the baby."

"But how *did* the baby get into the water?"

"I dunno," Auntie Lu answers listlessly.

"How awful to have your baby eaten by a shark."

"I never said the shark *ate* the baby," snaps Auntie Lu. "I said the shark *took* the baby. Let's go now."

On the way home they walk in silence while Kanoe's mind is distracted by too many thoughts and voices, as if someone with a remote control was randomly changing the channels in her head. Auntie Lu invites her for dinner, but Kanoe thanks her and says she would like to go home.

The wind kept blowing, horribly and steadily, for the next two days. Kanoe stayed in the house watching things fly by. She saw Auntie Lu and Robert on the beach talking loudly, but she only heard the muffled sounds of their conversation that the wind threw her way. They looked over at her house as if they were deciding something about her. Yes, she thought, they were talking about me, and they might be watching my house even though I can't see them.

As the windy day blew on, Kanoe withdrew. She felt the wind emptying her out. Even Frank, the keeper of her anger, could be blown away. She wondered where she really was. She saw the dried coffee on the bottom of the cup, those crumpled up clothes on the floor, the dirty dishes in the sink, evidence of some presence. Maybe, she thought, I have just been sitting here for a long time and secretly growing, like a seed packed down in the pressing earth, silently squeezing out tendons and fibers beyond my body. Maybe I'm branching out and the roots are restless for something to feed on, for some way to keep the seed alive and connected. She saw her hand holding a pen and writing on a piece of white paper in a language someone knew once but is now considered dead.

She wakes to a day of perfect stillness, not knowing how long she'd been sleeping, thinking at first she was still dreaming. The sky is blue and the ocean swells now break crisp and evenly. The sunlight crystallizes every object into clear focus. Kanoe gets out of bed. Into her net bag goes a towel,

a visor, sunscreen and a book. She pulls on her swim suit, wraps a pareu around herself and heads straight for the pool. She spreads her towel out half way between the pool and the sea and settles into the warm sand.

Closing her eyes she sees an image of Frank in his office, the day she first met him. She remembers admiring his Ivy League, East Coast looks, his wire rimmed glasses. Frank always loved an admirer, and in the beginning, Kanoe drank in his every move. He prized her attention and her quick mercurial mind that traveled so gracefully in the world of ideas. That she was an island girl and part-Hawaiian made it even better for him. She made him different from the others. He was no longer just another transplanted mainland professor with a blonde wife and pale-limbed children. He was connected. But after three years of marriage, when Kanoe began to really write, Frank “felt something was missing in the relationship.” When others began to take her seriously and praise her work, he told her she’d become “indifferent” and “disconnected.” When she got published in a well-known magazine, he had the first affair. Then came the promises of never again, the “if you’d only been more . . .” Kanoe stops these thoughts because they always made her stomach queasy. Maybe he just doesn’t want a wife who is a successful writer, and because he’s a professor of English, he just can’t bring himself to admit it.

Kanoe listens to the sound of the waves. They seem subliminal and far away at first, but the sound gets clearer, as if she is waking up, yet she knows that she hasn’t been sleeping. She is very aware of her body sitting up and looking out at the brilliant water. Out there in the waves someone is surfing. A young, dark man rides in and paddles out. Kanoe watches from her towel. He turns around, sitting on his board. Is he staring at her or just looking her way? She sees her sunvisor by the water’s edge. Did she drop it there or was it blown by some little wind? Kanoe gets up and walks down to pick it up before the water takes it away. It seems like miles. She knows he is watching. Bending down, she reaches to take it in her hand, but the wind picks it up and blows it in the water. Kanoe stands and watches as the white spot floats out to sea.

The young man is paddling swiftly toward the floating visor. Kanoe looks away nervously. If I just don’t look, she reasons, if I look up mauka at the solid green hills, maybe he won’t be there. He’ll be gone like something at night you thought was under your bed. She turns back, and like a sleight of hand he is quickly there. He’s walking out of the water holding out the white visor. He’s looking straight at her, staring, not the way Frank would stare at a woman. He looks her over as if she is an enchanting curiosity, something bright and fresh in a store window. Now his face changes. It is warm like the day’s sun on her body, because, she hears herself think, he has the most

beautiful smile, the most even and perfect white teeth she has ever seen. “Kapua,” he says in a soft and even voice. “I’m Kapuaokekai, and this must be yours.” He hands her the visor.

In another second, he is on his board paddling away. Kanoe watches his arms move into the water, his back shifting in rhythm with every stroke. He turns and waves. As if pulled by a string, her hand rises. She waves back. He flashes that smile again, turns quickly on his board and paddles away, down the coast.

The night before, Luisa had a dream and she told it to Robert: A boy and a girl are swimming with sharks. The sharks explain to them that certain sharks are related to certain people on land. “When you forget who your relatives are, that’s when the killing starts,” they tell the children. A big shark swims by. “You see him,” the sharks say. “His mother was walled up in Pu’uloa when they built Pearl Harbor. So sad.”

Since it is the Fourth of July, Robert and Luisa have insisted that Kanoe eat dinner with them. Luisa comments on Kanoe’s sunburn.

“I hiked down the coast, quite a ways today,” she lies. For a second, she questions the lie, but the lie and the question just as easily slip away.

“Robert,” moans Auntie Lu, “too bad we no more firecrackers.”

“Luisa you too old for fireworks.”

Robert is cooking spare ribs on a grill. They are all sitting in a hala grove that has been cleared out and fixed up to look like a little picnic area. They even have a stand for torches. Smooth bits of white coral are spread over the ground and each hala tree is surrounded by a ring of rocks like a planter. The picnic table and benches are painted white and so are the old wooden Adirondack chairs that have been brought from the porch. Kanoe listens to the breeze in the hala leaves, a quicker more restless sound than when it moves through coconut fronds. Luisa has gone in the house to warm up some noodles. Robert clears his throat, a male signal that Kanoe recognizes from childhood meaning something serious to follow.

“Kanoe, Luisa’s sister in Miloli’i, she’s really sick. The husband like us come stay little while, help him.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, but see, Luisa, I know she like go, but she’s saying maybe she no can go, and I know it’s cause she worried about leaving you here.”

“Leaving me? I’ll be fine. I’m a grown up.”

“She worried about you swimming alone, having one accident.”

“She really has a thing about that pool, huh Robert?”

“Yeah. See, so I figure, if I talk to you and you make promise you no go to the pool while we gone, then I can tell Luisa, then she no worry, then we can go visit the sister and help the sister’s husband and everything’s ok.”

“Okay, I promise, you can tell her.”

“Hey, thanks, Kanoe. Funny kind things she fix her mind on. Here, taste this.”

Robert cuts off a piece of meat and puts it in Kanoe’s mouth. It tastes of grill and gristle and barbecue sauce. Kanoe looks closer at the little picnic garden. There is a sea shell stuck in the small hollow of a tree and in its pattern she thinks she sees a tiny figure whirling and dancing around. The piece of driftwood down by one of the roots looks like a snake, curled around a log, peacefully sleeping. She sees that the rocks have been carefully chosen and placed, some of them with faces of women, some like animals and some like veiled creatures, alive now, but not quite formed. There is a whole world here in this garden, beyond, just beyond where she and Robert are drinking beer and cooking and having a regular conversation.

“Too good how she did that, yeah?”

Kanoe is aware that Robert has been watching her while cooking his spareribs.

“Takes a while to notice. Some people never even see. Luisa made all the things here. She finds them on the beach. She says they call her, and then she asks them if they like come to the garden. If they say yes, then they even tell her where they like be. Too good, yeah? Kinda like one whole party out here.”

Luisa comes out of the house with the noodles just as Robert plunks the done ribs in a big bowl. Luisa says she can’t figure out why Hawaiians like to celebrate the Fourth of July. “Captain Cook never even get here till 1778. Nothing to do with us.”

“Hell,” says Robert, “just one excuse for eat something good we not supposed to.”

The next morning, Robert took Kanoe to the store to get groceries. Since they will be away, they insist that Kanoe buy a lot of food. Luisa even cooks a huge pot of stew that she pours into separate plastic containers to store in her freezer. Kanoe is supposed to come to their house and get some whenever she wants. That afternoon, they depart for Miloli‘i. Robert shows Kanoe the special watering can in the shed to use on the delicate ferns that hang under the eaves.

“Now, you remember about the pool, yeah?” Robert looks at her nervously.

“Don’t worry, I’ll remember.”

Kanoe savors their formal, country goodbyes. As the truck drives away down the sand and gravel road, she feels a sense of finality descend with their departure.

Kanoe has turned and turned and turned in the sun until her skin reflects the colors of her father and grandmother and all those who came before her. The day after Robert and Luisa left, Kanoe again encountered Kapuaokekai at the pool. Since that meeting, she has been with him day and night. She hasn't tried to explain it to herself. She hasn't even thought about it too much. She finds one moment moving into the next and each moment a little more pleasant than the last one. So she continues because of the pleasure and the pleasantness, the calm and sense of well-being, are too much to make her even consider resisting. In the midmorning light she turns on her towel, and her brown fingers reach over to trace the ridge of his backbone. Kapuaokekai. She likes his feminine name. She loves the curve of his neck as it slides on to his shoulder, and she loves it that cautiously spreading down his back, are freckles. Kapuaokekai, her rider of waves, with the beautiful white smile. He's started to tell her about his grandfather.

"He said things had changed so much from the way they used to be. It made him sad."

"What kinds of things?" Kanoe asks.

"The way people thought about things."

"Well, how did they think?" Kanoe is always interested in stories about the past.

"My grandfather said, before, people weren't so scared about Hawaiian things. They weren't scared to talk to their ancestors who had passed away. They weren't afraid of interacting with the guardians—the 'aumākua, or the spirits of the forest, or the other living creatures in the world. Everyone knew they were related. Sometimes it was a blessing to be—to have those kinds of friends, protectors. Do you understand what I'm talking about?" Kapua stops talking and looks at her. She has been listening with her eyes closed in the sun.

"Yeah," Kanoe rolls over on to her side and opens her eyes. "But what exactly did he say changed them?"

"When the foreigners came," Kapua begins, "the attention of the people became caught up in all the new things they brought to our world—like cloth and metal and guns—all of those things we didn't have. Then came the ideas about the god of the foreigners who was a jealous god and didn't want to share the world with the gods of any other place. Each place this god came to, he claimed as his and didn't want any other kind of competition. His followers began to change the old stories to make people afraid of the things they had formerly loved and the ones who had been their protectors. They made up and told stories over and over again about how any person who befriended or invited any of the old ones into their lives was ruined and contaminated by the contact. They made up stories about people going mad,

producing evil children, killing or eating their own friends and family—terrible stories.”

“What did your grandfather say it was really like?” Kanoe sees Kapua’s brow is tensed. “Tell me.”

“He said we were all friends. We brought joy into each others’ lives. We gave each other things, special things.”

The world exists for Kapua in a way Frank could never comprehend. Kapua has learned to see the world as his family has seen it living for many generations in close and intimate contact with the sea. Gently and carefully, Kanoe meets that world. Names—he names everything. All the fish, all the limu, all the rocks, the currents, tides, the shades of light from the sun and moon—they all have names. Every face of the sea, every wind, all the waves, all the clouds, all the skies, all have names. All have names in the lyrical language of their shared past, names that surely know themselves for what they are: sounds of the voice. Only with the sound of the voice are things named with life. Kapuaokakai, we are in a dream, she thinks. Give the dream a name. Give us life.

There are only two important things for Kanoe at this moment in her life, Kapua and the pool. Frank, her writing, and her anger have become silent and unimportant. In the evening, Kapua catches fish for her and cooks them on a rock in a fire. He brings ‘opihī, sweet crabs, even lobster. They lie in the moonlight and watch the pool change faces under the passing clouds, watch those little drifts of wind on the water, and listen to the voices underneath the glassy finish. This is what we all need, she tells herself, undivided attention, peace. She thinks she would just like to lie here and watch him ride the endless waves, swim in the pool, eat, make love, and never see anyone again.

At one point there is something Kanoe wants at the house. Kapua doesn’t want to go there. She coaxes him. She takes him by the hand and leads him down the lava path saying it will just take a minute. He follows reluctantly away from the pool and the beach. They make love in her bed, but the bed seems too small. In fact, Kanoe thinks he doesn’t exactly look right in the house with its walls and squareness, and under the roof, his eyes lose a certain quality of light. She picks up her pen.

“I love to write,” she tells him.

“Later,” he whispers, “lots of time, later.”

They walk back to the pool, past Robert and Luisa’s house.

“Maybe I should stop and water their plants,” she tells him. “I promised.”

Kanoe stands on tiptoe to get the key from the hanging fern. When they enter the house, the living room seems big and cool and inviting. Kanoe goes

to take care of the plants. Kapua looks around the house, and when Kanoë returns, she finds him examining the collection of framed photographs on the desk near the kitchen. He picks up a picture of Luisa.

“This is her when she was young?” Kapua’s fingers softly trace her image.

“Yes,” says Kanoë.

“My father was in love with her when they were young.”

“So he lived close by?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Did she know it? Know he loved her?”

“I don’t know, they were really young. Who is this?” Kapua had picked up the picture of Lily.

“That’s her daughter. She lives in Texas.”

“Any others, sisters, brothers?” His voice is quick, almost eager.

“No, but here’s a picture of Luisa and Robert today.” Kanoë shows him a snapshot of the couple standing in front of Luisa’s picnic garden. “She still looks so young.”

“She’s still beautiful,” he murmurs.

“She is.” Kanoë likes it that he finds this older woman attractive.

“Is she kind, Kanoë?”

“She has moods, but mostly she’s very nice.”

“Like you, Kanoëlehua.”

That afternoon, Kanoë dreams in the sun. She dreams she is walking by the sea in a strange place. It is a sunny and warm morning. The ocean is blue and clear. She comes to a place that is like a beachside attraction, like a museum, where for a small fee, a person can get into a tank with a shark. She sees a man in a tank with a huge shark. They lie close together and look like they are in some kind of intimate communication. The scene changes. There is another exhibit. Now the shark is all tied up and made to sit in something like a chair, bent over and bound up in cruel ways. Kanoë becomes very upset. She screams that they can’t do this. “This is our ‘aumākua and he must be free,” she cries.

Sitting straight up and crying, Kanoë wakes from the dream. Kapua is right there. She tells him about the terrible dream. She buries her face in the warm curve of his neck, and he sings to her as he rocks her back and forth. The tune is strange and haunting and comforting, like something she’s heard a long time ago and is just remembering again. Kanoë listens to his voice and the lapping of the waves weaving together in a safe and protective lullaby. The bad dream fades. Kapua tells her that tonight will be a special night. The moon will be as full as it can be and together they will watch it rise out



of the depths of the ocean, bright and ripe and brilliant. The two of them will be alone with the moon, the water and the light.

*12 July*

*What I want to write. I can't.*

Kanoe was first conscious of a heavy feeling in her head and a throbbing sensation in her right ankle. It was only after a few days of Luisa's care that her focus returned enough to write a simple line, but every day after that the writing came faster and smoother and better than before. It was a soothing and familiar activity. She remembered nothing after Robert and Luisa left for Miloli'i. The doctor said she just might never recover those memories.

"So what's a few days out of your life?" he told her. There's more than five days in mine I wish I could completely forget."

She saw some things written down in her journal like a list, the kind she makes when she's thinking of a story, but she couldn't remember the story she was thinking of. There was something about a man, a young man, a house that's too big, and looking at photographs.

"We found you by that pool." Luisa tells her what happened. "With a gash on the head and blood on your face and inside your hair. You was just sitting there with your feet dangling in the water, and you was staring into nothing and never even knew who we was. You talk, but no make sense, and you never even know your name."

The ambulance came. In the emergency room, Kanoe was treated for shock and exposure. She had a sprained ankle and possibly a concussion, but they let Robert take her home on the promise that one of them would stay with her at all times for a few days.

"We so happy we never find you floating face down in that pool. But sorry," Luisa speaks most kindly, "had to call Robert's niece for find out where your husband for call about the medical insurance. So now he knows. Sorry." Robert adds that Frank has been calling and wants to come see if she's all right.

"You like him come, I tell him, okay. You no like, I tell him go to hell," Robert tells Kanoe.

"He can come. But tell him he has to stay in town, not here."

That night before bed, Kanoe looks over the notes in her journal, trying to make sense out of the pieces.

"Maybe I was, I don't know. Maybe I just snapped . . . Auntie Lu, thank you for saving me."

"We didn't save you, baby. I just wish we didn't leave you alone."

"I should have listened to you."

"No worry. It's pau, finished now. Everything's okay. You sleep."

Early in the morning while it was still dark and cool, Kanoe wakes up from a dream. She turns on the small light by her bed and looks for a pencil and her journal. Luisa was already up, sitting in a chair and watching the first bits of light coming into the day.

“What you want Kanoe?”

“I had a dream. I want to write it down.”

“No write. First, tell. Tell me your dream, I want to hear.”

“I am asleep by the pool. A young man is there. He is handsome and kind, and he lies on top of me so I can see his face framed by the bright sun, like a halo. He asks me if I would like to have a baby. I say sure. He says we have to do it in the pool, or it won't come out right. He carries me to the pool. First there is a full moon, but then it goes behind a cloud and it gets dark. There are torches all around, and I know someone is holding them, but I can't see who it is. We undress and slide into the water. We swim around each other in circles, coming closer and closer together until we slip into each other. The water is cool and smooth on my skin. I feel something for just a moment like a spark, a flame, a falling star shooting up and into me. Then everything changes. I am leaning on a large smooth rock near the pool. There is another rock, perfectly placed for me to brace my feet on. My belly is growing. I watch it get larger and larger before my eyes. The young man smiles and kisses me and tells me that the baby could come anytime now. Then off in the distance I see a tiny light getting closer and closer. It's you, Auntie Lu and Robert, coming with flashlights to see what I'm doing. Then I get confused and afraid. I try to get up, but he keeps me from moving. He says I'll hurt myself and the baby. I get away and start to run toward you, but an intense pain seizes my stomach, and I think I fall. Yes, I fall, and then I'm back leaning on the rocks feeling as if my belly will burst open at any moment. And there's blood, blood in my hair, blood on my hands and blood between my legs. There are a series of snapping sounds, one after another and everything is like a silent movie in slow motion. I am tenderly carried by invisible hands, washed in the pool and placed back on the rocks which are clean and smooth again. The torches begin to go out one by one and I watch the young man walk away. I see his broad and beautiful back in the moonlight, the sway of his hips, back and forth as he moves away. He turns back and I see his hands are cupped as if he holds something precious. He smiles a beautiful smile and a strong wave of love opens up every part of me. He turns away and enters the sea.”

“It's good to tell your dreams,” Auntie Lu said after listening with great interest. “My grandma always said.”

Kanoe looks into Luisa's face and she seems so incredibly beautiful. Her eyes are great and dark and deep, illuminated by a timeless light. She smiles,

and in an instant Kanoe sees sorrow, compassion, and love pass over her face all at once. Luisa lets out a sigh, strokes Kanoe's hair and tells her to go back to sleep.

Kanoe wakes again, rested. She is far away from her old battles. Sunlight has lost its old, sharp edge, and the wind is sweet and pleasant. Kanoe gets out of bed and roams around the house, not worrying about or trying to remember what is past. Robert has gone to town to bring Frank for a short visit. She feels no tension or anxiety about his visit. Although there might be things I want from Frank, she muses, he has nothing I really need. Today she is sure about her path, sure she will never have to beg for anything, ever again. Unexplainably, she feels taken care of, not by any particular person, but by something else, something quiet and kindly, something like this very day.

Auntie Lu sits on the veranda knitting for one of her grandchildren in Texas, while Kanoe lies on the punē watching the sea. Kanoe remembers thinking when she was a little girl that there was one place where all the waves in the world came from. She thinks she pictured it somewhere around the South Pole. What or who generated the waves was of no great importance. What did matter greatly to her was that they continued to proceed, one after another, on their course to each shoreline, reef, island, beach, and cliff from this one great wellspring of waves. And still, thinks Kanoe, they continue arriving. From their long and rolling journeys, waves arrive in a timeless consistency that will long outlast my little human life. Auntie Luisa hums quietly in her chair as she gets on with her work.