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Ka Nani
(The Beautiful)

Literary and Art Magazine
Volume X
1992

Front cover: Agave, photograph by Moriso Teraoka
Dear reader,

The staff of Ka Nani wishes to extend its gratitude to the individuals who contributed their time and expertise to read and judge the many literary pieces submitted to this year's Ka Nani. Without this firm foundation Ka Nani would not have been realized.

A tremendous amount of energy and hard work went into the creation of Ka Nani '92. Working together with talented dedicated people is not only rewarding but also a learning experience for all involved. The extra spice such as the groaning laser printer that had to be coaxed to print, the misplaced entry forms, the "sorry, no longer in service" telephone numbers of a few of the submitters and the Macintosh computers that kept "bombing" just as we were about to "save" gave the finished product a unique personality. It may have also given the staff ulcers and in the case of our photographer, the need for a quick trip to Las Vegas to regain his sanity. The experiences the Ka Nani staff shared can only be compared to a high school class trip—a group of friends embarking on an adventure that leaves one with fond memories, knowledge gained and a sort of sad feeling that it is over.

The art work was selected not only on its artistic quality but also on its ability to be reproduced clearly.

Persons who submitted art work were not involved in the art selection process, nor were persons who submitted literary work involved in the poetry and prose selection process.

Mahalo,

[Signature]

[Signature]

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Mahalo to Gail Harada for assisting in the selection of poetry
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Stage of Wonder

Ann Ravelo

It's mid-day. Sunshine filters through the dismal cloud cover, creating a haze of gray white-wash that illuminates the sky. But there is enough light to accentuate the beauty and splendor of what was once a playground for the royalty.

Acres and acres of rich manicured, vibrant green lawns with magnificent monkeypods are the setting for a chorus of bird songs sung in unrehearsed harmony. These masters of flight, heard but unseen, rejoice amidst the many trees.

A gazebo stands to the right; tall paneled windows encircle the chamber, providing a spectacular view of the garden. Just beyond this windowed wonder sits a thick patch of taro that grow lush, large heart-shaped faces which crowd and skirmish for sunshine. Nurtured by a large pond from which endlessly flows fresh water, the taro patch is home to a pair of ducks that glide between the tall stems. Quacks echo as they call to each other, an intimate gesture to insure the other hasn't strayed too far.

Between the cacophony of avian communication, a gentle rush can be heard from the small waterfall that joins two ponds. The mother pool lies in quiet elegance; the only interruptions are the ripples made by the oriental spotted fish that surface occasionally to gulp for air or low flying insects.

Intertwining branches of two closely grown banyan trees create a patchwork umbrella of leaves shading the pond from any harsh direct sunlight. Roots from the lower limbs extend to the earth below expanding its already immense girth. They hang low, like the goatee of a wise Chinese man.

A gust of strong cool wind blows; long venetian-blind fronds of coconut trees clack; the taro does a head-banging dance and leaves fall from the banyans and stir new patterns into the pond below. The birds grow increasingly silent as the air fills with moisture. Sudden heavy drops of rain spit from the sky. With nature as its cast, the garden is an everchanging stage that once again presents a memorable performance.

Shower

photograph by
Nora Lee-Williams
The Turtle

Sam Bennett

Seemed like everybody was at Sandy's. The day was hot, so people sought the ocean for relief. Unfortunately for me, the surf was pounding. Not being a strong swimmer, I was confined to the beach. Already turning red, I longed for a dip in calmer waters.

"Eh, boys, we go check out da odda beach. Garans get da chicks ovah deah." Avoiding the fact that I couldn't handle the shorebreaks at Sandy's, I figured females would get my friends' attention. "Shoots, den, we go check 'em out."

The beach was located about a half-mile makai of Sandy's. After descending a steep embankment, we entered a partially concealed cove. With rock cliffs rising on either side, the cove made for gender waters. Sure enough, six or seven bikini-clad women were spread out on the beach. Chris and I, always the professional oglers, parked ourselves right next to three local girls. I could tell it was going to be a great summer day.

Chris and I had recently graduated from high school, while Leiloa and Guy were going to be seniors. Being the only haole in the group, I was always the one turning red while all the other guys deepened their tans. After living here all my life, I felt kind of funny still being white.

The beach was crowded that day, with an even number of locals and tourists basking in the sun. A Hawaiian family was having a barbecue behind us, complete with cooler and beer. A loud haole family sat in front of us, jabbering away while taking sun. A Hawaiian man behind us.

My friends and I, always the professional oglers, parked ourselves right next to three local girls. I could tell it was going to be a great summer day.

The sun was going down and we were going home. It had been a long day. As I sat in the car, I couldn't get the family out of my mind. My friends were talking about the fight. Leiloa said, "Yep, that haole guy deserved it. We shoulda mobbed 'em."

Chris added, "Nah, dat local guy was going lick 'em away. Wotchu t'ink, Daryl?"

"Stupid haoles," I muttered. My scorching sunburn bothered me all the way home.
It was.
It isn't anymore.
The memories pass through me like a movie.
Me walking up the dingy-gray concrete steps.
The stocky muscle-bound man that looks at my identification.
The young woman that stamps my hand with ugly navy-blue ink,
telling the world that I'm not legal yet.
But, who cares?
It's too expensive to get drunk in there anyway.
The blaring music hits me as I finally enter the dark club.
Hypnotic bass and drum-beats course through my body.
I am now a cobra in a basket waiting for enticement.
I make my way to the large speakers where everyone sits.
I light a cigarette and watch the young vampires dance.
Their black clothes, black hair, and dark lips contrast with their pale, pale skin.
Just like me.
I watch another cobra in a Harley-jacket and faded jeans.
He writhes in a corner alone in his world,
entranced with the music, and the psychedelic lighting.
In the middle of the dance-floor, a beautiful, blond, young-man with a lacy golden suit makes my evening worthwhile.
It's not his handsome look that stirs my senses so much as do his jovial, staccato steps.
Every move seemingly choreographed.
Every word to the song seemingly known.
Moves, so light, but volatile.
His nonchalant dance turns into a rhythmical frenzy as he synchronizes with the singer's delirious screams:
"Sex! Sex! Sex! Sex!"
I nearly cough as the DJ pumps out the sickly sweet dry-ice smoke.
I watch it surround me like a capsule and try to make out my trail of cigarette smoke through it.
"I have to dance!" I tell my friend, as the DJ plays a song I like.
I let the melancholy, low, vibrato of the singers voice encompass every inch of my thought. I wave the flimsy black flowing material of my coat around. It's not a coat anymore; it's a cape. Inspiration conceived with every note of music. My arms and legs feel the resonating of the saturnine words. I am the cobra in a trance. I am a creature of the night with my dark hair and pale face. I dance until the DJ breaks my trance with a horrid song. I go back to the speakers and watch the other vampires. And I start all over again.
The Potter

John Hirano

The first time they broke up, she gathered the pieces they made of their lives, of their loves and bound them tightly together with a thin cord of hope...

The next time, she cupped them together, carefully matched the cracks and smoothed them with water, tears, and care...

But the last time—her arms hugged the pieces, dropped them to her skirt as she wept with head bowed in the realization that she could do nothing more...
I'll Be Your Mistress  
Sachiko Bratakos

The phone was ringing. Ritsuko hurried through the entrance doorway, left her shopping basket on the floor and reached for the phone.

"Hello, Okamoto's residence."

"Ritsuko? It's me. Listen, I have to cancel the dinner tonight. I have to finish my work. I'm going to be late. We'll do this some other time, ok?"

"Well... ok." She could barely hear her husband's voice because of the noise in his office, but she knew what he meant, and she had no choice but to accept it. His commitments with her had never been met during the 15 years of their marriage because of his business. He thought, as a husband, that he was responsible for supporting his wife, and he expected his wife, as a woman, to be responsible for her job—housekeeping, cooking, gardening, entertaining, and anything to do with the house. Ritsuko was used to this lifestyle. She saw what her mother did for her husband, and when she died, Ritsuko took care of her father until he died, now she had her husband to care for.

With his hard-earned money, her husband recently bought a two-bedroom house in a suburb, two hours of train riding outside Tokyo. He commuted to his office every day by train, packed with people like sardines. He was devoted to his work. His overtime became part of his regular work hours. Once in a while his unusually early return surprised Ritsuko. However, most of her days were long and still.

When they were newly wed, she used to complain to her husband about not spending much time with her, but her husband's response was always the same. He thought that his work was his first priority, and secondly, he was responsible for taking care of his wife. He always suggested that she find her own way to spend time while he was doing his duty out in the battlefield. As their married life went by, Ritsuko learned that there was no way of changing her husband's theory of marriage, so she altered her own life to fit his wants and needs.

During the fifteen years of her marriage, Ritsuko took various classes at various places to fill her long days. Her first attempt was a knitting class. Her first project was a sweater for her husband in his favorite color, ivory. She made it on time for his birthday and wrapped it up.

"Open it," begged Ritsuko, looking anxiously at her husband and the present, excitedly waiting to see his reaction.

"A sweater!" he said as he pulled it out from the box and displayed it in front of him.

"You know what?" her voice danced, "I made it!"

"You made it?" said her husband, "Let's see." He took off his usual sweater and put on the new one.

"Oh! You did well! It fits just right," he said as he examined the sweater. The result pleased Ritsuko, and she went on making sweaters and more sweaters—a blue one with a v-neck, a green one with a round-neck and a black one with buttons in the front.

Soon her husband stopped complimenting her work; after all, a sweater was a sweater, and he didn't need that many sweaters. When she saw the last sweater she had made for his Christmas present still in a box stacked up on top of his dresser one day, Ritsuko stopped making sweaters.

A few weeks later she was browsing downtown after class. Through the window case, colorful baby booties and bonnets caught her eye. "My! How cute!" she thought, grinning. "We should have a baby." From that day, her long nights were filled by making booties and bonnets for their future baby. But, despite her best effort of making bootie after bootie and bonnet after bonnet, there was no sign of a baby. Finally seeing a drawer full of baby stuff became depressing for her, and when her neighbor succeeded in having a baby, Ritsuko decided to give away the whole drawer filled with her dreams.

Soon after, she tried a cooking class. When her husband made it on time for dinner, he was pleased with the selection of the dinner menu, but he was not on time often. Usually, she sat at the dinner table, looking at the clock and looking at the new dishes and waiting for her husband to come home. She would finally give up her dream of having a romantic dinner and finish her meal alone by the melting candle at the quiet table. His last-minute cancellation of their date by phone always disappointed Ritsuko, who was eager to show off her new menu for the evening. So, she eventually stopped going to the cooking class, for there was no one to please and share the meal with.

When her husband was on one of his business trips, she was completely alone for days and nights. Since she had no one to cook for, she became a garbage disposal trying to clean up leftovers. When there was nothing to feed on, she bought take-out meals or instant saimin, just to fill her stomach.

She wished the nights would never come. They seemed longer than ever for Ritsuko, for she had no one to wait for. The TV was her great companion. She turned its volume louder and left it on throughout the evening until it was time to sleep.

Lying down on the double bed, trying to take up the entire space all alone was a struggle and a pain. Under the cold sheets, her naked body longed for her lover. She buried her face deep and sought him in his pillow until it drew her into a thrilling romance night after night.

One afternoon, Ritsuko was passing through the park after finishing her grocery shopping. A white puppy ran after her. It had large, clear eyes and a bushy tail. Its thick fur made it look like a snow ball. It was trying to stick its head under Ritsuko's skirt and she was confused by the sudden approach.

"Shiro, come back!" a voice came from behind her. Ritsuko turned around, and there was a youth in a crisp white T-shirt, standing with a leash in his hand. His tanned face appeared healthy and muscles bulged out from under his rolled up sleeves.

"Please forgive him. He loves to play with a lady's skirt," he said and grinned. His straight white teeth complemented his dark skin.

Ritsuko was embarrassed and tried to find words. "Its name is Shiro, isn't it?"

"Yah."

"It's a nice-looking dog," she said.
“He is a Siberian Husky.”

“S...i...e...be...rian?”

“Right. He pulls a sled in the snow.”

“Wow! First time I ever saw one,” said Ritsuko as she ran her fingers through its thick fur.

“Do you come here often?” the youth asked. When he noticed Ritsuko’s confusion, he introduced himself, “Excuse me, my name is Mizuki Noboru.”

“...M...my name is Okamoto Ritsuko,” answered Ritsuko. Meanwhile, the dog was running around on the grass, wagging its fuzzy tail.

“Shiro! Are you ready?” said the youth, as he stretched his arm up in the air. He threw a yellow tennis ball toward an empty field. The two watched the dog, dashing toward the ball’s destination.

“Shiro really enjoys playing with his ball, doesn’t he?”

“Yah, he does, especially today. He knows a pretty woman is watching him,” said the youth as he turned toward her. Not being used to such a compliment, Ritsuko was embarrassed and on the verge of tears. As the dog proudly caught it and presented it in his mouth to his master. As he patted the dog’s body dearly each time he returned, the dog rubbed his head between the youth’s legs. Ritsuko enjoyed watching the friendly nonverbal exchange between the youth and the dog.

On her way home, Ritsuko thought, “What a lovely thing I saw. They were running together. They were talking to each other.” She stepped into her house and looked around for a moment, hoping to find any friendly movement or any sound in the stillness. She was humming as she placed the groceries on the counter. Only her own voice intimately responded to her in the quiet kitchen.

In the bedroom, she stood in front of the mirror. For a moment, she stared at her reflection. She pulled up her slightly curled hair and turned side-ways, then, she moved closer to the reflection and smiled.

The next day, Ritsuko planned to pass through the park the same time as yesterday. She decided to wear a white dress gathered at her waist with a pink bow on the back, which she had purchased last summer but never wore, thinking, after she brought it home, that it was too thin for her age. As she hoped, on the green field Ritsuko saw the snow ball running toward her, with his tail wagging cheerfully. The youth was following after Shiro, waving his hand. The white of his shirt and of the dog’s fur blended together in the red sun. Ritsuko responded to their welcome with a big smile.

“Hi! We meet again,” said the youth. Meanwhile Shiro, as usual, tried to stick his head underneath the pretty woman’s new dress. “There he goes,” said the youth.

“Well, here he goes,” said Ritsuko as though she had expected. Shiro suddenly dashed toward the green field. He turned around and wagged his tail anxiously.

“I think he wants you to throw the ball. Do you mind?” asked the youth as he held the yellow ball in front of Ritsuko.

“My! I wonder if I can do it though...,” said Ritsuko. Then she reached for the ball.

“Try it.”

“Well...” she muttered as she prepared herself for the first throw since high school. The tiny yellow ball flew in the air, and Shiro briskly dashed toward it. When she watched him capture it with his mouth and joyously ran back to her, Ritsuko felt her blood running and her nerves tingling under her skin. She giggled and hugged the dog. Ritsuko and the youth took turns throwing the ball. The snow ball grabbed all their attention in an unending game.

Going to the park became a special chore in her routine. She looked forward to the next day and doing the same, for there now was some reward waiting for her. She added more colors to her thin lips. While she was selecting the outfit for the day, she thought of the youth’s compliment to her, and she felt her heart beating faster.

“Wow! You look great! The dress looks nice on you!” the youth had said as he admired her. Although she was pleased by his statement, Ritsuko was embarrassed and couldn’t think of a word to say.

Grinning before the mirror, she slipped on some of her old dresses, which she hadn’t touched for years, thinking they were too bright and too glamorous. “Mmm... They don’t look so bad for my age,” she thought.

Some days Ritsuko and the youth sat on the bench and watched Shiro play. The youth was a good storyteller. She loved to hear his stories of “When I was in...” The very first story he told Ritsuko was “When I was in Hong Kong.”

“When I was in Hong Kong, the first thing I learned was to hold on to my belongings all the time. I mean all the time.

On the first day of my arrival at the Hong Kong Airport, a man snatched my duffel bag which had all my clothes, and disappeared into the crowd. It was late at night, and stores weren’t open, so I decided to do shopping the next day. But, when I woke up the next day, I learned it was a holiday. So, I had to wait for another day.

Wearing the same underwear on the third day was unbearable, so I tried to be brave and left my hotel room without it. I hurriedly bought my underwear, and then, I stepped inside a clothing store nearby to put it on. I picked up a pair of pants, pretending to be a customer and looked for a dressing room. While I went outside the dressing room to view myself in the mirror, just to please the sales clerk who was eager to make a sale, my clothes were stolen. Great! Now, I had my underwear but no clothes, no shoes. One lucky thing was that I kept my money in a leather sack tied around my neck, for my fellow workers had warned me about pickpockets before I left Japan. Although I wasn’t so happy about the choice of clothes, I bought them anyway because I couldn’t walk out of the store naked. I left the store, without my shoes.

Finally, after buying a pair, I was exhausted from all this Hong Kong hospitality on my first trip there, and I wanted to sit down somewhere. Among the huge crowd, I was stretching my neck to find a place to sit. Suddenly there was a big blow to my jaw. ‘Ouch!’ I shouted so loud. Everybody looked at me. Then, I noticed my money sack hanging down helplessly from my neck. Someone had tried to snatch my leather sack, not knowing that it was tied with an elastic cord around my neck. When the crook released his grip, it bounced right back and gave a death blow to my jaw.”

Ritsuko’s face smarted from laughing so hard, and she held it with both hands.

"There!"}

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Ritsuko’s face smarted from laughing so hard, and she held it with both hands.
Another time when I was in Africa, a lion chased after me as I tried to take a shot of it. I ran and ran. I saw a tree ahead of me. As I tried to climb the tree, the lion ripped my pants and almost bit my ass.”

Ritsuko laughed loud like a child being entertained. She hadn't laughed much at home, for there was no one who would entertain her but herself. While listening to his stories, her eyes glowed and her cheeks turned rosy.

The youth was a photographer for a magazine company, and he had been traveling all over the world. His job was never predictable, and he usually received a sudden mission to fly out.

“Time, I might have to really go to Africa,” said the youth.

“Africa? Do you know when?”

“No, like other times, I will be given a job at the very last minute. But this time, if I go, I might not come back soon.”

“What about Shiro?”

“My roommate usually takes care of him while I am away, but if I am gone too long, it might be difficult,” said the youth as he watched Shiro running around the grass.

“...Will I be good enough for him?” asked Ritsuko after she thought about it for a moment.

“You’ll be perfect... Listen... if I don’t come back soon, will you be his mistress? Forever? I think he will be better off because I’m too often away from him,” the youth asked as he looked into her eyes.

...His mistress?” Ritsuko’s eyes glowed. “I’d love to!”

“Great! Sorted. I’m relieved now,” said the youth, “Let’s go chase after Shiro!” He stood up suddenly and took her hand. Surprised by the unexpected gesture, Ritsuko stayed still for a second and hesitantly responded to his offer.

“Okay, let’s go home, Shiro!” The couple strolled toward their home.

The phone rang. Ritsuko dashed to the phone.

“Hello, this is Okamoto’s residence.”

“Ritsuko, it’s me. Happy Birthday. Sorry, I can’t make it today. Let’s have a nice dinner or something together when I come back tomorrow.”

“I completely forgot about it. Well, we’ll have dinner for three tomorrow.”

“Dinner, what?”

“Never mind. Dinner together, right?” she said, beaming into the phone.

“Yeah, see you, then.” He hung up the phone. Ritsuko hummed around the kitchen while she was preparing dinner for two. Through the kitchen window, she saw Shiro waiting in the yard for his meal to come. His white figure looked like a big stuffed animal in the dark. Above him, the sky was filled with jewels like a huge sheet of celebrity wrapping paper.

“I am his mistress,” she muttered, and then to the reflection of herself in the kitchen window she sang, “Happy Birthday to you... Happy Birthday to you...”
An Unlikely Pair
photograph by
C. G. Bates

Energy

Although each day adds
its quiet, blue-green
Leafy sunlight, rocks and sand.
Each day chips energy away.
Perhaps it is not possible to go on.
Death stalks.

Every day the Question
Reappears in the shimmer
Of linoleum, aluminum, petroleum.
I found the pin yesterday, an American flag in red, white, and blue enamel layered over gold. It was clinging to a purple nightie, a gift to my last lover. Shel "left" a month back and finished extracting her things two weeks ago. I've been alone since then.

She took the dinnerware, her wok, and one of the VCRs. There's a bare spot on the wall, an unfaded patch with a nail in the middle. The picture had been mine, but she always liked it more than I did.

The pin is important. It's made of gold but would mean just as much if it were made of plastic and glue. It pops up every so often and reminds me. James gave it to me before he died. He had this toast: "Sex makes you stupid . . . here's to stupidity!"

Shel is gone, but she left traces of herself scattered throughout the apartment. The missing luggage key turned up. It was inside a pink ceramic heart Shel had gotten from somewhere. "Don loves Geri," is carved underneath. She dropped the lid one day and put the pieces in a drawer. The key was inside.

I took it out and tied it to the handle of the suitcase it belonged with and had a beer while I looked at the heart. It was about the size of your open palm. There was just one crack that runs down the middle of the lid, one break that makes it fall apart. I thought about gluing it, but just put the pieces back in the drawer. Maybe later.

I found a couple of strands of Shel's hair on my denim jacket, found more in the shower and under the sofa. The vacuum cleaner came out, drew in all the hair from under the dresser and under the bed. I vacuumed it all away, but kept finding other things: old Valentines, a bit of the plastic grass you use in Easter baskets, an empty foil for her birth control pills. I found a picture of Shel I'd never seen before. She was wearing the necklace I gave her. I put the photo with the rest of the things she might want.

We kept a rag box in the back of the bedroom closet. Some of the clothes were almost new, so I got a grocery bag from the kitchen and began sorting through what was there. There were new things at the top of the box, things Shel had never worn. These went in the Salvation Army bag. Shel gained some weight before we separated, but I never told her that I noticed.

I wasn't really mad when I found my old Army jacket at the bottom of the box. It was something that was easy to forget—especially since I had been trying for so many years. The jacket represented something Shel pretended to ignore and I tried to forget, but the jacket was never meant to be tossed away. It had a dusty smell to it. The folds were pressed deep and the material was stiff, but it still fit, so I put the pin on it.

The jacket reminded me of a lot of things. I ran my hand over a shoulder patch and remembered that the threads felt the same a long time ago. In the silent apartment, there was a ghost in the mirror who looked a lot like me. I saw something behind his eyes that hinted at some truth I hadn't learned. I turned away and jumped in the car to find James.
James and I had complimentary tastes in decor. He liked weird things that reminded you of mortality. I liked wood. We had no beds in our room. I built a bunk over the spot on the floor where James slept and we both had futons. I made a shelf a couple feet wide that ran the length of a wall. Just for James, I put a triangle-shaped shelf in another corner (three feet below the ten-foot ceiling). We hung a beat-up fish net across most of the ceiling and James put up a Jackelope head. The both of us rigged the wiring and we flooded the room in black light.

James stole a piece of plywood (about seven-feet tall) from a construction site. He leaned it against one wall and painted a crucifixion scene on it with neon paint. He got candles from a San Francisco gift shop with "Hail Mary" prayers papered over the glass and we hung them off of pegs to burn.

I put my stereo on the six-foot shelf so that short thieves couldn't carry it off, and James laid a tiny wheeliechair sideways on the corner shelf just below the ceiling. He found it in the garbage bin of some hospital that treated lepers, but he never said what he was doing there. Someone gave him a glass bottle with bubble-gum from vending machines, using the pennies from the bong to buy the gum. He filled the thing with bubble-gum from vending machines, using the pennies from the bong to buy the gum. Once, I came into the room and his cheeks were bulging between chews. "Why are you chewing so much gum?" I asked.

He pulled out a saliva-coated, multi-colored mass and said, "We had too many pennies." Then he stuck it back into his mouth and began chewing again.

At first, I made it a point to try to get laid once a party quieted down. The tricky thing was the timing since James and I shared one room and I wasn't into having more than one other person around during those private moments. After a while though, the sex got depressing. I'd see someone I screwed a couple of weeks earlier and have to agonize over whether or not to make a pass at her again. I'd worry about being a sleaze for wanting to be with her again, or insulting if I didn't try. The first times were always easier.

After a while though, I gave up on sex. It seemed like you could plot the energy of a party through the course of the night and find this one spot— in the wee hours between exhilaration and death — where knowledge is the underlying subject of every conversation. A lot of people would crawl the parlor and live the smallness by passing out, so those of us that stayed awake all night would gather outside on the unlit porch. If you had just the right type of high of the perfect intensity, you could see peace in the smallest sound and hear it in every patch of darkness. The trick was to do acid early and booze later. After 2 a.m. or so, only the cool people would still be awake, and then you smoke some grass.

I learned a lot when the parties became mellow — that clear glass is hard to make because you need to use gold, that green glass and blue are easy because you only need copper. Trivial things were my first hint that the world was deeper than I thought, and that people were deeper still.

Kant, Nitze, Tenenon, Kafka, Borges, Camus, Genovese, and Keats (and a lot of others I've forgotten) were all carefully introduced to me in those twilight hours. My first copies of Zippy...
the Pinhead comics and The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy were given to me during the dark porch discussions. It was shocking that everyone had a view, and that so many views were so well-developed. I learned of books to read, places to see, music to enjoy, and food to eat. I fed on scraps of languages to be learned at some time in the vague future.

Often, Denise and I would be among the last on the porch. At first, she tended to be a very quiet but very observant. Sometimes, it seemed that she listened carefully and ignored things simultaneously, so that if you watched her sitting there, you couldn’t be absolutely sure which one of the two things she was doing. She usually didn’t get extremely high, so she’d last the whole night instead of passing out somewhere in the middle. She watched her high because she got fucked up very easily. James often said he envied her.

If she watched TV, it was usually only to pass the time. If she watched TV, it was usually only to pass the time. I rarely watched TV because I was generally the last person to get high. I watched it to pass the time. I usually didn’t get extremely high, so I’d last the whole night instead of passing out somewhere in the middle. She watched her high because she got fucked up very easily. James often said he envied her.

I told her that men lie because they are weak, that you can never sure that they’re not think­ing with their dicks, that no, she’s not ugly or sub-standard, that what’s-his-face is a fag, and that the only thing she was doing wrong was trying too hard and that she was strang­ling me with her massage for being honest.

I stood and thanked her for the massage, and promised that I wasn’t lying. She said the word “promise,” as if the word or repetition would ensure my honesty. I said, “I promise that every­thing I just said is true: You are not ugly, what’s-his-face is a fag, that the only thing you’re doing wrong is trying too hard, and your cooking needs improvement.”

Denise smiled, and said, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. If you want, I’ll show you how I make my pesto and caesar salad. I cook Italian better than Bill does.” She smirked, and since I was trying to be serious, I added a little more softly, “And I think you’re very beautiful.” She looked at me as if I was teasing her, so I bit my lip and tried to explain, “... no, not just physically. I mean, you look good physically — I’d dog you right now. I mean ... ugh! Okayokayokay ... I’ll shut up.”

“Go to sleep,” she told me.

One night, there were five of us talking about relationships, and lovers who smother you with their own lack of identity. I thought Denise would like the discussion, so I left the porch to look for her. She wasn’t in the kitchen. All the jello was gone, and the only beer left was Old Milwaukee, but I had one anyway.

I passed by Denise’s room, and she wasn’t in there either. I went to ask James where Denise was and found my bedroom door locked, so I went to piss. The bathroom door was open so I knocked and went in when no one screamed. It was empty, so I closed the door and took a leak sitting down so I wouldn’t fall. After I was done, I lifted the seat so that whoever came after me wouldn’t think I was weird. The position of the seat was also sort of an issue. A majority of the residents of our “family” agreed that it wasn’t really important because “Men can fall in too,” and because “Equal is Equal.”

My reflection looked pale, so I ran some warm water. After I had washed my face, I opened the door and Denise fell in. She looked more stoned that she usually did — and happier too. I got out of her way as we excused ourselves, and was thankful that I raised the seat as she closed the door behind her. The door to my room was open.

James was rolling a joint as I walked in. He said he needed to mellow out. I jumped on my bunk because it was easy to look down at the tapes on the stereo that way. I figured some Americana or Bread would help James come down nicely. Once I got in my bunk though, I had to stop because Denise’s Army jacket was on my futon, and along with it, her underwear. I held one end of the brassiere off the bunk so that the books were right in front of James’s face, and I asked him, “Uh, should I be looking for wet spots in my bunk tonight?”

James sometimes borrowed my bunk when he had a girl in the room. He said the view was better up top, and he’d usually use his own futon. “Don’t worry,” he said. I let the bra drop.

“The only wet spots are down here. Take some hits with me,” he said.

I told him “Fucking gross.” The lit end of the joint rose past the level of my bunk, and James’s head popped up.

“Here,” he said. “Hold this.”

So I took the joint from him and took a hit, and held it while he fell twice before he was able to clamber into my bunk and brace himself against the wall. I exhaled and gave him the joint.

“Want some gum?” he asked.

“Gimme a break,” I told him.

Denise’s birthday came a month or so later. James passed out early and I got pretty high from drinking port and doing acid with Denise from early in the afternoon. We’d gotten closer since that night she’d slept with James. They had sex a couple of times since then, and she’d made fun of James’s “cuteness” when he wasn’t around. I felt more comfortable around her without having to talk around our sexuality, and we had started to talk about some of the things that
make you hopeful and lonely and doubtful. I lost some of the compulsive wisecracks too.

Denise wanted our guests to leave the house before midnight so that it would still be her birthday when they left. She became rude after twelve, so everyone cleared out a half-hour later. We dragged James to bed and she asked me to do her shoulders because he weighed more than he looked.

I smoked a cigarette while I worked her shoulders, and she thanked me for the massage and asked me to tuck her in. I agreed, but started to feel uncomfortable once we were in her room. She sat on the bed and reached around to unsnap her bra. She slipped the straps off her shoulders and pulled it out of her sleeve and laid back, kicking her shorts out from the bottom of the blanket. She kicked her panties out and asked me, "Aren't you going to tuck me in?"

Denise rested her head near my shoulder while we smoked. The flannel was up to our chests, and she had put a paper plate on my stomach for us to use as an ashtray. I made a "Huh," sound before I could stop it, and Denise asked me. "What are you thinking?"

I laughed and told her, "Uh, maybe you don't need to learn how to cook."

She laughed, and I closed my eyes as I felt her shift to kiss me. It wasn't a passionate kiss or tender kiss. It was a peaceful kiss. It was the nicest kiss I'd ever had.

The window was open and there was a soft, steady breeze that made everything under the covers warm and comforting. Denise spoke to the ceiling and said, "James told me that you used to have dreams of me, that you wondered if you were falling in love with me."

She paused, "Are you?"

"In love?" I said. "Well, you know I care a lot about you, and that I love you a certain way... and that I think you're extremely attractive. But... I'm not sure. I don't think I'm in love with you that way right now."

"That's good," she said. "I'd feel funny if one of you really fell in love with me."

"Are you sure that I don't love you?" I asked.

She turned away and said that she wasn't sure about anything.

A couple of months later, the semester ended and I attended summer session at another college to save on tuition. When I came back for the fall, I found that Denise had moved out. Two months after I had left, James had managed to get her pregnant and she had moved out and dropped off the face of the earth. I asked James why she left, if she was going to have an abortion, or if she would put the child up for adoption. I asked him if he loved her. He looked so peaceful as he sat there, and he said that he loved her, but for different reasons than I did.

I woke up in the hospital the next day. Bill was standing near the bed when I woke up. Nina was reading a book. Bill grabbed my hand and then his face broke. "James is dead," he told me. His lips were curling painfully under his moustache, and he started to shake. He brushed some hair away from my face and I looked away at the bright window. I sensed that Nina had gotten out of her chair and was hugging Bill from behind.

I cried too, but didn't say anything. The tears were sliding down into my ear, and it sounded like I was drowning. Something died in that bed.

His family invited us to the funeral, but I couldn't go. The thought of neat carpets of grass and pretty flowers all arranged was too painful. Those images were too ironic to endure when mixed with my memories of James, so I pretended to be in shock and stayed home. For a week or so, I felt like I was the one who should have died. I was afraid James' father would grab me by the front of my suit and push me into the open pit while screaming, "Murderer! You killed him, you little shit! You should have died instead!" just because he loved James. I was afraid of that pit, of the hole James would be lowered into. Even thinking of the smell of dirt would make me feel sick. Bill and Nina attended the funeral without me but they didn't say much when they got home.

I took a swig of tequila while driving to James' place. At a stoplight, an elderly lady saw me tipping the bottle into my mouth and tapped her husband on the shoulder. She whispered something that made him glare at me. Fuck them.

I pulled into the mortuary and parked the car. The walk seemed longer than it did before. I had another mouthful of tequila and sat down to the right of where James' feet should be. I sat there for several minutes with my hands in my lap before I knocked on the grass and said, "Anyone home?"

I told him, "You know, James, I always thought you died from an overdose, but I finally understand — you died of grief. Didn't you?"

And the winds howled, so I asked again, "Didn't You?"
Of all the magical and mystical places locked in the joyous memories of my childhood, none is more precious than the picture window. Located in the east corner of the music room in a large white house in Manoa, the picture window frames the falls at the back of the valley. It always seemed as if the builders of the house framed the falls first, then built the house to surround that window.

When I was a child, there always seemed to be music there. Sometimes Papa played the piano; when he was tired, my eldest sister Betty Lou would take over. Second eldest sister Corrine learned to play the banjo, and Mama, third sister Roberta and I, the youngest, would sing and clap our hands.

Even when no one was around, and I was alone in the music room, the memory of the echo of our voices raised in song would surround me, and I would hum along with those ghostly tunes. I liked to sit on the floor cushions in front of that large beautiful window, and dream time away. Sometimes I would wish for special things, small childish things, and I would always send my wishes through the window, out to the falls.

Everyone who came to our home was eventually caught by the beauty framed in that window. The sky, high in the background, was a fluffy white, a shimmering blue or a steely gray that would surmount the hills. The hills were a montage of varied greens in the winter and spring. In the summer and fall months, they would be speckled with brown, but they would lose none of their beauty. The trees and foliage that could be seen in the bottom third of the picture window were a collage of blossoming colors in every season. The falls in the center always gleamed like a vertical string of diamonds and sapphires.

At night the window reflected the inside of the music room and a part of the parlor, like a dark mirror. When I was young, I would press my nose against the glass, and see darkness staring back at me. Loud sounds at night made the window vibrate, making the forms reflected there shimmer. I used to wonder if the pictures reflected were an illusion; during the day-light hours, the pictures were always beautiful, at night the reflections were sometimes frightening.

I was ten the summer Nana, Papa’s mother, was diagnosed as having cancer of the colon. Immediate surgery was needed to remove a large lump in her abdomen. A colostomy was done so that her body’s waste products could flow into a plastic bag from an opening created in her abdomen and be safely removed.

Up until the time of her illness, my grandmother was a sporadic visitor in my life. She appeared magically during holidays bearing gifts, dispensing hugs and kisses, and would usually leave us all over stuffed and with stomach aches. I enjoyed her gifts and love but in a vague greedy way.

During Nana’s stay at the hospital, my father began to drink heavily, and my mother was forced to deal with everything. He still managed to go to work, but when he came home, he would head for the bar and start drinking. I remember being frightened when they started to...
fight, but when Mama and Papa brought Nana home to live with us, the fights seemed to stop.

My bedroom, the smallest, was turned over to Nana, then Mama pushed the piano aside and set up our old yellow camping tent in the music room. It became my bedroom for the next year. I was allowed to sleep on the floor on a futon, and to decorate it in any manner I wished. I loved being there because, after the first few days, my mother was too busy to frequently look inside again. I could keep it just as messy as I wanted. I chose to face my tent toward the window and spent hours playing near it, staring through it and touching it.

Our lives seemed to return to normal, but I soon noticed that my parents were no longer talking and touching each other as often as they did before. Papa still drank, but only when he thought no one was watching. Mama remained responsible for everything; she took care of Nana and all her problems, cleaned up after Papa and us, and she still had the time to make each of us feel that we were special and loved.

Nana seemed frail after her surgery. We no longer made as much noise in the house, although we were never told to be quiet. She was terribly embarrassed by the plastic bag on her hip, and she refused to let anyone but Mama take care of her. Each of us was given chores to do that would provide her with company when Mama was busy, and keep us out of her way at the same time.

During Nana’s stay at the hospital, her skin had begun to dry and peel and one of my tasks was to put lotion on her legs. Her skin was so soft and delicate that any sharp bump, or even the scratch of a fingernail, could tear it. At first, I resented having to help and tried to get out of the chore.

I think Nana understood my resentment because she began to tell me stories about her childhood while I rubbed her emaciated legs and feet. I began to stay with her for longer periods of time. I took over the simple tasks assigned to my sisters just so I could spend more time with her. I grew to love the gentle thoughts of my grandmother.

I took her to see my special window when she was strong enough to walk that far. I placed a chair right in front of the window, and then I walked her carefully there and eased her gently onto the seat. It became our special place of sharing, and I would sit on the floor by her chair and curl my legs under me. I would touch and caress the smooth pale warmth of her skin.

I taught her how I sent wishes through the window and out to the falls. She read poetry and studies interfered with the time we had together.

During her last month with us she needed help to move from the bed to the chair in front of the window and back again. I almost snarled when anyone tried to help besides Mama and myself. Her illness seemed to shrink her body until she was almost my size. Her skin draped her bare, thin bones, and she became even more fragile.

Papa was again openly drinking himself into a stupor nightly, and the house on the mornings after would resound with the noise of his vomiting. Mama appeared daily from their bedroom, her face blotchy from crying. Their loud arguments began often. When Nana kept her silence, their arguments would grow louder and longer.

Nana was usually in her bedroom when their arguments started, but one night she was seated in her chair when they began. They were so loud that I woke up. I saw Nana’s reflection in the vibrating glass. There were tears streaming down her face, leaking through her tightly clenched eyes. I quickly went to Nana and hugged her tightly. I started to rock her back and forth, like I would my favorite dolly.

Nana held me with all the strength she had, and I began screaming at my parents to stop arguing, “Stop it. You’re hurting my Nana,” over and over again. My parents rushed over behind the tent, and we were soon all hugging and rocking. When Mama tried to pull me away from Nana, I wouldn’t let go. Nana finally told her and Papa to go on to bed, and that we both would be fine.

I fell asleep that night on the floor by Nana’s legs. Sometime during the night, Mama must have come out and moved both of us back to our beds, because when Mama woke me for school that morning I was on my cot. When I went toward Nana’s room, Mama stopped me and told me that Nana was sleeping.

I got dressed and went to school that day, but all morning long I couldn’t focus my attention on my school work. Just before the lunch bell rang, the school principal came and took me to his office. He seated me in a chair next to his desk, and then told me my grandmother had been taken to the hospital. When I jumped out of my chair to try and run home, he caught my arm and told me my father was on his way to pick me up. I started to cry, and I struggled in his arms. When I saw him, all the fear, all the pain and all the
anger I had been holding back came pouring out. I remember rushing at him with clenched fists, and hitting him over and over again. I told him how bad he was, how he drank too much, how he hurt Mama, and how very much he had hurt my Nana. I remember repeating over and over again, until it became a drone, “I want my Nana.”

He was stunned at first, but he soon held me with my arms tightly pinned between us. When I had calmed down enough to look up, I saw tears on Papa’s face. I had never seen Papa cry before. When he noticed my stare, he looked into my eyes and said, “She’s my Mama, too,” in a voice filled with pain. New tears splashed down his cheeks, and he lowered his cheek to touch mine. He cried aloud then, desperately deep man sounds of mourning.

His arm’s loosened from around me after he had cried for awhile. I reached up and gathered his head in my arms, and then I rocked him. I then knew that Papa’s pain was even greater than mine, for he had known and loved Nana longer than I had. When Papa quieted, he took out his handkerchief and wiped both of our faces. We left the Principal’s office and picked up my other sisters at their school and went home. We were closer after that day.

Nana lasted another month at the hospital. Papa was able to sneak me in to see her only once, but she was barely able to recognize me. The pain medication no longer worked and new cancers were growing larger in places all over her body.

Papa stopped drinking, and he would daily sit with me in his lap in front of the window. We would talk about Nana, and Papa would tell me his version of her stories. I learned Papa was a lot like Nana.

It was the middle of the night when Mama got the call from the hospital saying Nana had passed away. We all got up and gathered together when the phone rang. We all cried together, hugging tightly, when Mama told us in a strangled voice that Nana wasn’t going to be in pain anymore.

After awhile, Mama sent us back to our beds. I went to my tent and sat on the futon for awhile, then I went to the window and sat in the chair. I stared at my reflection in the glass, and soon I began to see Nana again. When I closed my eyes, I could feel the softness of her skin and smell the lotion I used to help her put on. I fell asleep that night hugging the cushions on the back of her chair.

Although thirty years have passed, when I look at my reflection in the window, I can still see Nana there too. I can see her face clearly, for I have inherited the bump in her nose, her fine flyaway hair, and her hairline. I think I have also inherited some of her humor, strength and wisdom. I am no longer frightened by the nighttime pictures that shimmer in the glass of the window, because it now reflects the faces of my children.
I saw you
crouched under the table
eyes wide spying
at uncle- and auntie-folks
bickering near the flowers
in Japanese and English

I wanted you to take my hand
wished you would crawl out
from under the awful black lacquer
past the hanging lace
to stand near the food
and add your voice
to mine
to quiet their fight
but you looked past me
as if I too
were dead

I told mother
once home
that I saw you there
under the table
watching
listening
that it was the first time
you ever looked sad
and her eyes —
Mother's eyes
they misted for a moment
as she said
that you scold her
even in death.
The Salad

Brock Pemberton

"Young man, why are you taking my picture?"
"Mom wants me to take pictures of everybody, Grandma," Bobby politely recited.
"Well, I believe you should go outside and use your camera on your cousins. They are quite better looking than I."

Bobby was only twelve, but he knew his grandmother's last comment was meant to entice a compliment. He replied, "I think you're pretty, Grandma. And you make the best potato salad in the whole world."

"Well, you may go to the kitchen and help yourself, but do not eat too much, you will not be able to eat your dinner."

To Bobby, Grandma's potato salad was a dinner. He had to be forced to eat spinach, carrots, broccoli and peas by themselves, but combined together with potatoes, a few other choice ingredients, spices and Grandma's magic touch they came alive with flavors that mesmerized his memory for hours. On Sunday nights his mom, dad, aunts, uncles and cousins always ate dinner at Grandma's house.

English, Dutch and Polish families were the main ingredients of this 1950's farming town on Eastern Long Island. Blacks, Mexicans and some Orientals were hired to work on the farms, but they weren't considered part of the community. In fact they were made to live in a migrant labor camp on the other side of the railroad tracks. The laborers' children didn't go to school Bobby went to; he and his friends were not allowed to go near the laborers or their offspring.

"I want some too."

Bobby's older cousin, Marie, had entered the kitchen and wanted her share of the salad always made specially for Grandma's grandchildren. They always played the same game with Grandma. One at a time they would compliment her culinary expertise and one at a time she would allow them to have some of the salad before dinner. But Grandma always made it clear that each grandchild was to get an equal share. All this was supposedly done without their parents knowing. At the dinner table Grandma would always tell the family that the gremlins must have eaten all the salad. At the moment Bobby wished they had. Somehow he had managed to devour all but a few measurer spoonfuls.

"Where's my salad?"
"Shhh, Marie, the gremlins ate it."
"There's no gremlins and you know it. Did you eat it all?"
"No! I only ate a little. There wasn't much there. Somebody else must've eaten it."
"No, Bobby, the rest of us didn't get any yet. I'm telling Grandma. She said we should share it with each other."

She turned and ran into the living room. Bobby turned and flew out the back door. The porch steps blurrer beneath his feet as he bounded into the yard. Escaping from what he had done was impossible, but he was willing to try. Setting his sights on the forest behind the barn, he ran.

The forest swallowed him quickly and he was engulfed by branches that beat, vines that grabbed and thorns that ripped. He thought facing Grandma would be worse.

Tripping over a fallen branch, Bobby met the forest floor. He lay waiting for the angry cries of his cousins, who he was sure would be hunting him with their sharpened forks, seeking revenge for the unseizable deed he had committed.

"Bobby! What are you doing out here?"
Marie had followed him. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to eat it all. Honest!"
"You didn't Grandma had the rest in the icebox in the cellar. She forgot to bring it up. She sent me to look for you. You're a mess! You're going to get in trouble for getting so dirty!"
"Yeah, I know! Just don't tell that you found me so close to the railroad tracks, okay."
"The tracks! You led me to the tracks! Those dirty potato pickers live there in one of those labor camps! We're not supposed to go near them! They'll kill us if they find us! My dad says they all live in one building like animals and they drink anti-freeze to get drunk and they trade their kids for dogs to eat, and they live with 'Commies.'"
"'Commies?'"
"Yeah, that's right, Bobby! Communists from Red-China. Mary Ellen Sweeney's father said somebody smuggled them over here in a boat and sold them to the labor camp people. He says they don't belong here so they don't have to be paid for working."

A dog howling in the distance took their attention and they were left alone. The forest floor. A cool breeze whispered its way through the trees as birds fluttered to find a safe place to spend the night. Young frogs in a nearby pond sang in a squeaking croaking chorus, silenced ever so often by the splash of a muskrat seeking a frog-leg dinner. The tantalizing aroma of supper being cooked wound its way through the woods.

"Umm, smells good. There must be a house around here," Marie whispered. "Let's go see."
"No! Maybe it's the labor camp people."
"They live on the other side of the tracks. Come on, Bobby."
Marie walked into the aroma-laden breeze. The moon was full but most of the light it cast was caught by wind-blown tree branches, leaving ghostly shimmering images that danced on the forest floor. Marie faded into the blackness beyond the dancing.

"Wait, Marie. I'm coming!" Bobby yelled into the night, then ran into the dark after Marie, fearing his yelling would bring the forest crashing in on him.

They soon saw lights flickering through the trees. The blended aromas of roasting chicken, onions, corn, potatoes and the excitement of the forest at night drew them like a magnet, closer and closer.

"I'm hungry," Bobby said, licking his lips. "How can you be hungry after eating all that potato salad?"
"I thought you said I didn't eat it all, Marie. Anyway, that was before."
Marie and Bobby came to a clearing in the forest. The moonlight revealed an unpainted rotting run-down one-story house with burlap bags covering broken windows. The windows that weren't broken had no curtains, letting the light from unshaded light bulbs escape to the garbage cluttered yard. One beam of light rested on an old rusted bicycle; another revealed a
covering her mouth. She struggled to get loose while sadistic delight.

He was talking to Marie but they couldn't hear what he was saying. Bobby went to one of the tracks to my home. Carl was sitting on a ripped and stained couch, drinking from a jug.

"Don't you worry your pretty little ass, bitch. Old Carl goona take good care of you. I got some stuff inside that'll loosen you right up. Hee, ha, ha!

"He was dragging Marie up the old steps toward the gaping doorway. The aroma of cooking which minutes before enticed her onward now sent waves of nausea through Marie's stomach. She was being dragged toward the house.

"What's goin on?'' An older boy was standing next to the tracks to my home. Carl yanked his hand away and Marie screamed.

Bobby stopped running when he realized Marie wasn't behind him. He called her name but got no answer. Then, back from where he had just fled, he heard Marie scream. Bobby, his heart pounding, ran back through the forest to where he had left Marie. He saw nobody.

"Hee, ha, ha, ha, hee, hee; damn stupid son-of-a-bitch.

Bobby backed away from the window; Jim, standing behind him, whispered, "We need some help if we gona get her out from there. Wait here." Jim disappeared into the forest leaving Bobby alone. He could do nothing by himself to rescue Marie so he stepped back to the edge of the clearing. He could hear Old Carl yelling at Marie, threatening to tear her head off and feed it to his hound dog. Bobby knew he had to distract Old Carl to keep him away from Marie. He picked up a rock and sent it smashing through a window. The sharp crash of breaking glass cut into the night.

"What da hell's goin on, Old Carl screamed as he came staggering out into the moonlight.

"Who da hell's out here, one of ya damn niggers? Ya better get the hell outa here 'for I sic my dog on ya.' The hound dog was nowhere to be seen. Old Carl spat at the moon and stumbled back into the house. "Ya hear that, bitch? Them damn labor camp niggers want a piece'a you too. But don't ya worry ya pretty little head, Old Carl keepin ya fo himself."

Bobby stood there, helpless. By himself he could do nothing to help Marie.

Then, Jim was back with an older black man, an Oriental man and two Mexican men. "Two kids stay here," the black man commanded.

The four men ran into the house and dragged Old Carl outside.

"Jim, you and you friend go take care of da girl."

Old Carl was screaming hysterically at Marie's rescuers. "You damn niggers better leave me alone, get the hell outa here 'for I sic my dog on ya! Ya ain't got no right doin' this. I'm a white man, ya damn bastards!"

"Yeah, ya white, right enough. But yo got yo'self a young white girl in there," the black man yelled back. "We couldn't do nuthin when yo messed up my daughter 'cause she was only a black girl and yo was a white man. But now yo gona get sent away fo good. This here white boy seen what yo done. Carols, did someone call the law?"

"St. De coming now, Eddie."

Bobby, Marie and Jim had just come outside when the police arrived. Marie was crying and scared, but she and Bobby managed to explain everything before Old Carl could convince the police to arrest the labor camp people for trespassing. Old Carl was taken away to jail and Sergeant Thompson took Bobby and Marie home.

"You come too, young Jim. Maybe you can help explain all this," Sergeant Thompson said.

"I'll call ahead and tell them we were on our way."

When they all got to Grandma's house they were met outside by a very worried and curious group of people.

"Are you okay?"
"What happened?"

"Where have you been?"

"Didn't I tell you to stay away from the railroad tracks!"

Soon all was explained. Jim didn't say much during all the talking; he just stood off to the side waiting for someone to say something to him. No one did, at first.

"I thought Old Carl was locked up in the insane asylum three or four years ago," Grandma remarked.

"He was released last year. I guess he's been living in that old house he stayed in when he was working on your farm," Sergeant Thompson answered.

"Yes um. Thank you ma'am," Jim answered, looking down at the ground.

Bobby could not comprehend what he was witnessing. He had to speak up! Fear mixed with anger surged through him as he exclaimed, "But Grandma, Jim and the people from the labor camp saved Marie from that crazy man! Why are you treating him like he did something wrong? We should be thanking him!"

"Shut your mouth, young man! Don't you talk back to your grandmother! You're much too young to understand these things," yelled Bobby's father, slapping him across the face.

As Jim and the dog approached the tracks, the sound of croaking from the pond suddenly stopped. "I guess another muskrat got himself a frog dinner."

"Ya know, dog, those frogs are crazy. They know there's muskrats gonna grab 'um if they keep on singin, but they keep singin like they important or somethin. The only thing I can figure is maybe they can't remember longer than a few minutes. Seems like there's lots of folks 'round here that don't remember more than a few minutes. You and I is smarter than that, ain't we, dog? We goin remember for a long time just how things are."

Back at Grandma's, Bobby and Marie were told not to mention to anyone what had happened. "Things like this are best left untold," Grandma preached, "Here, you may have some of my special potato salad. It will help you forget about tonight."

Just then the breeze turned cold, and the frogs again stopped singing.
There's a gecko in my kitchen
Getting fat on ants
There's spider mites and mealy bugs
Living on my plants.

A mouse who rents the room
Beneath the kitchen sink
Tells me to take the trash out
When it begins to stink.

There are spiders in the attic
And termites in the walls
There's moths in all my closets
Despite the many moth balls.

The roaches clean up all my crumbs
I never have to sweep
Bedbugs keep me up all night
Preventing any sleep.

It's getting pretty crowded here
And if my landlord ever found out
He'd either raise the rent up
Or else he'd kick us out!
The Thanksgiving dinner table offered only confusion. On the side of the table I was sitting on, was all the normal haole food: Turkey, gravy, corn, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. The other side of the table, farthest from me, had all the Filipino food. There were Filipino noodles, balut, lumpia, egg plant, and cancanin. I was confused.

My dad is haole and my mom is Filipino. That makes me a "haolepino."

At the dinner table, as I do every year, I started on the brown heaven that covered the turkey meat. Crisp and juicy, the skin was a long awaited delight. As I went for my third piece of skin I heard a car pull up. My relatives, who live in Waikiki, were out in the driveway. I went to the front door to greet them. Wesley, my little fatso of a cousin who looks like the cartoon cat, Garfield, was the first to come through the squeaky screen door. He headed straight for the Nintendo. My Auntie Tessy, Wesley’s mom, said her silly greeting.

“What’s happening, belat?” She would always greet me in this irritating way. Belat is a Filipino word for the female genitalia. I had to hear this at least thirty-five times a year, counting birthdays.

I greeted my grandmother with a kiss on one of her softly aged cheeks. Her straw hat hit the top of my forehead as I backed away, realizing that I was going to hear another stupid question.

“Surrender Bataan Cheri?” I knew that’s what she was going to ask. Bataan is, or was, a place where there was an enormous battle and the Filipinos surrendered. Unfortunately, in my situation it meant virginity. This question always came up since I started to have boyfriends.

“No grandma. No surrender!” Then her questions of how I was doing in school and at work came at me, like rapid fire. My answers pleased her. She smiled with approval as she walked pass me. Her purple polyester pants brushed over my feet.

There was another long squeak that came from the door. It was Grandpa. He slipped off his rainbow colored beach slippers that he bought at an ABC store. I felt nervous all of a sudden.

Grandpa does not speak English. I quickly got off a “hi” before anyone noticed my worries.

As far back as I can remember, that’s all I have ever said to him. It was probably the only word he could fully understand.

Our house now sounded like a chicken farm. Non-stop clucking was heard. The adults were updating each other on new events and gossip. For my brother and my cousin, the clucking was about new toys. The noise died down when every one found a seat at the dinner table.

Grandpa sat next to the Filipino food. As for myself, I was right next to the turkey. I caught myself thinking of how I would never try that nasty looking Filipino food. My thoughts of disgust were interrupted by my grandpa’s hand passing through my line of sight. He grabbed a lumpia. I smiled at him and asked, “How are you Grandpa?”

He didn’t answer or acknowledge my question. Embarrassed, I hung my head.
Dinner was a quick event with fast hands grabbing and shoving food. We were no longer chickens. We were now pigs. Watching WWF Wrestling after dinner was a new Thanksgiving tradition. Hulk Hogan pinned Macho Man and Thanksgiving was over.

Unfortunately, we had to go back to school on Monday. We all shared our Thanksgiving adventures. Bruce, who likes to brag, rambled on about what he and his grandpa did. They went to a stream that flowed through Bruce’s backyard. There they set sail on a hand-made boat, which his grandpa made. Bruce’s grandpa was passing it down to him. It was nicely painted then it already was.

Janine went quickly to her bag to show what she had.

"Here look," she offered.

"So what, it's only a dumb family picture," Bruce hissed as he looked over his boat.

"Yeah, but look at me and my grandpa."

"That's gross, Janine. Imagine, this will always be in your family photo album. You're making history."

"I know and we had fun doing it. My mom and my grandmother scolded us but we couldn't help it," Janine explained.

I wanted a look. I held out my hand so Janine would pass me the picture. Still giggling, she passed it in my palm. I looked. In the picture she and her grandpa flipped their eyelids and made pig noses. Janine was disgusting and funny. I gave It back to her and then looked away. I did not want to be next to share.

"What'd you do?" they both asked at the same time.

"We ate dinner and watched wrestling. The funniest thing that happened was my brother always does that."

"Yeah, and ate, that's it."

"What's your grandpa's name?" Janine asked. "He has a Filipino name, doesn't he?"

This question caught me off guard. I did not know anything except I knew he would not recognize me or understand anything I'd say. I turned away and said nothing to my friends. Grandpa was still by the shaded tables when we left the beach to go home.

"Mom, I'm home."

"How was the beach, Cheri?"

"All right. Has Grandpa agreed to the operation?"

"No," my mother whispered as she went slowly back to peeling potatoes. "Cheri, I need some sugar for the pie. Go get some for me."

On the way to the store, I had to pass an old lady's house. The last time I saw her was the time I was up in her lychee tree. She did not give me permission but she didn't yell at me.

From her front porch, she called to me. "Cheri, go get some for me." The sadness did not leave her voice.

"Introduction"

"I'll teach you," she offered. She got up from that almost impossible squat and walked towards me. "Would you be interested?"

She sat in a squat at the bottom of her stairs. "I knew I could if someone would teach me," I said.

"I'll teach you," she offered. She got up from that almost impossible squat and walked towards me. "Would you be interested?"

She reached out her hand to make our agreement definite with a shake. I hesitated but accepted. This was my chance to learn some Filipino and maybe finally communicate with Grandpa.

The first eight lessons consisted of just a list of words. They did not make any sense.

"Can't I learn a phrase that makes sense?" I begged with frustration.

"Do you have something in mind?" she questioned, knowing that I did.

"How about, I love you?"

"Oh, you're in love with a matang boy?"
"No, it's for Grandpa."

She said the phrase repeatedly so I could get it right. I could not wait to use it. The phone rang and Grandma answered. We ran through a couple of her curious questions. Then I asked for Grandpa. He wasn't home. Disappointed, I went to my room. I continued my lessons in hope that I'd get to talk to Grandpa.

My teacher taught me in the next two lessons how to put the words together to make full sentences. I tried Grandpa again. The ring of the phone made me feel lonely because I felt like no one would pick up. There was a click and I knew someone was answering. Oh-oh was what I heard. It was Grandpa. Oh-oh means yeah.

He was on the phone. I could speak to him. My new language was like a gun. It was loaded with words and phrases, ready to fire. There were at least ten questions I asked. They covered how he was feeling and what he did for the past two days. I paused to get courage for my next topic.

"Grandpa, please remove the cataracts," is what I pleaded.

"Cheri," he started, "It doesn't make a difference. I'm old and almost blind." His voice was fading.

"I learned to speak like this for you, Grandpa. I left my normal ways to help you. Please do the same for me and try going to a doctor."

"Let me speak to your mom."

"Okay Grandpa, see you at Christmas."

When calling for my mom, I knew he would agree. Mom's face, when she got off the phone, told me that he was going to have the operation. The next person she was talking to was the doctor to schedule an operation.

Christmas felt extra special that year and I knew why. I had made a difference. The same clucking occurred when all the relatives arrived and died down when we all found our seats, just like it did on Thanksgiving.

"Cheri, my eyes have healed. I can see my the pores in my skin. I can put a thread through a needle hole without glasses."

A bright glow of enlightenment splashed across his dark brown skin. He had never looked at me with such happiness, until now. He, surprisingly, reached for a piece of turkey. I thought to myself, "What the heck, Cheri, leave your normal ways and try the lumpia." The lumpia was delicious.
Who ever said time travel is a fantasy,  
Never read Verne or Shakespeare.  
You may go where you fancy,  
Day by day; year through year.  
The Egypt of the Pharaohs,  
Is just a book away,  
As are the Capistrano swallows,  
Making their homeward sway.  
All the magic in the pages,  
Is like a time machine,  
Which echoes through the ages,  
To fill your nightly dreams.  
Imagination of an author,  
As a story does unfold,  
Can take you off to Labrador,  
Or Sutter's Mill for gold.  
A journey down the Amazon,  
Or up Mongolian steppes,  
Or rest ashore on Avalon,  
As Arthur did in death.  
Share the myth of Olympus,  
And sip a nectar divine,  
Or turn the page to Cygnus,  
To meander the spatial clime.  
A book can even teach you,  
The feats of legerdemain,  
All manner of things to do,  
The pages will explain.  
From how to build a rocket,  
To take us to the moon,  
Or a tiny heart shaped locket,  
Which makes your darling swoon.  
It's simply done by reading,  
The tales of love and hate,  
A matter of believing,  
That time is just a gate.  
A book can hold the flow of years,
So Far Away

There were times
She clung to my skirt
While my hands gripped the heavy cart
All over the grocery store

There were times
She crawled into our bed
Between us
We quietly made love with our tangled toes

There was a time
She woke us up in the middle of the night
Cried out hard, saying her gold fish had died
In the dark
Her dad took her downstairs to bury it

There were times
I wished for my time and place
I wished for a moment
For just the two of us

On our usual Sunday
"It's time for the grocery store, honey!"
"No, I'm staying home, mom," she replied while her thoughts
were on the phone
"Oh... Well... All right...."

The road became too smooth
The air turned too gentle
The grocery cart felt too light in my grip
My hands instantly sought the tiny fingers on my skirt

Those days had gone
So far away...
So far away...
Cherchez la femme en la cinéma vérité.
Who is she?
What is she?
Why is she?
Why can’t she?
The all too familiar questions she hears.
But why ask her why?
When the mysteries to their own lives are not yet answered.

Who is she?
Is she who they say she must be by virtue of her blood?
Is she herself by virtue of a test?
Or is she who she is by virtue of her passions?
But why categorize her?
How can they know who she is when she knows not herself?

Who is she?
Walk through the labyrinth castle.
For that is her mind.
See that black candle sitting on the table?
That candle is her dreams.
And the wick is her esteem.
It prays that a fire is never lit.
For fire is their spite.
Their envy.
Their weaknesses.
Just a fire is all it takes
to send the emotions from her corridors into chaos.
The fire that can make the loss of hope pandemic.
And black is her solitude.
Her pretexts, which she reminds herself to shed.
Black is her protection
from the marauder of dreams.
From the weapon they use with vigor...
Vituperation.
Each shot and fire sending themselves into euphoria.

Deluding their victims with toxic words
that seep into the crevices of the brain.
Poisoning the mind with sophisms

They ... seemingly all knowing.
They ... who would have her believe
that ignorance is the palliative for a troubled soul.
Yes, ignorance is bliss.
But knowledge is power.
And power she wants.
Power over herself.
The power to not only yearn but attain.
The power to banish the guttural screams of torment
that only she can hear.
The power to control her heart.
And if she gains that power, does she not have bliss?
Or is bliss merely an illusion
brought about by cliches?
The hopeful words of those that appear to spout wisdom.
The silver lining.
The key to one’s future.
Anything’s possible.
And it goes on ad infinitum.
Forced down the throat of a despondent soul ad nauseam.
To her jaded mind,
the supposed profundity of the metaphoric statements is blindly clung to.
For words in and of themselves hold no magic.
No threat.
And no promise.
Only acts themselves reveal accomplishment and nature.
And it is her uncommon acts, perhaps,
that have disconcerted others with insular attitudes.
So much so that they would attempt a coup d’etat on her values.
But chacun à son gout she believes.
NOT one view for all.

Y A W N !!!
What could they possibly talk about?
Not much.
Would that be a thin squeak of triumph on her part?
She thinks it is.
Was that a hint of bliss?
Oh, jubilation where are you?
Show yourself.
Though she knows not if she has ever met you,
she is not afraid.
You pose no fear, only challenges.
But are you, jubilation,
Willing to accept the challenge and
cherchez la femme in her cinema verité?
Will you walk through her labyrinth castle
and find the black candle?
Will you melt the blackness but not the dreams?
She's waiting.
She bids you bonne chance.
And she bids herself . . .

BONNE CHANCE!

Violin and Fruit
photo-collage by
C. G. Bates
Homeric

Only the noble Greeks
Dared their Gods' wrath
You and I are but meek
Souls of Christianity
Saved by a single death
Euphoria for the sinless
Yearning for the damned

If this is free will
Let it not be mine
Instead assuage Theseus
As Hippolytus dies
Daring the Gods

R. E. McFeeters
I saw you running through a verdant field, tripping over shadows that were deepening, as night came to darken the Earth.

You were pure joy then, with brown curls flying behind, as you ran around in circles and back again.

Slowly you tired, then crystal black eyes searched and found me; and you sped forward, laughing at the sky and whirling your arms.

Bronze lights glistened on flushed skin as you slammed into my legs and I caressed your tousled hair as you gummed my knees.
If Western eyes are likened to stars and skies and light, then yours are pools of night and brimming with obsidian and smoke of mahogany fire.

If Western eyes are beams to the lost heart, then yours are shade, refuge from love's too bright despair.

Dark lustrous disks flourish beneath the black-wing arch of your brow like sable gems.

And in a deep Mannerism of night and love, Above me, your eyes are passages into Benevolent darknesses That close around us. You conjure the night Summon the unrealled And the unrecoverable And lead me back into forgone, mystic, illicit childhoods.

And though I know a thousand faces well enough to place them in days light's searing present, Yours alone is known to me By eyes that obscure light and times and blend my night with dreams.
Forces In Opposition
ceramic by
Michael E. Dennet

My Better Half
sculpture by
Joseph Kato Jr.