PART I

DELIVERANCE

1

MALIA, 1995

Honoka'a

WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES WE'RE ALL STILL ALIVE AND IT becomes obvious then what the gods want from us. The myth people tell about us might start on that liquid blue day off Kona and the sharks, but I know different. We started earlier. *You* started earlier. The kingdom of Hawai'i had long been broken—the breathing rain forests and singing green reefs crushed under the haole fists of beach resorts and skyscrapers—and that was when the land had begun calling. I know this now because of you. And that the gods were hungry for change and you were that change. In our first days I saw so many signs, but didn't believe.

The first came when your father and I were naked in his pickup truck in Waipiʻo Valley, and we witnessed the night marchers.

We'd come down into Waipiʻo Valley on a Friday, pau hana, with Auntie Kaiki babysitting your brother at home, and me and your father both knew we were going to use this childless night to screw our brains out, were run dumb with electricity just thinking about it. How could we not? Our skin rubbed dark by the sun and your father then with his football-days body, me with mine from basketball, the two of us feeling our love like the hottest habit. And there was Waipiʻo Valley: a deep cleft of wild green split with a river silver-brown and glassy, then a wide black sand beach slipping into the frothing Pacific.

A slow descent to the bottom of the valley in your father's bust-up Toyota pickup, hairpin turn after hairpin turn, a sharp cliff to the right, cobbled tar underneath, the road so steep it caused the truck cab to fill with the smell of the engine's burning guts.

Then a jarring road of silt and waist-deep mud puddles at the bottom of the valley and we reached the beach and parked the truck right up against the freckled black eggs of rock that rimmed the sand; your father made me laugh until my cheeks prickled with heat and the last shadows of the trees were pointing long toward the horizon. The ocean boomed and sizzled. We unrolled our sleeping bags in the bed of the pickup, over the gravel-smelling foam pad your father put down just for me, and once the last teenagers were gone—the thick buzz of their reggae bass fading into the forest—we took our clothes off and made you.

I don't think you can hear my memories, no, so this won't be so pilau, and anyway, I like to remember. Your father gripped a small fist of my hair, the hair he loved, black and kinked with Hawaiʻi, and my body began to curl into a rhythm against his

pelvis, and we groaned and panted, pressed our blunt noses together, and I pulled us apart and straddled above and came back onto him and our skin was so hot I wanted to store it for all the times I'd ever felt cold, and his fingers traced my neck, his tongue my brown nipples, this gentleness that was a part of him that no one ever saw, and our sex made its sounds and we laughed a little, closing our eyes and opening them and closing them again, and the day lost its last light even as we kept on.

We were on top of our sleeping bags, the cool air minting our dampness, when your father's face got serious and he rolled away from me.

"You see that?" he asked.

I didn't know what he saw—I was still coming out of some sort of fog, still rubbing my thighs together for the tingle there, the last of the oiled rush of our love—but then your father jolted to a sitting position. I rose to my knees, still sex-drunk. My tits swung in against his left biceps and my hair fell down across his shoulder and even though I was scared I felt sexy and almost wanted to pull him into me, right there, never mind the danger.

"Look," he whispered.

"Come on," I said. "Stop messing around, lolo."

"Look," he said again. And I did, and what I saw yanked me tight.

Out on top of the far ridge of Waipi'o a long line of trembling lights had appeared, slowly dipping and rising as they moved along the valley's crown. Green and white, flickering, it must have been fifty, and as we watched we saw the lights for what they were: fires. Torches. We'd heard of the night marchers but always assumed it was only a myth, part of a hymn of what had been lost to Hawai'i, these ghosts of the long-dead ali'i. But there

they were. Marching slow on their way up the ridge, headed for the black back of the valley and whatever waited there for undead kings in all the damp and darkness. The string of torches plodded along the ridge, winking between the trees, dipping, then rising, until all at once the flames snuffed out.

A loud, creaking groan sounded out across the valley, all around us, the sound I imagined a whale would make before dying.

Whatever words your father and I had choked in our throats. We were up and off the pickup bed and jerking on our clothes, toes in gritty black sand, us hopping and gasping and yanking into the cab, ignition, and your father had the engine loud as we tore back through the valley road, the headlights flashed over rocks and mud puddles and bright green leaves; the whole time we knew those ghosts were in the air behind us, around us, if we didn't see them we felt them. The truck bounced through the rutted wreck of the tar, the windshield showed trees and sky and back down, into the muck, up and down as we bounced, everything black and blue but what our headlights could flash over, your father making the truck race between the lurking trees and up the long road to the exit. We came up out of the bottom of the valley so fast that there was nothing below now but the few speckles of house lights farther back in the valley, the outlines of the sunken taro patches gone white in the midnight.

It wasn't until we got to the lookout that we stopped. The cab was full of panic and mechanical effort.

Your father blew a long breath and said, "Jesus fucking Christ."

It was the first time he'd talked about anything holy in a while. And there were no more torches; no more night march-

ers. We listened to our blood thump in our ears and it told us *alive alive alive*.

Just one of those things, is what me and your father told ourselves, soon after and for many years. After all, there were so many people in Hawai'i that had seen similar things; we'd talk story in full kanikapila mode at a beach barbecue or back lanai house party long enough, and plenty similar stories came up.

THE NIGHT MARCHERS—you'd been conceived that night, and all through your first years there were stranger things. The way animals changed around you: suddenly subdued, they'd nuzzle you and form a circle as if you were one of their own, didn't matter if it was a chicken or a goat or a horse, it was something instant and unbreakable. Then there were the times we'd catch you in our backyard, eating fistfuls of dirt or leaves, flowers, compulsively. Far beyond the dull curiosity of other keikis your age. And some of those plants—the orchids in hanging baskets, for example—would bloom in the most incredible colors, almost overnight.

Just one of those things, we still told ourselves.

But now I know.

DO YOU REMEMBER HONOKA'A IN 1994, not so different than today? Māmane Street, both sides with low wood buildings from the first days of cane, front doors repainted but inside still the same old bones. The faded auto-mechanic garages, the pharmacy with the same deals always on the windows, the grocery

store. Our rented house on the edge of town with its layers of stripping paint and cramped bare rooms, shower stall patched onto the back of the garage. The bedroom you shared with Dean, where you started having nightmares vague with sugarcane and death.

Those nights. You'd come quiet to the side of our bed, still partially tangled in your sheets, swaying, with your hair smeared every direction, sniffling in your breath.

Mama, you'd say, it happened again.

I'd ask what you saw, and you'd start to talk in a spill of images—black fields cracked and empty, cane stalks shooting not from soil but from the chest, arms, eyes of me or your father or your brother or all of us, then a sound like the inside of a wasp hive—and while you talked your eyes were not your own, you were not behind them. You were only seven years old, and the things that were pouring out of you. But after a minute of talking this way you'd come back.

They're just dreams, I'd tell you, and you'd ask what I was talking about. I'd try to repeat some interpretation of the nightmares—the cane, the reaping of your family, the hives—but you never remembered what you'd just been telling me. It was as if you'd just woken and found yourself in front of me while I told you someone else's story. The nightmares happened every few months, then every few weeks, then every day.

The sugarcane plantation had been around since before we were born, our whole side of the island shagged with fields of cane, mauka to makai. I'm sure since the beginning people had been talking about the Final Harvest, but it seemed like it would never come: "Hāmākua's always hiring," your father said, dismissing the rumors with a flap of his wrist. But then, so soon after your nightmares reached their daily cadence, along Māmane

came the low of the cane-truck horns, that September afternoon in 1994, and your father was one of the drivers.

If I could be above our town, looking down, I would remember it this way: Into the town came the tractor trailers, many with the chain-link-style beds, empty loops like the ribs of neglected animals, swaying as they made their way past the Salvation Army, past the churches, past the empty storefronts that used to hawk bins of cheap plastic imports, past the high school across from the elementary school, past the football-baseball-soccer field. As the trucks passed, blowing their horns, people left the bank and grocery store and gathered in rows on the sidewalks, or the shoulders of the streets. Even those inside that didn't come out must have heard the truck horns moaning, the air brakes bleating, the hymn of an industrial funeral. It was the sound of a new emptiness coming. Because they would never be in the fields again, the trucks were polished to a mirror-shine, none of the dirt of work on them, and for all the Filipino-Portuguese-Japanese-Chinese-Hawaiian families that lined the streets, the chrome threw back a slippery quicksilver reflection of their dark-brown faces and the new truth settling there.

We were in that crowd, me, Dean, Kaui, and you. Dean stood still and stiff like a little soldier. His hands were already so big at nine, and I remember the dry sheath of his palm wrapped around my hand. Kaui was drifting in between my legs, the breathy tickle of her hair against my thighs, a few fingers pressing after. You were at my other hand, and unlike the confusion and anger thrumming along Dean's fingers, his stiff neck, unlike the four-year-old's dreamy spin of apathy coming from Kaui, you seemed completely at peace.

Only now can I guess what you'd been dreaming about—whose was the death, our bodies or the sugarcane. In the end it

didn't matter. You'd seen the end coming before any of us. That was the second sign. There was a voice inside you, wasn't there, a voice that was not yours, you were only the throat. The things it knew, and was trying to tell you—tell us—but we didn't listen, not yet.

Just one of those things, we said.

The cane trucks made their turn just before the grocery store, ascended the steep hill out of town, and never came back.

A few months after the plantation went under, we were completely stretched. Everyone was searching; it was no different for your father. He was driving for hours across the island, chasing a paycheck that moved like obake: here and gone. Sunday morning in the orange light bouncing off our old wood floors he'd be at the kitchen counter, clutching his favorite coffee mug spreading its Kona steam and sliding his fingers over the "help wanted" section, lips moving like a chant. Days he found something, he'd slowly cut it from the page and take it with just the tips of his hands and place it in a manila folder he kept near the phone. Days he didn't, the sound of the newspaper as he crushed it was like a flock of birds taking flight.

But that didn't stop your father's smile; nothing would. He'd been that way even when things were steady, even when you all were in hanabata days, upper lips crusted with baby-leak, just learning to walk, and he would fling you into the air so your hair would flap open and your eyes would squint happy and you'd squeal your brightest. He'd throw you guys as high as he could—aiming, he said, for the clouds—and when you'd come back down so would my heart. You've got to stop, I'd say, especially when he'd do it to Kaui.

I not gonna drop 'em, he'd say. Besides, we can make another one if they break their necks or whatever.

Other times, in the morning, he'd stay in bed later—mostly he'd been an early man, that still continued after the cane trucks stopped—and he'd curl up close to me and start giggling through his thin mustache, and I'd try to scramble free from the covers before he'd rip a good fut and trap me in the cave of it with him, the ripe cheesy-beany stink of whatever was burning in his gut.

Almost taste better going out than coming in, yeah? he'd say, and giggle again, like we were back in high school goofing off in fifth period. I remember once he did his fut-under-the-covers thing and asked that same question and I said I don't know, let me test, and slipped a finger up inside his boxers, just into his butthole, and he squealed and jerked away going, Eh, that's too far, that's too far, and I laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed. There was something about your father, and me, and us, and how we'd push each other, that went good with the quiet times, us in the bathroom watching each other brush teeth in the mirror, or juggling the one car we had (we traded the bust-up pickup for a bust-up SUV just after you were born) to get you all to science fair, basketball practice, hula performances.

But if we could've poured our money into a cup that cup would be half empty. Your father lucked into a part-time thing at one of the hotels, like everyone else wanted, but he couldn't get full-time or the good tips at the restaurant, only working the room crews, and he'd come back and tell me about the barely touched plates of ahi on the balconies being picked over by a mass of mynahs and the volcanoes of clothes on the hotel room floors. Those haoles got two pairs of clothes for every day of vacation, he'd say, Two for every *day*.

And it felt like almost as soon as that hotel job came, it went, Seasonal Restructuring. And my hours at the mac-nut warehouse got slashed. Our dinners got simpler, never mind the food

pyramid. Your father did everything he could, a house-painting job here, some landscaping there, a couple days bent over at a friend's farm. I picked up a few nights at Wipeouts Grill. We came home with backs splintered with pain, aching legs, and blood-drumming foreheads, and we'd pass each other and hand you kids off while one person's shift ended and the other's began. But those shifts were less and less on the calendar, until suddenly we were at home using the calculator to find out how much time we really had.

"We can't do this," your father said to me. It was late in the evening, after you all were asleep. Dogs were barking down the road, but the sound was soft and we were used to it. The gold light from our desk lamp made our skin look honey-coated. Your father's eyes were wet. He wouldn't look straight at me, and I realized I hadn't heard a joke from him in so long. That was when I was really afraid.

"How much?" I asked.

"Maybe two months until trouble," he said.

"And then what?" I asked, although I knew the answer.

"I gonna call Royce," he said. "We been talking."

"Royce lives on O'ahu," I said. "That's five plane tickets. That's a whole different island, a *city*. Cities aren't cheap." But your father was already standing up and walking toward the bathroom. The light went on, and the fan, then the water hissing and spattering in the sink, the wet sucking and spraying of his breaths as he washed his face.

I wanted to break something, it was so still and quiet. Your father came back in the bedroom.

"So I think," he said, "I'm gonna sell my body. The mahus get my okole and the ladies get my boto. I'd do that for us."

"I'd do that for *you*," he followed, after pausing a moment.

He had his shirt off and was looking at himself in our long mirror. "I mean, check 'um, yeah? All the sex waiting in this body."

I giggled and hugged him from behind. I spread my hands over each pectoral and ignored the way they were starting to sag a little toward bitch tits. "I'd probably pay money for these," I said.

"How much?" Your father grinned in the mirror.

"Well," I said, "what's included?" I let my left hand drift down, worked it into his waistband.

"Depends," he said.

"Mmmm," I said. "What I'm feeling's probably worth two or three dollars."

"Hey!" He pulled my hand out.

"I'd be paying by the minute," I said, shrugging my shoulders, and your father snorted. But then he paused.

"We're going to have to sell more than my dick," he said.

We both sat down on the edge of the bed.

"We've got Kaui and Nainoa wearing Dean's old clothes," I said. "They get free school lunch."

"I know."

"What did we have for dinner last night?" I asked.

"Saimin and Spam."

"What did we have for dinner the night before?"

"Rice and Spam."

Your father stood back up. He walked to our desk and leaned down on it, placed his palms on it like he was going to push it this way or that.

"Fifteen dollars," he said.

He stood, sighed, laid his palm on the dresser. "Twenty-five dollars."

"Forty," I said.

"Twenty." He shook his head.

He went this way, touching each thing he could see: a seven-dollar lamp, a two-dollar picture frame, a closet full of five-dollar clothes, the sum of our lives not more than four digits.

AND I WAS never good at math but I could see the other end of this and there were dark lights and payment plans and bucket showers on the other side. So three days after those calculations we got you kids to school and I was at the roadside, hitchhiking with your father's hunting knife in my bag, getting forty miles to Hilo on no cost just to walk in the sweaty rain to the Section Eight division of County of Hawai'i and start our application. "What brings you here today?" the woman at the counter asked, not unfriendly, and with her dark and freckled arms, the extra folds of skin outside her sleeveless blouse, she could have been my sister, was my sister.

"What brings me here," I repeated. If I had the answer I wouldn't have been standing there, steaming Hilo wet, begging for the housing vouchers.

AND THAT WAS how we were when the third sign came. We couldn't cut any more corners. But Royce had come through, as simple as a phone call to your father and a phrase, "I think I got something for you, cuz," and suddenly everything pointed to O'ahu. We'd sold some of our stuff and then we sold more, roadsiding it in Waimea, by the playground, across the street from the Catholic church, where all the trees grow up over the parking strips and everyone has to drive past if they're headed to the beach. We'd made enough from those sales, the food bank's

help, and Section Eight to get a cushion, enough for five tickets to O'ahu with something still in the bank.

Your father had a plan for the rest of the money—a glass-bottom boat cruise on the Kona coast. I remember telling him no, we couldn't do that, we needed to save every last penny for O'ahu. But he'd asked what kind of father would he be if he couldn't give his children relief?

"They deserve more than they get," he said, I still remember this, "and we gotta remind them that things is gonna get better."

"But we don't need some tourist cruise," I said. "We're not that kind of family."

"Well," he said, "maybe just once I wanna *be* that kind of family."

I had nothing to say to that.

So Kailua-Kona, Ali'i Drive, small stone walls and swerving sidewalks fronting the scoops of sugary beach and luminous ocean, then all the little storefront tourist traps, leading back like breadcrumbs to the beach hotels. Your father and I stood at the Kona dock, each holding a ticket for the boat ride, plus one for each of you kids, and we watched the tides surge and all the clean glossy boats rock and dip and shine slick with each swell. The pier was long and blacktopped and spined with fishing poles, and halfway along the dock's edge a group of local boys were pitching themselves off, into the water, over and over, exploding into the ocean-froth of the boy who'd jumped before, *chee-hoo*'ing and slapping their wet feet across the wood steps back to the edge.

Then we were out away from the dock of Kona, sitting in a plush jointed couch on the *Hawaiian Adventure*, a trimaran like the types we always see drifting in the haze of the Kona coast, especially at sunset, boats with slides off the back and lobster-colored tourists jabbering on the covered decks. But this

one had a middle hull with thick glass in the bottom that let us look down into the ocean, and as the engines pushed a mellow vibration again and again across the deck, the water went from something green-blue to a deep, almost purple color, and the coral grew up thick and knotted, in sections stuck out fingers or bloomed brains and the spiked red fans of sea anemones, swaying like the tide was a wind. I could smell the sun, the way it heated the old sea salt on the edges of the boat, and the sharp too-sweet fruity Malolo syrup in the fruit punch, and the sting of diesel fuels belching from the grinding engines.

Mostly we sat inside, all five of us in a row right down front in the plush stadium seating, looking through the glass bottom, me telling stories about which animal was which god, how they saved or fought the first Hawaiians, your father cracking jokes about how his Filipino forefathers only eat dogfish or the black fish with long noses, and the sun slanted in under the ceiling and the motor kept churning its hum up through our seats. I was somewhere warm and slow and Kaui was asleep in my arms when I woke without knowing why.

You and Dean and your father were gone, in fact no one was in the viewing cabin. Voices were rising out on the deck. I shifted Kaui from my lap—she complained—and I stood. The voices were clipped into basic commands: We're going to make a turn, keep pointing, get the preserver. I remember feeling like the sounds were coming from the other side of a cavern, so far away and cotton-stuffed in my head.

I grabbed Kaui's hand. She was still rubbing her eyes and complaining, but I was already bringing her with me as I climbed the stairs from the viewing cabin to the sundeck. Impossibly white. I had to shade my eyes and squint so hard I felt my lips

and gums lift. People were gathered along the cabled rail of the slick white deck, looking into the ocean. Pointing.

I remember seeing your father and Dean. They were maybe thirty feet away from me and Kaui, and I was confused because your father was wrestling Dean back from the rail and Dean was screaming *Let go*, and *I can get him*. One of the deckhands in a white polo shirt and baseball hat pitched a red life preserver into the air, and it wobbled and wheeled out into the sky with the rope whipping behind.

Did I run then to your father? Had he pulled Dean off the rail? Was I gripping Kaui's hand so hard it hurt her? I can assume, but I can't remember. I only remember that I was at your father's side then on the blazing-white deck, rising and falling with the waves, and all our family was there, except for you.

Your head was bobbing like a coconut in the ocean. You were getting smaller and farther away and the water was hissing and spanking the boat. I don't remember anyone saying much of anything, except the captain, calling out from upstairs: "Just keep pointing. We're turning. Just keep pointing."

Your head went under and the ocean was flat and clean again.

There was a song playing from the speakers. A tinny, stupid-sweet Hawaiian cover of "More Than Words," which I still can't listen to, even though I liked it once. The engines churned. The captain was talking from the wheel upstairs, asking Terry to keep pointing. Terry was the one who'd thrown the life preserver that was floating empty in the waves, moving away from where I'd seen your head.

I was tired of being told to point, being told to wait, so I said something to Terry. He made a face. Then his mouth was moving under his mustache, words back at me. And the captain was

calling again from above. Your father started in, too, all four of us saying things. I think I finished talking with something that made Terry start, so that his face flushed around his sunglasses. I saw myself in those mirrored lenses, me darker than I thought I was, which I remember made me happy, and my shoulders from basketball, and that I'd stopped squinting my eyes. Then my feet were up on the railing and Terry's eyebrows were raised and he started to open his mouth at me. He reached for me—I think your father did, too—but I leapt into the big empty ocean.

I hadn't been swimming long when the sharks passed under me. I remember them first as dark blurs, that the water told me the weight of those animals, a shove of wake against my legs and belly. They passed me and all four of their fins punched the surface, knives on the summit of dark swells, cutting for you. When they reached where your head had been, the sharks dove under. I started to swim after them but the distance might as well have been to Japan. I dunked once to try and see. Underwater there was nothing but a vague darkness and froth where the sharks were. Other dark colors. Pink and chummy ropes rising from the froth—I knew those would be next.

I didn't have any more breath. I broke the surface and choked in oxygen. If there were sounds, if I yelled, if the boat was closer, I don't remember. I went back down. The water where you were was all churn. The shapes of the sharks were thrashing, diving, rising, something like a dance.

The next time I went for air you were at the surface, sideways, prone and ragdolling in the mouth of a shark. But the shark was holding you gently, do you understand? It was holding you like you were made of glass, like you were its child. They brought you straight at me, the shark that was holding you carrying its head up, out of the water, like a dog. The faces of those things—

I won't lie. I shut my eyes as they neared, when I was sure they were coming for me, too, and if everyone was yelling and crying out, as I imagine they were, and if I was thinking anything, I don't remember any of that except the black of my closed eyes and my prayers without a mouth.

The sharks never hit. They passed again below, around me, wake like a strong wind. And then I opened my eyes. You were there at the boat, clutched to a life preserver. Your father reaching down for you—I remember how angry I was at how slow he went, all the time in the world, and I wanted to say, *Are you a fucking pau hana county worker? Grab our child, our alive child*—and you were coughing, which meant you were breathing, and there was no red cloud in the water.

This wasn't just one of those things.

Oh my son. Now we know that none of it was. And this was when I started to believe.

2

NAINOA, 2000

Kalihi

HEAR THE BLOOD HUSH, THEN RUSH, THE THUD OF IT coming along my knuckles. Cracked knuckles, swollen knuckles, bloody knuckles. Bloody knuckles used to hit and hurt, not because I wanted to but because my brother made me. This was New Year's, Black Cat Crackers up and down the cul-de-sac, *pop pop pop*, whole families in green plastic chairs in their driveways, sidewalks smooched with char and red shreds of paper. The fireworks were going and Skyler and James went behind the garage to play Bloody Knuckles with Dean, and since Dean went, I went, and since I went, Kaui went.

Years already I'd been trying to understand what was inside

me, while the rest of the world was trying to tear it out. Especially my brother sometimes. This was one of those nights where he hated me.

Skyler, James, both of them hapa Japanese, tall and round stinking teenagers. James with his braces, glittering and spitty. Skyler with his floppy hair and cheekfields of pimples. Both with their prep-style clothes, all Polo and Abercrombie. And there was my brother with his jaw-length twizzles of hair, baggy Billabongs and too-small Locals Only T-shirt, surfer-dark skin and pursed thick lips. So obvious we didn't belong, but Dean was always trying to trade up: him and Skyler and James, their knuckles already blistered with blood, laughing and shaking the pain out of their hands.

"Miracle boy's turn," James said through his braces, nodding at me.

"Fully," Skyler agreed, "I think so, yeah, Dean?"

All night my brother had been one-upping them both, James and Skyler. My brother running faster, swearing dirtier, the only one quick enough to cockroach a beer from the adults' cooler. So cool, all for James and Skyler, since their families had glossy SUVs and heavy dark furniture in their high-ceiling houses, everything Dean wanted to be. But how could he get there, I bet he wondered, besides getting rich boys close enough that maybe he could absorb some of whatever they were that we weren't.

And me and my brother both knew I was the only one that had done anything for us anyway, because of the sharks, what came after. We'd been on the news and in the papers and every time Mom and Dad had been talking about how poor we were. So then we were getting donation checks and clothing drives and even free food some places, from everyone that had seen and heard the stories Mom and Dad kept telling, how I was lucky to

survive the attack but we were so broke that groceries and rent and bills were going to kill us instead.

And even after the letters and donations, things didn't stop. I talked about the sharks in my Kahena Academy application, the selection committee had probably heard of me, too. So I got into the best prep school in the state—a full scholarship, the same as it was for all Native Hawaiians—even if the school was full of kids far beyond what James and Skyler were.

And my family, especially Dean, could see all the other things happening to me, that I was getting smarter, quickly, that it might as well be magic how my brain was vaulting me past my classmates. And the 'ukulele, too—the songs I could play—*He's some kind of prodigy*, the teachers were saying, and Mom and Dad like the sun when teachers talked about me. They'd started to say I was something special. Even right where Dean and Kaui could hear.

All that happening and my brother here with James and Skyler, then me. They all knew what they'd heard.

"So what, Dean," Skyler said, "I get a turn with him or what?"

Dean stared at me, started to smile, but I swear underneath I saw a flinch, maybe he didn't want it to go all the way, he was still after all my brother. But then the grin spread. "Everyone gotta take a turn, Noa," he said.

Illegal aerials—the type of red and blue and gold explosions only hotels were supposed to launch—boomed in the black above us, tossing our shadows against the stucco walls of Skyler's mansion.

"You've got a hundred pounds on me, easy," I said to Skyler. Like that would help, like anything would help.

"No be like that," James said. "Fairy."

"Get some bloody knuckles," Skyler said, stepping closer,

punching hand still twitching. He aimed it at me, made a fist, the clench was slow and stiff and I could see the flaps of skin on his knucklebones, the bits of blood. Around the corner came the murmur of the party, the sparkling crash of beer bottles piling up, then the firecrackers, *pop pop pop*.

"Cut it out," Kaui said, her voice smaller than all of us, she actually put her hands on her hips. We all froze, every boy, we'd forgotten about her, standing at my side, little sister three years under me.

I looked at Dean again, I wish I hadn't; it shames me now to remember it. How I was thinking he might still step in, say it was a joke, of course a teenager with the body of a man shouldn't be pounding on a middle-schooler.

"Come on, mahu," Skyler said to me. "What, first time punching? Hold your hand up."

I raised my fist. Dean leaned back lazy on the wall, crossed his arms.

Kaui said, "Noa, don't."

"Go away," I said to her. "It's between us."

Skyler put his fist up. Six inches from mine. Our knuckles: his already chewed with punches, mine all smooth and thin, even I saw the ending. Then Skyler moved to punch me; I flinched. "No flinching," he said, punched my shoulder with his other fist, soon there would be a bruise like the day after immunization. "We gotta go again," he said.

So we did, set our fists in the air facing each other. I tried to make my wrist lock, tried to think of what I could be that wouldn't break or bend, statue or train or rock wall, but then he punched into my knuckles. There was a bony slapping sound.

Pain shot to my elbow, I yelped, Skyler hooted. "Gotta go one more time if you cry like that, pussy."

I looked at Dean again, but he made like he was only watching the fireworks, burning in the air above.

"He not gonna save you," James said. "It's big-boy time, sack up, bitch."

My teeth were clenching so hard my whole jaw was a balloon of hurt, something like my knuckles were, don't cry don't cry don't cry. "All you retards can do is punch," I said. "You'll be praying for McDonald's jobs while I'm graduating from Kahena."

James's feet shifted in the grass, I heard the hiss and crackle. "You guys hear this smart-ass?" James said to Skyler. "Maybe we both get a turn for the second round."

"No," Skyler said. "Only me."

My hand was shaking then, all my fingers and my palm whumping with my pulse, but I closed the fingers, felt the pain stretch and burn across my bones. I put my fist six inches from Skyler's again. He punched, harder, like a heavy door slamming closed, my hand still in the doorjamb. An explosion in my hand bones so big it blew through my eyes, everything white for a second, I fell back on my ass in the dirt. When I landed I made an awful wet crying sound, like a puppy.

James and Skyler both laughing, Skyler flapping his punching hand, and out front on the lawn someone must have told a good joke, because all the adults were laughing, right at the same time.

Kaui moved in front of me. "Cut it out, botos," she said.

"What?" James laughed again. "Wait, what?"

"I said enough," Kaui said.

"Maybe it's your turn, then, yeah?" James said to her. "You and me."

Dean stood up from his lean. "James, no be stupid," he said, his pidgin dialed up since he wasn't with Mom and Dad.

"Do it," Kaui said to James.

"Both of you shut up," Dean said.

"Too late," Kaui said. Then to James, "Do it, scaredy cat."

"Watch your mouth," James said.

"You gonna watch it for me?" Kaui said, all ten years old of her. "Do it, pussy." She put her fist out, just as mine had been, her hand so much smaller and rounder, there almost weren't any knuckles.

James set his fist in the air, six inches from hers.

Kaui's face like something carved from koa, little brown sister, bushy hair pigtailed. I didn't know what to say—part of me wanted her to try it, because she was always thinking she could keep up with me and Dean, even though she was five years younger than him and three years younger than me, she should know her place . . . and then part of me didn't want her to try it, because I knew the only way it could feel when it was over.

"Kaui," Dean said.

"Do it," Kaui said to James. She kept her fist out.

James shrugged, locked his arm, pointed his fist at hers. He twitched a fake at Kaui, she didn't flinch. He shifted his weight and threw a punch from his shoulder, but when his fist met hers it wasn't a fist, he opened his hand and grabbed her wrist, laughed. Patted her hand. "Come on, I not going hit a girl, specially not Dean's sister."

Dean laughed, too, he knew he had won, James and Skyler liked him enough, probably because of what he let them do to me. I chose it, I wanted to say. I matter, not you. But the three of them shifted their positions, just a bit closer to each other, me and Kaui outside their loose circle.

"Go," Dean said, waving us away like bees at a picnic. They were all three laughing. I turned, I walked away through the

trimmed bright grass, I heard Skyler's voice, dimming—"I got some fireworks," he said—and then I was out of earshot.

"I hate that stupid game," came Kaui's voice next to me, and I jumped a little.

"I didn't know you were there," I said.

"Well, I am," Kaui said.

"You shouldn't have come back there," I said.

"Why not?"

If there was one thing Dean and I agreed on, it was that no one got to hurt Kaui but us. That was what it meant to be her brothers, but I knew what Kaui would say if I explained it that way, so I didn't. Instead I said, "You got off lucky, they didn't hit you. It used to be like that for me, too."

We'd made it back to the sidewalk, two houses down, Uncle Royce's party. Skyler and his family would have hated it here—which is why they'd gone to another party up the street the other way—people here were just in jeans and T-shirts, camo board shorts, the tarry smell of cigarettes, no decorations, beer in cans from half-gutted cardboard boxes. Then another rolling pop of firecrackers.

"If you're tired of everyone picking on you, maybe don't be such a smart-ass all the time," Kaui said.

"You know," I said, "just because you learned a few swear words, that doesn't make you grown-up."

"Whatever," she said. "Bet they'd still be wrecking you if I didn't step in."

"Doesn't matter," I said.

"Things like that with Dean," she said, "it's almost like you *want* to get beat up."

She was right, that's exactly what it was, but how could I tell her? She didn't know, no one knew, how after the sharks I could

feel Mom and Dad holding their breath so hard it was almost like they were holding mine, they talked about the ʻaumakua, how me having been blessed by the spirits, chosen, meant something. Already I was lucky for them, had brought them things, the donations they got from my story that made our move to Oʻahu so much easier, certificates and awards from Kahena Academy, shaka respect from every local that heard the shark story and felt the old gods in it, everything, it was me.

Dean saw it. And he heard, too, from Mom and Dad, could I be the new Hawaiian scientist, or some senator, or the whole renaissance. We all heard, and there were things growing in me that made me believe I could turn into those dreams.

Still I shrugged at what Kaui said. "He's always mad at me. I figure maybe if I just let him get in a few good lickens he'll get over it."

She snorted. "Dean's not so good at that."

"At what?"

"Getting over things."

Then there was an awful whimper, a human sound you just know is bad, me and Kaui both stopped talking. We saw Dean, dark skin shirtless, walking slow toward us on the sidewalk from behind Skyler's house; Skyler was with him, their shoulders bumping. My brother had used his shirt to wrap Skyler's hand and now cradled it. I noticed a new, black smell, almost like after firecrackers, burned paper, but more sweet and smoky, grilled pig maybe. And Skyler had his eyes clamped shut, tears squeezing out in between, him whimpering, my brother telling him that everything was going to be all right, James behind them looking sick.

All the parents and the party shut up.

Dean said, "He tried to let go but the fuse was too short." Skyler was shivering like a horse coming up out of a river.

Dean whispered something to Skyler, Skyler shook his head. But anyway Dean started to pull the cloth back and showed us something like a hand, three fingers that wiggled white, two others that didn't, there were yellow chunks and shreds of skin, then splinters of bone gone gray in the light. The sweet pork smell blew again across our noses. People hissed and turned away.

Then voices came up again, loud and urgent, someone's keys jingling, while I stepped forward and touched Skyler's hand, I didn't know what I was doing, even Dean asked me that, *What are you doing*, but I didn't answer because there was too much in me to speak: I felt the prickly growth of the grass in the lawns all around, as if it was my skin, the beat of the night-bird wings as if I was the one flying, the creaking suck of the trees breathing in the firework air as if the leaves were my own lungs, the drum of the hearts of everyone at the party.

I touched Skyler's hand, my fingers traced the splinters of bone and shreds of skin. And in the space between our hands, something pulled, like magnets, and there was a warmth. But Skyler's dad arrived, pushed me back, and closed the shirt over his son's hand—it was better already, I swear, the skin closing back, the bones stitching themselves, I saw it was better—and suddenly my head felt fizzy, filled with helium, like after running too fast for too long. I stepped away, I tried to lean against the folding table with the mac salad and musubi, but my hand missed the tabletop, touched only air, I ended up on the ground, on my ass, for the second time that night.

From there I watched as two fathers took Skyler into a truck, the square sound of the doors closing, the chatter and roar of the engine starting, and, somewhere more distant, *pop pop pop*.

Kaui nudging my shoulder. "Wake up," she said, and she said

it again and again until I did. Who knew how long it had been. "What did you do?"

I wanted to say, but my eyelids were heavy, trying to make my mouth muscles open was like trying to open a refrigerator with a slug. I didn't know what I had done, exactly. Only that there was a feeling from Skyler's hand, a feeling of wanting to correct itself, and I was part of that feeling, made it larger, if only for a minute.

Dean arrived, looking down on us. "We gotta go."

I could see something burning there behind his eyes. Scared and angry and shamed. This was when it really started, wasn't it. "Sorry," I said, hoping that would be enough, this time, and I think I was also saying it for everything since the sharks had first saved me.

"Sorry for what," he said. "Not like you was the one grabbing a firework you couldn't handle."

I shrugged. "I know. But still."

"But what, you thought you was going fix his hand or something, when you touched it?" Dean smirked and shook his head. "You didn't do nothing."

Mom and Dad were calling to us from across the street. "We gotta go," Dean said.

We got in our dented blue Jeep Cherokee, me and Kaui and Dean in the back, Mom driving us home because Dad was four beers deep and, he said, didn't want us to see him fondle a cop to get out of a DUI. His palm on Mom's thigh and her fingers laced between. Headlights going past us the other way as we came down from Aiea, Dean looking out his side window and every now and then taking deep blowing breaths, all the signs and buildings along the H1. He looked even older, just since we'd got in the car, and I bet I did, too. Neither of us like the

Dean and Noa from Big Island, before the sharks: I remembered us sprinting through Hapuna Beach big-wave advisories, surf booming to our knees, then our chests, we'd dive right under the foaming whitewater. We'd feel the rip pull us sideways along the beach, see who could get deeper under each wave, let the sucking current of the coming set drag us along, the grains of sand gathering and bouncing over our spines, and we'd feel the water start to bend and stand up, tugging on our board shorts, and when the wave crested and tossed its full force directly on top of us, we'd push deep and open our eyes and grin at the yawning curl of gold sand and blue ocean that couldn't touch us. Underwater Dean's eyes were as I think mine were, squinted with joy, and the air rushed from our noses and mouths in silver ropes as we swam back toward the surface, where we'd high-five at our bravery, at what we could beat. Now we were in the Jeep, coming home, Kaui in between us, both boys and our Bloody Knuckles hands, driving toward whatever would come next, while part of me kept checking the rearview mirror for what we were leaving behind.