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Home and Again

Dylan Smith

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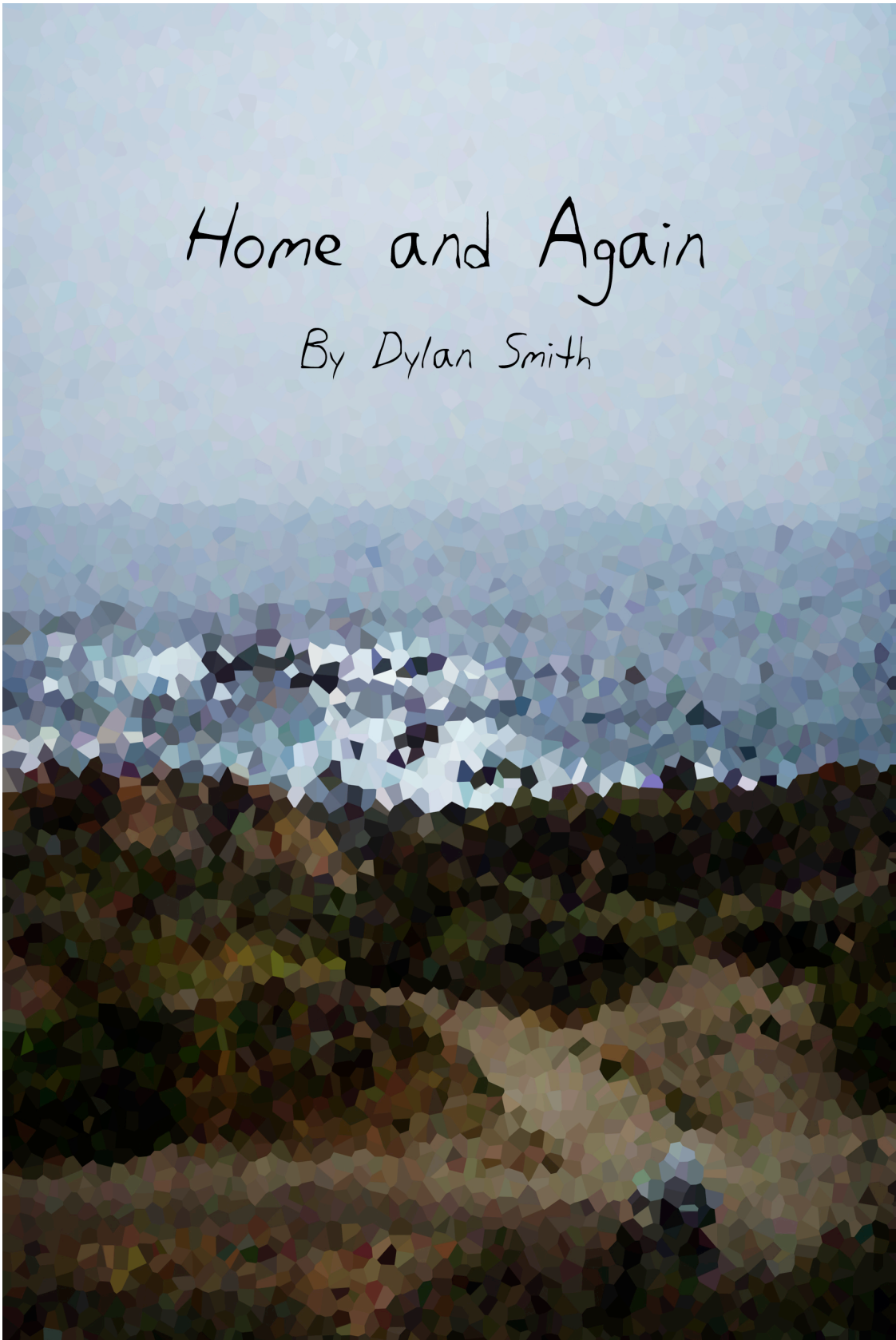
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Part One: To My Father

One

If you remember, there is an old house that sits on a peninsula at the top of a bay. Surrounded by rocks, this house is unprotected from the winds that batter the coast. There are no barrier pines between the water and the wood. This house is on the island of Oahu. This house has five bedrooms, three baths, and a lanai that looks out onto a murky sea. You live in this house. This is your house. It used to be that this house was ours, from the wooden floors to the glass windowed doors. I called this place my home because it was where I felt we belonged: this home, this house, our home. Home was where the rooms are a collection, a catalog of our lives. Home was where I was supposed to end up and home was where I belonged, but that home is gone. You should have held on to us like we held onto you: furiously. Remember what we had? Well, that isn't here anymore. This home was ours, yours, mine, from the wooden floors to the glass windowed doors. Until it disappeared slowly behind us. We cut the ropes that held us here. Drifting away, we couldn't go back, and we left you in an empty house by the ocean. It echoes when you breathe. A steady gust came around and blew us away and I always look back and know that I never will return to this home because home is not a place, it is a time. Home was yesterday.

* * *

We built this home for you, for me, and we filled it full with the armoire from that antique shop on Highway 51, where the sullen man made Mom pay twice its worth. You thought it was a waste of money. We had many things from other parts of the world, from places we had never been. My grandmother's home was full so they sent us their spillover:

Hopi Kachina dolls, Russian eggs, and two glass vases made in Venice. There were the tribal masks that my grandmother gave to us, which hang on the wall by the front door.

There was a Papasan chair upstairs that I used to come home to, curl up and read in. Mom called it my decompression chair. It sat in the guest room upstairs by the Murphy bed. The guest bedroom faced out toward the ocean and I would look out through the large sliding glass doors that made up the entire east wall. We never had any guest use the Murphy bed until I slept there after coming home from Basic. Those doors led out to the lanai where the old wicker rocking chair sat after having been relocated from Mr. Chee's front porch. Mr. Chee died last year and we bought the wicker rocking chair at the estate sale because we couldn't bear seeing anyone else in it. He used to rock back and forth on his porch all day and carve wooden utensils out of maple wood, the same wood that baseball bats were made of, he told me. A long time ago, he brought over an entire set of wooden utensils for our family, and Mom only used them when your clients came over for dinner. When you talked real estate, we left and went upstairs, and played Monopoly on the upstairs lanai. When Mr. Chee died, my brother cried. Mr. Chee taught my brother how to tie a bowline knot for Boy Scouts a little while after Mom came into my room one night and told me about you. The masks watched you go but I never saw you leave; you were just gone.

Your friend David, from college, is a painter and he gave me Cat and a Dog for my sixth birthday. They were painted on thick, flat wood and each wore human clothes. Dog smoked a corncob pipe and Cat drank from a fish bowl. All of the fish were dead in the fish bowl because you said David had a sense of humor and vodka killed fish. Dog liked Cat the best and he didn't like it when Cat got drunk and threw things. Dog and Cat hung on the wall

over my bed and I was trying to re-hang Cat after he had fallen down during the night when Mom came in to my room and told me that you were leaving home. After a while, it became normal that you weren't around, and when you gave me your old truck because you had a midlife crisis and bought a BMW, I finally got something out of it. You thought that would make me talk to you more, but it didn't because you were different and you weren't here.

In the living room, there was a carpet that had a stripe of every color, each a different size, except the colors weren't of the normal rainbow. Forest green next to burnt red next to pastel blue, that combination was my favorite. Dino, our dog who liked you the most, rolled on the carpet and his hair was everywhere so we had to vacuum on Sundays. We didn't have a cat. I preferred watching the television from the floor because I didn't like to sit next to you, Mom, or your son -- my brother -- or my sister -- your daughter -- because it made me uncomfortable. I needed space and my brother, your son, would touch me with his feet when he curled up or you would elbow me because you are a very tall, big man. Sometimes I would go, sit, and read in my decompression chair when everyone was watching Wheel of Fortune.

There was a tree that hung out over the water behind our home. I had built a treehouse in it and nailed a sailor's wheel to the highest platform and when the wind and rain swirled around us, I was up in the tree turning port and then starboard. I was the captain of a sinking ship because you cut down the tree and had the men put in a dock for your latest toy, only I couldn't dock there and I was lost at sea, boat in half.

I parked the gold truck to the right of the front steps, Mom parked her car to the left, I remember when you came home from the hospital, and we had to help you up the steps because the stroke had made you weak. You are six and a half feet tall and we could hardly

do it, so Mr. Chee came over to help. You were different after the stroke and even though I was twelve, and my sister was six and crying, and my brother was five and still thought you could do anything, we knew you weren't our Dad. Mr. Chee lived in the guest bedroom before he died so that someone could always watch him. We helped him up the steps and we didn't need you.

Our dining room table sat eight and sagged so you and I bought some wood and sanded it and made another leg to prop up the middle. You helped me get the Woodcarving Merit Badge. When you left, I stopped going to Scouts because I hated camping and only did it because I liked being with you. I went to the first few meetings but when you never came, I stopped going. Mom, my brother, my sister, and I would sit down for a family dinner every night because Mom believed in that kind of thing. Even when you were home, you usually ate upstairs in your office but we always told you when dinner was.

When we cleaned the house on Sundays, it was my job to wash the sliding glass doors upstairs by the Murphy bed because the salt would collect on them and it looked unkempt. Dino would follow me up and lick the salty water running down the glass. From the outside looking in, I would see you in my Papasan chair watching the TV by the Murphy bed while Mom, my sister, my brother, and me, cleaned the house. I would work quickly so that I could leave and ride my Schwinn cruiser, which we kept in the garage, to Ian's house. Ian didn't like coming to my home because you scared him.

The garage had room for two cars but we parked them in the driveway. Inside the garage was a punching bag you decided would be a good Christmas present for my brother because you had decided he had an anger problem. He punched my sister after she had hot glued his hair to the upright piano you bought Mom for Mother's Day. She had told him that

it was an experiment and when he tried to get up, he pulled out a chunk of his hair and so he hit her. There is still some glue on the piano next to the dent where the Texas-shaped dinner bell that hung in our kitchen slammed into it. You threw that at me when you found out I had unwrapped one of your Beatles albums, Rubber Soul, and played it because I had never heard it before. The album was no longer "mint" and so you threw the dinner bell at me. Mom yelled at you and so I took my brother and sister into my room and read them Elmer Blount Has an Open House, my sister's favorite children's book. Elmer Blount leaves the door open to his home and all of the forest animals come in to see what's inside. My sister especially loves the foxes that play with Elmer's underwear.

Our home was old and in the hallway was a cubby, a nook, where we kept the phone. Above the phone was a small bronze faced clock that hadn't worked since we moved in before I was born. You tried many times to fix it but old things aren't supposed to be fixed sometimes. After you left, we bought a digital clock that sat next to our cordless phone and we never looked at the bronze faced clock. Our technology was new, so when you called, we knew it was you. Mom made us answer the phone when you did and sometimes we didn't do that. You told me once over the phone that you didn't know how to be a Dad because yours had died when you were thirteen and you just didn't know what to do with me. By then, there weren't any pictures of you on the wall and Mom had replaced them with paintings that her Father had sent as wedding gifts all those years ago. You never liked those paintings, but now it didn't matter. The one that I stared at when you called to talk to me was a watercolor of three children on a beach in Ogunquit, Maine examining the sandy beach. Their faces were turned away and they wore winter clothes, which is not beach attire.

You stayed married for a long time after the masks watched you go -- almost 4 years -- as you battled Mom for everything until, one day, she gave in. The piano was hers. The masks were yours. You hid behind those. Cat and Dog were mine but you took them because the judge said they were yours. Dino was yours. The Texas-shaped dinner bell was hers. It was ours: my Mother's, my Sister's, my Brother's, and mine. The armoire was hers because the judge said it was hers. The Beatles albums, including Rubber Soul, were yours but she, and we, didn't care. The many-colored carpet and black leather couches were hers. The punching bag was yours. The Papasan chair was yours and you thought that would make me come sit in it. The table was ours, not yours. Mr. Chee's wicker chair went with Mom because you didn't deserve to sit in it. Our home, you demanded half of, and so we left the house and took the things that the judge said were ours. But, by then, I was gone and didn't live there anymore and my mother, my brother, and my sister had found a new home. You came back and lived at the house. Then, you took the bronze faced clock, ripping it straight from the wall when you finally realized the clock was broken and could never be fixed. Sometimes, things aren't meant for fixing.

The things that made this house our home were scattered across two houses by a tidal wave. I felt like I should wander down the beach and pick up the lost refuse, most of which had been floating for days. Steadily coming in, the things I found, the wooden utensils, spoon and fork and knife, wash up separately. Many people take and take, and soon the house is empty. Everyone has a piece. This home is gone and a house remains.

* * *

You are an old withered man who is walking through our old home and telling this son how this stunning waterfront property has five bedrooms, three baths, and a guest room that looks out onto a murky sea. You don't see. The lanai by the guest bedroom is great for company, you say, and this house has character; it has history. This house has our history but history is forgotten and then misremembered. You never saw, would never see, and I knew it. You are dead but this old withered man is still here in your place. There is a ghost inhabiting your floppy skin, waving your arms, and speaking unfamiliar words with a familiar voice. Sometimes your face contorts and I faintly see the "you I knew" grappling for control of your familiar features. It was a face I had traced with my eyes many times before but this was a face that had changed, different in the way only a child would question, like feeling the freshly shaven skin of where a mustache had once been and asking, why?

Two

Snow littered the ground in patches and where it melted the sound of dripping water reminded me of the broken faucet in the guest bathroom; it was never fixed. Dusty rocks poked through the white carpet; Snow didn't belong there. Winter wasn't supposed to be dirty. Winter is clean, white, fresh, and cold. Everyone was quiet back then, in prayer, while I looked out on the valley. I remember an orange flare floating slowly above us and I watched it lazily fall. It turned everything the color of fire, each tree flickered in the burning light and I burnt that memory. Fats had been in the hole next to me when an RPG barrage rocked our camp and he had looked me right in the eye for the entirety of it. Six weeks later, an angry father, whose son was killed accidentally when they carpet bombed the valley, threw a Molotov cocktail right at Fats. It shattered on his right shoulder and I watched him turn, reacting to the impact, and as the flames flicked to life, his face was terror looking at mine. The lighter fluid inside the cocktail had dripped down his back and onto his belt where he kept two grenades hanging. His eyes tried to see where they couldn't but I watched as the fire snaked towards his belt and then he was everywhere, even on me. The flare was high above us as we remembered Fats, who got his name because the only song he listened to was Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill". Fats' deep voice echoed across the valley as we played his song in memory.

The wind and the willow played

Love's sweet melody

But all those vows we made

Were never to be

"Ain't that somethin'?" I asked, checking my watch. It was a simple, bronze watch.

"A proper goodbye for him, don't you think?" Red responded.

"Naw, it won't ever be a 'good'-bye."

He looked up at me with glassy eyes and a sloppy frown that reminded me of a dead fish. He stretched and then dropped his head again, returning to prayer, I guess. Tate was propped up against a pile of half filled sandbags and his helmet was pulled down over eyes. His chin rested on his chest. He reached into his front vest pocket, pulled out a Ziploc full of Red Man chewing tobacco, and then stuffed his mouth full of the stuff, offering some to me. I declined. He liked to chew while we were going somewhere in the choppers; he would sit at the door and spit at the people in the villages below. The flare fell behind the scraggly trees deep in the valley and everything darkened. The men we fought were relentless like locusts and they didn't want us to be there. For our part, neither did we, but we did what we did and went where we were told. The moon was not so bright and now the swarms would come to multiply, lighting up the valley with tracers and the smell of burning oil.

Tate and I had been together since the day I showed up at the recruiter's office and found him sleeping under a newspaper at the front door. I had come early so I wouldn't be late like I was to graduation the day before. Leaning on the building, I watched him and waited for the office to open. The door chime rang and he stood, smelling like piss, and put in a mouth of Red Man chewing tobacco. He walked in, shaking his himself awake. Then we were on a C-130 over the Atlantic Ocean, on our way to war. Then we came back and he walked into our front door and flashed hard. The masks by the door didn't have eyes just like some of the boys who got caught in the gas. He broke down before making it off the

welcome mat. He collapsed and was shaking so hard he could barely get the Red Man in his mouth. Mom took the masks down until he left.

I slept in the guest bedroom, because I had been there since leaving Basic, and Tate slept in my old room. He came to stay with us after our first tour because he had nowhere else to go and so we gave him some of our house. He got shipped out again before me and when he left, he left through the back door and I never moved back downstairs. You made Mom box up my things, and took Cat and Dog, hanging both in your office next to the Silver Star that we never talked about. My sister and your son called Tate "The Red Man" just like most everyone did, and I didn't see him for a long time after he left our house.

The afternoon after signing my papers, I came home and found my high school diploma sitting on the kitchen table. Mom had framed it and she was looking at it when you called. She shook her head at me and I knew that she "wasn't home". The lawyers had been arguing for a year now and there had been three judges. I never knew more than that because you and Mom were very good at compartmentalizing.

"Hello."

"Your Mom there?"

"No."

"Well, have her call me back."

"Dad."

"Yeah?"

"I enlisted."

There was silence on the on your end. On my end, I heard your other son shout. I heard him jump out of bed and throw his door open. The wood floors creaked and since he

walked with his heels, Georgie's footsteps sounded like a drum. Georgie barreled down the hallway and his scrawny body crashed into me. He reached for the phone that was high above his head, pressed next to mine.

"Is that Dad? I want to talk to him!"

By then you had hung up and when he called you back, you didn't answer. You didn't call or answer for a while after that.

Our phone calls were a courtesy for me, for you. That's what you did when you didn't see someone everyday. I called you, we said hello, and soon after we said bye, not goodbye, just bye. I knew they didn't last long because the clock above the phone was broken, and I knew that it would never move, tick, or speak again. The broken clock never told me when I was, but it let me know where; I was home, until you took that away from me.

An artist named Michael Palmer did the oil painting on the wall next to the phone nook. It was four children on a beach in winter. One stood off to the side, watching the other three pick through the sand for shells. I looked at that painting when you did call and sometimes I looked at it when you didn't. Tate liked it especially because he had three brothers, all also in the Army. They had taken care of him after his Mom had died. They were much older, he said, and sometimes they would drive up to Maine, get a lobster roll, and search the beaches for sand crabs. They could only afford to go during the winter when it was cold and most joints were closed but the salt spray that licked his lips was a taste he said he would never forget.

We took trips to Maine during some summers, to stay with Michael Palmer, because Aunt Meredith (Mom's Sister) knew him from her days in New York. It was a long flight to

Boston and then an hour-and-a-half drive to Ogunquit but we always came back with something new for home. When I was six, Ella was in my mother's belly, and your son was not even an idea yet, your friend David came with us. He wasn't married and didn't have anyone to spend Thanksgiving with, so he came with us and met Michael. David was a painter too and they talked and smoked cigars together each night before you carried me upstairs to bed. Mom always smiled when I rested my head against your shoulder; that's when you knew it was time to take me to bed. Your lap was expansive and each night I found a new part to nest in while you swapped stories with the other men. Mom watched, with wine, and stayed silent, sometimes whispering to Aunt Meredith. That's when David made Cat and Dog for me and we filled this home with my two new pets because we weren't allowed to have real ones yet. Cat wore a bronze watch and I liked to pretend that he had taken the bronze clock from above the nook and put a leather band on it; spruced it up, got it fixed, and showed it off to all his friends. Cat had fallen down from the wall the night Mom came in to tell me that you were leaving. Cat broke his bronze watch when he fell. Sometimes old (and broken) things are not to be fixed because they are too fragile; too brittle for daily use.

Before you left and before we had a wireless phone, you would drag the ancient, slinky, telephone cord up and down the hallway, yelling at people. There were quiet times and there were loud times but you always got your way. Because the clock was broken and the cord didn't stretch far enough for you to peek into the living room, I always sat with a small silver alarm clock. It was digital and you would yell for the time and I would come running with the clock to show you. I asked why we couldn't just keep the digital clock in the nook so I didn't have to come running every forty minutes but, that wasn't how things

worked. A simple, black, wooden chair sat just inside my door so that you could pull it in the hallway and sit. Sometimes, you wouldn't bother and just sit in my room and talk into the phone. We would watch each other, you from the chair and me from my bed. I usually left and went to the Papasan chair upstairs. One time, I didn't.

You were a handsome and powerful man, and when the sun came through the windows in the afternoon, it lit your auburn hair. You had creases around your lips, each the shape of a little "c", and three hard lines across your forehead. Your eyes made me feel cold and when you smiled, I smiled back. Sometimes, you would tell me a story and never finish it because when the phone rang, you would pace, and when you banged your fist against the wall, we knew something was wrong and you wouldn't be at dinner.

"Just put the clock in the nook, Dad."

"Not everything is meant for convenience. You will be doing things that seem stupid all your life until you are successful enough to make other people do them for you."

I looked away from him and reached for the book I was reading.

"You put that book down when I am talking to you, son. I didn't raise you like that."

Your elbows were on your knees and you were leaning forward with a mug in your hand, dipping the tea bag in and out because you were impatient and couldn't wait for it to steep properly.

"Time is very important and when I trust you with the responsibility of keeping my time, you had better do so with the utmost urgency and attentiveness."

I knew that when you talked like this, I had to call you "sir".

"Yes, sir."

"Now, what time is it?"

"3:56 PM."

"3:56 PM, sir."

"Yes, sir."

I had to keep looking right into your eyes and you always blinked less than I did.

"It's an odd coincidence, don't you think, that the broken clock above the phone nook stopped at 3:56," he mumbled.

"Yes, sir."

"Except for one thing, we don't know whether it's in the AM or the PM."

"I think it's in the PM, sir."

"I didn't ask you to think. I asked you what time it was."

"No, sir. You didn't ask me to think but I thought I might."

"Do what you are told, and nothing more, you hear? Only ask what you need to ask, and nothing more. Useless information is just that, useless."

You took out the teabag and dropped it on the floor next to the chair. You never picked it up and it sat there for a couple of days until Mom saw it and scolded me for being indecent. As you went to take a sip, the phone rang in your lap and the boiling water swept down the front of the white button up you always wore. Jumping up, you ripped the shirt off your back and yelled.

"DAMMIT! This water is TOO DAMN HOT!"

You stood there, huffing, with a pink rash down your chest from where the water seared you. I saw your tattoo. It was on your shoulder. There was a skull and crossbones with a crosshair etched over it and the eyes of the skull were filled in jet-black.

"Where is your mother?"

"What's that on your arm?"

"Do I need to wash your ears out with soap? Did you not just hear me tell you not to ask about useless information?"

"No, sir."

"No, you didn't hear? Why weren't you listening?"

"I meant... the first... well... I don't want you to wash..."

"Get your mother before I take off this belt."

I jumped off the bed and ran down the hall yelling, "Mom! Dad wants you!" I was running away from you but you followed close behind and we found her outside on the back lanai with her own tea in hand and that is where I left you both and said bye to find the Papasan chair, my decompression chair. I think you liked the masks because you liked the way their dark empty eyes matched the sepulchral eyes on your shoulder.

I always kept a clock nearby and never failed to tell your time, even after you had left home. I bought a bronze watch, just like Cat's, with a pure white face, that had a nifty leather band, with the money Heather had given me at graduation. I lost track of how long it had taken the flare to fall but it was long enough to say bye. Tate's was passed out next to me. He had somehow gotten his hands on a bottle of Jack, which was improbable to say the least. I checked my watch, the simple bronze watch that looked like Cat's, and wondered if it was off an hour. Did they follow daylight savings here? It was April 2nd and the clocks jumped forward at the house. That was so long ago. It was long enough to know that the clock above the phone nook wasn't there anymore. You ripped it out of the wall and when I came back to the house that used to be our home, it didn't matter if it was in the AM or in the PM, because that all happened yesterday, and I had said goodbye - but not 'good'-bye.

Three

You are sixty and I am just twenty-nine. I moved in to watch you because the things that made you Dad have been slipping away, drifting out to sea. I watch you from the upstairs lanai by the guest bedroom and I can see you clearly, just off shore, but there is a storm rolling in, and you cut down the tree I used to captain. It was the tree I built a tree house in – the one I played sailor in – the one with branches that crept out towards the depths. I can't captain our ship anymore and so this house will drift with the fast currents, which are taking us somewhere we don't want to be. Before, I could pretend that when the storms came I would guide us to safety. Now, I can't. These waves will batter you against the shore and you will never be able to leave. But I am here with you and I am not sure if even I will escape. We are being pulled closer and closer to shore; to the rocks that the storm breaks upon, and soon we will be broken too. Ships have one captain and I do not want to go down with this ship. This is your ship.

There is still a hole in the wall above the phone nook and there is a man coming today with dry wall to fix it. Cat and Dog are hanging in my old room, but I have moved into the guest bedroom upstairs. My suitcase is still unpacked and Georgie -- your son -- has been talking at me.

"He's just a little messed up lately. It isn't Dad. Not our Dad. Make sense?"

"No."

"I am glad you are here. Steph and I are having a hard time keeping an eye on him with the baby almost due. I have been coming to check on him but he needs someone full

time. Ella is too young. She should be living, not cooped up in this old house." Ella is Georgie's older sister.

"You're too young for a kid, Georgie."

"My name is George."

"And I call you Georgie."

"I am twenty-two years old."

"And I still call you Georgie. You aren't ready." There was a pause and I heard you slamming the screen door and walking down the back steps.

"I've got a job, a house, a wife... I am plenty ready."

"You are too young."

"Should I have done what you did? Run away?" He scoffed while turning away from where I was sitting on the bed. Placing his hands on his hips, he walked over to the salt-caked glass windowed doors. Things weren't so clear through the window and it was hard to tell that the winds were gusting. The whitecaps were fuzzy and weak – the doors needed cleaning – and you were hazy as Georgie watched you pace in the back lawn with your cigar. The tide was coming in and the clouds were swirling. The jellyfish would probably drift in with a tide like this.

"Georgie."

"Henry."

"That's Dad's name." I was Henry David but I went by Davey and Georgie knew that. Henry was, Henry is, my Father's name.

"No one calls me Georgie."

"So is that it? Dad's a little messed up." I said, changing the subject. "That's news..."

"It's different this time, Davey. There is something different and worse. Even Mom has been around to see him."

"What's she been doing out here?"

"Coming to see him, what else?"

"What are you doing out here?"

"Coming to see you, what else?"

He turned around and resting his back against the doors, with his hands across his chest, he looked at me with an age he shouldn't have possessed. Pointing over his shoulder at you, Georgie looked at me and with a solemn tone said, "That isn't Dad anymore."

But, you weren't there and the screen door banged against the frame. Then, you came into the guest bedroom. We heard you coming and your cigar was gone but I could still smell it on your breath. You never smoked them, just chewed until they were stubs, which you then hurled into the ocean.

"Dad, Davey is here. He is staying for a while. He's visiting. Understand?"

"Speak to me like I am a child one more time, kiddo, and I will wipe that smile off your face. Don't think I couldn't kick your ass," you said. Your voice was deep and gravelly, like a key being run down a metal screen door. You turned, eyed me up and down, and then uncertainly mumbled, "Who are you?"

"Dad, that's Davey, your son."

"I know who my own son is," you blurted. "I just don't have my glasses. I can't see a damn thing without my glasses." You felt your pockets, both pant and shirt. Turning around, looking furiously about, the creases around your mouth, each the shape of a little "c", looked wild. Three hard lines (they were still there) darkened on your forehead.

"Around your neck," Georgie said softly.

You were startled and your anger cracked. Feeling up your torso, you found them hanging there. Putting them on, you examined Georgie and the creases around your eyes folded together. Then, looking at me, you searched for proof that I was who Georgie said I was. You hunched, squinted, and then leaned in for a closer look.

"Yeah, Davey, that's Davey."

Looking back at Georgie, you leaned in, hands on your hips, adjusting the glasses again. The pair you had on today was black, with large rims, and a silver stripe than ran down the legs. They were not meant for someone your age. Smart, sharp, slightly feminine men wore these glasses, usually with skinny ties and unbuttoned collars. There was a little shop that you walked to for coffee and they had a circular rack with cheap sunglasses and reading glasses. You regularly forgot your most recent pair and would buy new ones at the shop so you could read the labels on the little donuts you bought. There were six donuts in each Hostess pack. There were 230 calories and 13g of sugar in a serving of four donuts. Each morning, Bobby, the short Filipino man who ran the store would explain to you how many grams of sugar were in each donut. You had asked him so many times to do the math for you that he had finally written down the "per donut statistics" on a sheet and taped it on the wall to the left of the cash register. Every morning, you asked, were confused, only ate four donuts, and deposited the remaining two, and the wrapper, into the trashcan at the end of our driveway. You would wipe the white powder off on your shirt, and upon returning to the house, would catch a glimpse of yourself in a car mirror, or car window, or in the mirror at the end of the hallway, or in the bathroom mirror – after relieving yourself

(because coffee made you pee). Embarrassment, then anger, and then a new set of clothes, that is how your morning went. Those glasses looked ridiculous on you.

You reached out, pinched Georgie's belly, and straightened, crossing your arms, with a disdainful smile stretching painfully across your face.

"You could stand to lose a few. Men aren't born hard. Men are made hard. Look at Davey here," You said, grabbing my arm. "Boy has been doing real work - in the sun - not like you." Then you muttered, "Goddamn flying desk jockey..."

You turned and walked out of the room, muttering something about Georgie's ungratefulness.

"Son-of-a-bitch."

"Calm down, he didn't mean it."

"That bastard can't let sleeping dogs lie. You think I don't know I have put on a few. Who wouldn't? There is a crazed pregnant woman living in my house and I haven't been working my new job for more than 6 months!"

"Yeah."

"What the hell is 'yeah' supposed to mean?" Georgie was yelling now and his face turned pink. He was wearing a blue blazer with a blue-striped button down and pressed khaki pants, all of which was Ralph Lauren. People around here don't wear Ralph Lauren but Stephanie, his wife, was from Texas. That is what rich men from Texas wore. They wear boat shoes (he was wearing boat shoes) and he hated boats. Georgie had landed a great job, working for some developer as an "apprentice" architect. The only thing was, his mentor was a fall-down drunk, and so Georgie - that little shit - was designing a new development by himself. It was going to be built a few miles down the beach from this house. Our house,

this house, didn't have any beach. It was perched out on a little peninsula, and our coast was made entirely of rocks, big, dark, porous rocks that poked into the Pacific. There was a small bay with a beach to the south and that is where the Eggers house was. It sat empty most of the year. The kids owned it now and they lived on the East Coast and couldn't get out here much. We had the keys and kept an eye on it for them. The Eggers were family friends, and Ian Eggers was my best friend, but I haven't seen him in a while. In front of their house was where we kept some kayaks and canoes because they sure weren't using the house. Georgie never liked going out on the water and he hated that I did.

"Calm down. I didn't mean anything by it."

"Sure." He said, sarcastically, "I'll see you tomorrow for dinner. I have dry cleaning I need to pick up and groceries to buy." Dinner would never happened.

Without another word, he walked out of the room, and I heard his car door slam as I watched you pace in the backyard again. You were fuzzy through the salty glass and I decided that first thing in the morning, I was going to haul the hose up the lanai and clean them. I heard you yelling at someone and went downstairs, past the masks, and onto the downstairs lanai, through the screen door. It bounced against the wooden frame after I let it shut. The cigar was back in your mouth and you had your hands in your pockets. You still wore khaki pants and a white button up, refusing to wear what everyone else here wore, just like Georgie, or rather, Georgie did it to be just like you.

I put on some slippers and descended the white steps you built during the summer between kindergarten and first grade. The rough 2x4's needed to be sanded and you let me take the rough paper and smooth the splintery wood. Mom watched from the comfy chairs on the lanai and didn't say anything. Your large hands enveloped mine and together we

used the saw and cut the wood to the proper length. That afternoon, we sat on our steps, and you would point out minute shapes on the horizon, telling me which were tankers and which were catamarans. I could never see them and Mom got me contacts when I was twelve. You were still pacing. I sat on the steps.

"Dad," I called.

You continued to walk around the yard, hands behind your back, picking up leaves and imaginary trash that littered the yard. Behind you was the dock, where my tree (my tree house tree) used to be. It leaned sloppily to the north, like an odd compass.

"Dad."

Again, no response.

"Dad!" I yelled.

And still you paced, chewing resolutely on your cigar, with those three lines on your forehead crunched like an accordion. You stopped, looking south, with your hands in your pockets and as I approached, I could hear you mumbling.

"There are 40 acres just east of Princeville I could get... What do you mean... 15% is what I charge... A move back to the mainland would do us good, Catherine... The kids can learn to live with it... Chee, you stay away from my boys... Boat looks in good condition... I don't need no doctor... Where are my glasses? Where are my goddamn glasses?"

I had been standing behind you and listening for a few minutes and when you circled around to face me, after patting your pockets, both pant and shirt, you jumped.

"Who are you? What are you doing on my property?" You said, gruffly. "You seen my glasses?"

"It's me, Davey."

"Who? Where are my goddamn glasses?"

You kept checking your pockets, both pants and shirt.

"Dad. Your son Davey. It's me, Davey."

"I don't have a son named Davey. I got a strapping young lad named... Well... named...
What's his name? Something with a... Have you seen my glasses?"

You turned around and bent down to check the grass for those damn glasses and when you stood up and faced me again, you sputtered, "Dammit! Where are my glasses? And, who the hell are you? Get off my property!"

"Dad. Remember me? Your son, Davey. We built those steps together." I pointed back at the house.

"I built those steps with my son, George. Who are you... and where are those damn glasses?"

"Dad. I am your son."

I was urgent.

"My son's name is George. Who are you? Let me get my glasses. I can't see a damned thing without my glasses."

"Dad. Don't play games! Davey, remember Davey, it's me, Davey, remember me?"

You were flustered. The cigar stump fell out of your mouth and it moved with no words. The three lines were gone and you looked gaunt. You were (are) a large man, but your thick arms had melted away and you looked like a wispy tree, nothing like the tree that used to be where the dock is now. It was strong, thick, and it took many men to haul it off. My hands fell to my side and you looked at me, overwhelmed.

"Dad. Remember me?"

Nothing. Just blank eyes.

"Dad. Remember me."

"Where are my glasses," you asked unsteadily.

I reached out and placed the glasses, which had been hanging around your neck this whole time, on your face. Your squint faded and then returned.

"You look a lot like my son, George. Handsome kid, with broad shoulders like yours."

I left you standing there and went south along the coast until I felt the cool sand push between my toes. The wind was flicking hard on my face and the salty air dehydrated my skin. I felt rough and brittle. When the current was just right, and depending on the cycle of the moon, hundreds of jellyfish would be thrown up on the beach. These weren't box jellyfish, the ones that stung and killed, but harmless ones that floated out of the canal when it rained. Some were as small as a pencil eraser and some as big as a hub cab. I stepped on one and its gooey insides squirted between my toes. The beach was a minefield.

They didn't belong here and I began to throw the jellyfish back into the sea. My hands were slick and many broke apart, too fragile for flight. I worked methodically, starting at the rocks where our property ended and the beach began. I cleared the entire length of beach in front of the Eggers house. I was dripping with sweat and jellyfish goop. They needed to be back in the ocean. They didn't belong on this beach. The sweat dripping from my eyebrows brought with it the salt that had collected on my face. My eyes burned and I couldn't see. I yelled at them.

Remember me? Remember me. I saved you. I saved the jellyfish. I did. Then the wind picked up and I could see the white caps tumble over, break, and turn into waves. The sets pushed the jellyfish I had thrown into the ocean back onto shore and their bodies were

mangled. Broken flesh and spindling tentacles littered the beach. I was trying to blink away the salt that blurred my vision. I kicked the broken pieces of the jellyfish back towards the oncoming water, whispering order to the creatures I had just saved.

"Go back, get back, come on, go back, get back, come one, get back in there," I whispered as I tried to put them back where they belonged. I trailed off. I was standing in the midst of carnage that I had wrought with my own hands. I let the dead creatures be and returned home. They would have died anyway. You were still pacing back and forth in the back yard. You were animated, waving your arms wildly around you as if a swarm of bees were attacking you. I could just barely make out the sounds of an argument I had once heard between you and Mom many years ago. We would never move from this house, you said, this is our home. Then the storm broke on this house and you came in soaking to find the door to the guest bedroom locked.

You could say that I was waiting for you to die and for this house to fall into the sea. You could say that I wanted you to die. You could say that you are my excuse, and you are. Soon, the jig will be up.

Part Two: What Happened

Four

This house stood against the sea on a little peninsula on the north end of a small bay just up Kamehameha Highway, on the island of Oahu. The other houses on this bay stood secluded behind trees that protected them from the salty gusts that ripped in off the ocean. But not this house. The yard stretched out to a rocky shoreline, and this house's trees stood behind, a buffering wall between the house and well... nothing. Most owners had planted rows of pines, to break the wind. However, this owner liked the view and had them planted behind, in an act of defiance. There was no beach on the property of this house, only rocks, which cut haphazardly into the sea. The other houses had a thin beach that stretched to the south from the rocks on which the house was perched.

The house was painted a beige color, like the color of sand, with white trim, but the paint had faded and was beginning to peel. There was a skinny lanai that wrapped around the whole of the house, which expanded at the back, to the east, where the house faced the ocean, providing ample outdoor floorspace. The upstairs guest bedroom, which faced the sea, had large sliding glass doors that led to an upstairs lanai. A metal spiral staircase was on the left of this lanai and it went down to the lanai below. The overhang of this addition gave some protection to the lanai below. The front of the house, which looked towards the Ko'olau mountains, steep and encroaching, had wooden steps that led to the front door. The house was raised on stilts, as most houses near the ocean were. The stilts were only about four feet off the ground and so the hollow space gave the wooden floors inside a hollow sound. They were prone to creaking. A dilapidated dock struck boldly into the

waters of the Pacific, but it sagged with rot and disuse. There used to be a tree where that dock was; the only tree that ever stood between this house and that ocean.

He was walking away from me with his back hunched. My father was almost 6' 5" and now he looked no taller than me. I was 6' on a good day when I wasn't slouching. His hands were in his pockets and they looked like the only thing holding up his pants, which were many sizes too big. Even his belt, which was cinched up to the tightest notch, didn't fit snugly around his waist. Yesterday, I had taken one of his belts and was adding a few more notches with a kitchen knife, so he could tighten it up properly, when he exploded. He took the belt from where I was working on it at the dining room table and stormed out to the backyard, mumbling. He didn't yell but his face was familiar, I had seen it many times and it was usually accompanied with severe disappointment. I watched him from the kitchen window, which faced out towards the ocean, and he was pacing again. Whenever he was frustrated, I could find him out there, reliving memories that were dead and gone. I followed him out, calling after to apologize but he didn't hear me. I sat in a chair on the lanai, which faced out towards the ocean, and listened to his past, which sometimes included me, and even his memories were misremembered. I had heard him talking about the day I enlisted and in his mind, he still lived with us. We argued and he told me that this was a mistake, that I had a future, that I could go to most any college. Within a few minutes, he was kneeling in the grass, pleading with the ocean, begging me to stay, and that was when I couldn't watch anymore. That wasn't what had happened and I hated it when he lied. I had called, told him, and he hung up. We didn't talk for a few years after that.

I left the Army when I was 26 after re-upping twice. I didn't own much. My tiny room in the enlisted barracks was sparse, uninteresting, and after I met Lily I always insisted we

go to her place. I spent two years doing other things... and now I am here with my father in the house I grew up in.

Today, my things were coming. I had shipped two boxes when I came to stay with Dad and most of it was of no importance. There was the Afghan rug, no bigger than a doormat, which I had found in an abandoned hut after a valley was carpet bombed during my first tour. My records were coming and they took up the entirety of one box. I had spent the majority of an afternoon before I left carefully packing the fragile vinyl, wrapping the Afghan around my favorite three: Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, Bon Iver's *For Emma, Forever Ago*, and Ray Lamontagne's *God Willin' & the Creek Don't Rise*.

Dad had an entire wall of albums on the landing at the top of the stairs. There was a single chair and a large speaker system but I had never heard it turned on. I would find him there someday, before he moved out, sitting in his chair with headphones on. He never listened to the vinyl on the speakers, only with headphones, his eyes closed, legs crossed, a faint smile on his face, tie usually undone, and a foot bobbing up and down. When Dad was "listening", we never disturbed him. Mom would sometimes put her hand on his shoulder and he would open an eye and remove one ear from the headphones. Mom would whisper something and he would acknowledge with a nod, then slide the headphone back into place and begin to bob his foot again. My sister Ella, my brother Georgie, and I, would watch from the guest bedroom where we usually spent our afternoons. Once, he caught us peeking through the cracked door after Mom had disturbed him and he called us over. He picked up Georgie and placed him in the chair, then put the headphones on his head. Georgie was tiny, only about four, and they were enormous on his thin frame. My father had to hold the headphones to his head so they wouldn't fall off. Georgie had a concerned look on his face,

as if waiting for Dad to snap, and he sat there, listening, while Ella and I watched. When he listened to music back then, he had control of his body. Rhythm ran through him. Now he is controlled by something else. He paces.

As I walked back inside, I heard the doorknocker. My boxes were here. I took them upstairs to the guest bedroom and shut the door, carefully extracting the records and placing them in a quilt-like pattern across the Murphy wall-bed that remained permanently on the ground now that I was back. It looked like it would stay that way for a while or at least as long as Dad lasted. He was 60 and had early-onset dementia, or that's what I thought, and I didn't really know what that meant, except that he had driven away both Ella and Georgie, one after the other. I was the last option and I was the last one they asked. Ella and Georgie had always been friends because they were so close, only a year apart. I was six years older than Ella and seven older than Georgie, which meant I didn't really know them. Being family doesn't necessarily mean you know someone, or are friends with them. It means you are in their lives. The rest is circumstance. The last time I had spent time with either of them was when I came home from my first tour with Red Man and even then, they were just 13 and 12 – not even in high school. I didn't get to know them as people. They had always been children to me and because of that we were never close. They knew that Dad and I never talked, and waited until there was no one else to turn to; someone had to live in this house with that man.

But Mom was coming around the house to see him, and to talk with him, and I thought they hadn't talked in years. The divorce had severed their relationship completely and once Ella and Georgie had left the house, there hadn't been a need to even acknowledge each other's presence. Even with three children in common, they managed to talk less than once

a month, which infuriated Ella, who believed, and still does, that this was just a separation. She never understood that Mom and Dad couldn't love each other, that love dried up and sometimes became a shell of what it used to be, like how Dad was a shell now. But, I don't know Ella and she doesn't know me. It was not a separation, never had been, and Mom was never coming back to live in our house by the ocean. He wasn't Dad anymore and if he wasn't Dad, then how could he be with Mom?

The Afghan rug, which I had hauled back to the States from the Pakistani border I was stationed near, lay in the empty box and after a moment of consideration, I took it downstairs and arranged it just outside the back door that led out to the lanai. There wasn't a doormat there and I figured this would do a fine job.

It was late in the afternoon and the sun had set behind the mountains. Light still poured over them and through the cracks. The water turned grey and the sky would light up. When the clouds pushed up against the mountains, rays of sunlight would shoot through the passes below the cloud line, as if a final reminder of something – though I do not know of what. A prolonged dusk. You will remember me.

The horizon to the east was purple and you could follow the layers of color that were stacked on top of each other. From dark purple on the ocean horizon, to dark blue, to sky blue, to pink and you were looking straight up. Then orange, then red, and then to the mountains, backlight in golden brilliance. The last color was not yellow like a banana, but yellow like power, dark and radiant, more deep than bright, and all at the same time. The vibrant green mountainsides, where moss had grown up the steep cliffs, dark black, silhouetted by the sun. This was my favorite time of day and when I was a child, I would spend it in my tree house by the ocean, staring at the grey sea and the sky that was golden.

After laying the rug, I sat for a while and watched the sea and the horizon darken. My father did too but from another time. He was in some world past remembered.

He stood at the edge of the yard, where light waves lapped against the rocks, next to the dock that protruded into the ocean. The water was calm today and there was almost no breeze, which left a stillness in the air. Dad built that dock where my tree, and treehouse, used to be. He was leaning against the dilapidated wood, which had been slowly deteriorating in the water and the salty air. Most things broke down faster out here, in the elements, and we had to get the house repainted every few years to protect the wood from the salt spray.

I watched him and the sunset for a while and then went inside, wiped my feet on our new doormat, and began to make dinner. Lily had taught me how to cook. She was a chef, and had a small restaurant tucked away in the mountains of New Mexico, which is where I lived before coming to stay with Dad. I lived with Lily, but now I don't. I live with Dad now.

Tonight was pasta, with Lily's recipe, and I began to chop up onions and crush garlic. After sautéing, I added the tomato puree, crushed baby tomatoes, oregano, and the rest of the fixings. I let the sauce simmer and went into the living room to turn on some baseball because Dad had the best sports package you could buy for a TV, even though he seemed less interested in it than I remembered. When I was small, he was the coach of the Little League team that I was on and he would drill me outside with the radio on. Dad had fashioned the radio so that we would get Seattle Mariner broadcasts and we would throw the ball in the backyard, and listen to Dave Niehaus: "The greatest announcer who ever lived," Dad called him. We were Texas Ranger fans. I was a Texas Ranger fan because my father was, but for some reason we still listened to Mariner broadcasts. The games were

over though because this was Hawaii and everything that happened on the mainland happened during the day. We ate dinner while everyone else slept and late at night, we were in the past, still in Tuesday, while London woke up to Wednesday.

I heard Dad walking around the house and then the front door opened and his shoes were still on. He looked at me, sitting on the couch and asked what was for dinner.

"Pasta, with homemade marinara," I replied.

"Who made it?"

"I did, Dad."

He grunted and walked farther into the living room, stepping on the carpet that had replaced the many-colored one that Mom got in the divorce.

"Your shoes, Dad?" I said pointing. "You are getting dirt all over the carpet."

"Oh..." He said. "I forgot to... I..."

And he turned and walked to the front door. I returned to the TV and began to flip channels and then, after a few minutes, went to boil some water for the spaghetti. From outside, came a guttural yelp. I jumped up and rushed out and there he was, sitting on the steps, hunched over his shoes, his hands trembling above the laces. I didn't know what to do. They were loafers that just needed to be pulled off, but his knobby fingers were attempting to untie the bow.

"Dad..."

He just sat there and kept trying to untie the laces. His hands were shaking and his fingers weren't doing what he wanted them to do. I stood there and watched helplessly, worried that if I disturbed him he would begin his pacing again; worried that only Mom

could touch him lightly on the shoulder, and that there was never anything I could do to help him.

"Davey," he muttered.

"Yeah."

"Come help me get these shoes off."

This was Dad, not the Dad that paced, but the Dad who let Ella and Georgie listen to his music; the Dad who hung up when I enlisted.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" He barked.

I was down the steps in a flash and my hands gingerly undid the laces, even though they didn't need to be undone. I was worried he might break if I tried to pull them off. Carefully I did the right shoe. Then I moved to the left and then he thanked me quietly, and we went inside and sat down to dinner. He was quiet and so was I, and we ate our pasta in silence, even though the sauce was underdone because I didn't want to keep him waiting. We didn't talk about the shoes, or his hands, but he mentioned the Rangers, and they lost I told him, and he nodded.

"How long do you think you will be here?" He asked, leaning back from the table. His back was straight and he looked every bit the man who had intimidated me and still did. However, the creases around his mouth were more extreme, and his body didn't fit his broad shoulders, like a man would in a suit that was too big. He looked like a man in a suit that was swallowing him whole.

"A while I think."

"Hmm. Well you are going to have to do some work around here then. I won't have you just sitting around."

"Anything, Dad."

"Well, you can start tomorrow with that dock, it needs a good sanding and refinishing. Coming up on five years since it was built, so its about time for a new coat of varnish," he said, wiping his mouth with his napkin. The dock was built almost 20 years ago. He was sitting at the head of the table, and I was to his left and I didn't know whether to explain it to him or not. He had barely eaten any of his pasta, and I had cut it up before setting the plate down in front of him. My Father had spread his food around the plate and I had counted his bites, eight.

"You built the dock almost 20 years ago... It's been 20 years since you cut down the tree that used to be out there. Remember? The one with my old tree house in it?" I said softly, speaking meekly as always.

"I know. I said 20..." He trailed off, like most of his sentences seemed to do, and his eyes were distant, searching for a memory that would confirm the truth of my words.

"Either way, the dock needs new varnish and if you are going to stay under my roof, you are going to do some work."

"Sure, Dad."

"Alright then," he said, as he pushed himself from the table and headed towards the stairs. He left his dinner plate, with most of the pasta smeared across. He wanted it to look like he ate his fill. He didn't. I picked our plates and brought them to the kitchen for washing. My father was already coming back down the stairs by the time I had finished cleaning the kitchen and he entered with a cigar in hand. He was wearing his house slippers and had changed into a robe and pajamas. His hair was mused, like he had struggled to pull his shirt over his head.

The cabinet above the fridge housed my father's extensive liquor collection and if you were to peer deep inside, you would find thirty-year old bottles of scotch, brandy, and bourbon that had been purchased before I was even born. His long arms snaked up towards the cabinet and he deftly pulled down a bottle of some cheap whiskey. He only drank the cheap stuff now. The hesitation that was in his fingers earlier had vanished and he seemed in complete control. Pouring himself an inch and a half or so in a small glass, he replaced the bottle and retrieved a single ice cube from the freezer. I had seen him repeat this many times before the divorce, every Sunday night before the week began. Now, he repeated this process every night, at least since I had arrived around a week ago. Unless he was pacing again, and when he was pacing, he would come in late, around 10 after I had called him in. He would make his way straight to his bedroom and I always heard the lock click. Georgie had given me a key to the room when he dropped me off last week. I haven't seen Georgie since.

He made his way to the downstairs lanai and backing out, pushing the screen door with his butt. In the doorway he stopped. He stood right on top of the Afghan rug I had put down and he looked like he was forgetting again. He started to shake and his mouth moved but no words came out. His left hand shook and the scotch whiskey sloshed violently in the glass.

"Dad, you okay?" I asked tentatively. I had never seen him like this.

"Whaaat isss that?" He was looking down and some his words were slurred.

"An Afghan rug... A doormat."

The glass dropped from his hand and landed with a thump on the rug, and the whiskey washed over his feet.

"That was ne here. It don't be here." He knew he was saying the wrong things. I had never seen him like this. He was panting and shaking and I was scared. He closed his eyes and tried to breathe deeply, filling his lungs with the warm, still, night air.

I ran towards the nook in the hall and grabbed at the phone, dialing Georgie's number, and listened to each ring intently. Georgie didn't answer phone calls from the landline... Afraid of Dad, I guess. He didn't answer and neither did Ella. I took the phone and peeked around the corner of the hallway and my Father was still standing there, breathing heavily, with his eyes closed.

Mom, I thought, I'll call Mom. I hadn't spoken with her since getting here. I punched her number in three times before getting it right and she answered on the second ring.

"Hello..."

I didn't say anything.

"Henry, is that you? You know I have caller ID." Henry was my father's name. Henry was my name, but it wasn't because everyone called me Davey.

"Mom."

"Davey?"

"Dad is freaking out right now. Just shaking and standing there. He dropped his whiskey and his eyes are closed," I said in a panic as I watched him gasping on my Afghan.

"Calm down, Davey. It's okay. Everything is going to be okay."

"All I did was put down a doormat, some old Afghan I had."

"You can't be doing things like that, Davey," she said with exasperation, "Things have to stay the same around him. Change disrupts, that is what the doctor says."

"Well, what the hell am I supposed to do? Mom, he is just shaking and standing there!"

I was nearly yelling into the phone now.

"Just put the phone up to his ear and let me talk to him," she said calmly.

I eased around the corner and approached him cautiously. I reached out, held the phone to his ear, and couldn't make out what she said to him. Slowly, ever so slowly, my Father's body loosened and he began to still. He opened his eyes and looked right at me. My arm began to hurt from holding the phone up to his ear for so long when finally he said, "Okay".

As if nothing had happened, he continued out towards his favorite chair near the corner of the covered lanai. The light was on and it lit the yard with a faint yellow glow and just beyond its reach was the ocean, and its gently lapping tide.

"Mom?" I said, holding the phone back to my ear.

"Take the rug and hide it where he won't find it and then get him another glass of whiskey. Remember, only..." And I cut her off.

"One ice cube, I know."

"Things need to be the same, Davey, just keep things the same."

"What did you say to him?" I asked.

"Those words aren't for you." She said, "I will be around tomorrow after lunch. He has an appointment and you are coming with. You need to learn so this doesn't happen."

"Mom..."

"Don't argue. You are coming."

"Mom."

"Davey, you know I love you, all the time, no matter what."

"I love you too, Mom."

"I'll see you tomorrow, sweetie."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome." And she hung up.

I did as she said and my Father took the whiskey without saying a word. He made his way to bed late that night. I heard him climbing the stairs from my bed. His all too familiar steps beat like war drums in my head. The threatening metronome urged a fight. Rebel, return, recycle what you once loved. Accept this home. It is your birthright, your responsibility. Like drums marching on – a rebellion – he continued up the stairs. It seemed like forever, forever he spent trying to hold on to some far away colony that had long since yanked the yoke of colonialism. He needed to give up.

Five

Dad was downstairs watching the Rangers and I was reorganizing my records in the guest bedroom. I had left my player behind, with Lily, and I wasn't going to get it back. Not the way I left things. I shouldn't have just disappeared like that but I don't say goodbye so good. She deserved better than an old record player.

I could hear the game downstairs, the steady chatter of the crowd overlaying the announcer. Since he didn't use his record player anymore, I figured I might as well. Picking out an old Kings of Leon record, I opened the door and listened for him. Nothing. I crept over to the record player, which sat on a small coffee table on the landing at the top of the stairs. His special chair used to sit next to the coffee table. Now it was my Papasan chair, my decompression chair, and when he took it in the divorce, he had thought that him having it would make me come sit in it. It didn't matter now and so I sat with my legs curled beneath me, feeling the familiar worn fabric. I placed the album on the platter, dropped the needle, picked up the headphones, and listened with one ear uncovered, just in case he came upstairs. I wasn't sure if this was allowed after last night's debacle and I hadn't seen him since.

This morning, I woke up early and made bacon and egg burritos, and left them on the counter covered with foil. My body was trained to wake early, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't sleep in. At 5:37AM, I was finished making breakfast and put on my shoes for a run down the neighborhood road where I passed Bobby, sweeping the sand off the lanai of his coffee shop and I remembered Dad's routine:

1. Walk to shop.

2. Buy new reading glasses
3. Buy donuts.
4. Buy coffee.
5. Spill on shirt.
6. Put on fresh clothes.

Dad wasn't going to eat the burritos.

Clouds covered the moon and it was very dark. Light spilled from inside Bobby's shop, casting long shadows through the patterned railing of the wrap around lanai. He waved at me and I slowed up, not knowing how he picked me out in the darkness.

"Davey!" He called. "Howzit. Long time no see."

"Yeah... It's been a while." I said, looking up from him at bottom of the steps. His grandfather had converted a small, old plantation house into this shop, which Bobby now ran.

"What, like five years?" Gone was the fake accent he put on for the tourists who enjoyed the authentic feel of buying coffee from a "native", even though Filipino's weren't technically native. But, Bobby Danao's family had been here long enough to be called native – local. He was fifth generation and his family had been in Hawaii since the late 1800's when the American businessmen who overthrew the monarchy began to bring in cheap labor from the Far East to work the sugar cane fields. Bobby's family as always welcome at our home. His daughter, who was a few years older than me, babysat Ella, Georgie, and I before I became old enough to do it. Many mornings, I would wake to find Bobby and his father sitting on the rocks in our backyard casting lines into the ocean. He taught me how to

shore fish, and his hands, calloused and rough, were the ones that held mine when I learned to tie the proper knots.

"Longer, I think. More like eight or nine. Last time I was back was after my first tour."

"That's right. You had that big guy with you, Tate, was that his name? He came by here a couple of years ago looking for you. Asked after you, but didn't want to go up to the house."

That was the first I had heard of this. Tate and I hadn't spoken in years, not since he got back from his second tour and sent me a letter. I responded and then never heard back from him.

"Really?"

"Yeah, didn't talk much. Was chewing some sort of tobacco."

"You been fishing at the house lately?" I asked. The last thing I wanted to talk about was Tate.

"Not in a while. Not since Mr. Henry got sick. I try to make sure he is okay when he comes in and I don't charge him for the donuts. He always buys some of those reading glasses," he said pointing to the rack just inside the front door. Mr. Henry was my father and Bobby had always called him Mr. Henry, like most everyone did.

"Don't let that stop you. He doesn't know what he's doing anymore. Old man's lost it. I am living out there now. Come on out and bring your Dad."

Bobby told me his Father had passed a few years back.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know," I said softly.

"Well that's what happens when you run off like you did. Leaving all of us like that. And not even telling us you were still alive," he said bitterly. "And show some respect for

Mr. Henry. He is a good man, Davey. He's your Father and he never did anything that should make you talk about him like that." There was sharpness to his voice and I had never heard Bobby talk like that before.

I didn't know what to say.

"Mr. Henry has helped most of the families out here and it's a shame to see him like this. You should be ashamed of yourself, au'we!" Bobby continued to sweep the lanai as I looked up at him from the bottom of the steps.

"Jesus, Bobby," I shifted my feet and looked down.

"Your Father is sick and he isn't getting better. Mr. Henry has been coming to my shop since before you were born. Even when he moved out after his divorce, he would drive the twenty minutes and get his coffee from me. Everyday for more than thirty years, Davey! Mr. Henry hasn't lost it; it was taken from him, against his will. When he comes into my shop, I see him fighting to keep what little he has left of himself. There is a little less there each day..." He trailed off and his face was much older than I remembered. Bobby was probably around the same age as my Father but he looked much younger, but even that difference couldn't hide the wear of his years. The skin hung loosely around his eyes, and his leathery skin was dark and he had many sunspots.

I just stood there like a scolded child, embarrassed. I felt shame, remorse, and regret, but Bobby didn't know. He hadn't been there when the masks watched my Father as he left our family and abandoned us. He left us, and then we left him.

"I'm sorry." He said, his hands resting on the top of the broomstick. "I just don't like watching people die. Mr. Henry is a good man... A good man." He turned and walked into the coffee shop.

I left as quickly as possible and went straight back to the house, eating the breakfast I made Dad before he could wake up and find it. Keep everything the same, that's what Mom had said. I spent the rest of the morning avoiding my Father, because keeping things the same meant that I wasn't supposed to be there. I was not same.

The track ended and the record needed to be flipped. I noticed that the sound of baseball had vanished and I quickly turned off the player, creeping back into my room with the record in hand. I stowed it away with the rest of the records in the back of the closet, next to the Afghan rug. I heard my Father shuffle slowly up the stairs and then peeking through a crack in my door, watched him go into his room. I made my way downstairs and then out to the downstairs lanai where I settled in a chair that looked towards the south and along the coast. From there I could see a bit of our driveway, and my Mother's car when she drove up it. I didn't get up to greet her. I don't know why. I just sat there looking down the beach until I heard her voice. I used to do that a lot – pretend that I was oblivious.

"Not going to get up and greet your Mother?" She was standing behind me.

"Hi, Mom."

She dropped her purse as I stood and we hugged.

"Well, how have you been? How's Lily?"

"Fine."

She shook her head, pursed her lips, and picked up her purse.

"Where is your Father?"

"Upstairs last I heard."

I followed her as she walked back inside.

"Henry! Henry, come downstairs! You have an appointment today."

No response. She climbed the stairs, knocking on the door to the master bedroom. I stayed at the bottom. A few minutes later, they both descended and as soon as my Father saw me he asked my Mother what I was doing here.

"He is looking after you now. Can't look after you if he hasn't me Dr. Yee."

"I don't want him to." He said fidgeting with his glasses.

"That's just too bad."

He grunted.

We made our way to the car. I sat in the backseat and he sat up front, hunched over. We drove past Danao & Son Coffee Shop and onto Kamehameha Highway, which went to the base of the Ko'olau mountain range and the Pali Highway, and finally into Honolulu.

We waited in an examination room on the 14th floor of one of the many buildings of Queen's Medical Center. Dr. Edwin Yee was a neurologist who specialized in cases of early-onset Alzheimer's and dementia. My Father was sitting on the elongated chair that most doctor's had in their examination rooms. He didn't look too happy but then again he never did. Dr. Yee was asking him questions about the time.

"What day is it, Henry?"

"Thursday." It was Friday.

"What year is it?"

"2002." It was not 2002.

"What did you do yesterday?"

"Showed a house to some couple that were looking to buy on the North Shore. We looked at a lot of places way out of their price range. Then I picked up Ella and Georgie

from school, it was my night with them. Why in the hell am I telling you this?" He asked and tried to stand. His legs were unsteady beneath him and he settled back down in the chair.

"Henry, it is a Friday and the year is 2012. David is right here," Dr. Yee said, pointing to me. "He isn't in the Army anymore and he lives with you. He is there to help you out if you need anything. Understand?"

"Oh," my Father said. After a pause, he continued, "Catherine, I don't want him here."

"Davey is staying, whether you like it or not, Henry."

I wanted to leave. He obviously didn't want me there but my Mother's insistence kept me in the room. The little c's, which framed his lips, were angry like bees. When he was mad, those lips would upturn every so slightly and his eyes would tear steady holes through you like termites, with each passing minute boring farther into you.

"It's fine, Mom. I will just go sit in the waiting room."

"No you won't," she said turning back to my Father with her finger extended.

"Henry, that boy will be in this room, understand. He is going to be the one who helps you and when you need anything, your first call will be to Davey. He needs to know."

His one-size fits-all robe was hung limply around his gaunt form. He was hunched and he turned his angry gaze to the floor. Mom was concerned

"David, why don't we talk outside," Dr. Yee said, stepping outside and shutting the door behind me.

"Is it because of the stroke?" I asked

Dr. Yee began to speak and the severity of my Father's illness flattened on my face like a dead on a windshield that refused to come off – smeared and goopy. He told me that they were quite sure that my Father was suffering from Dementia with Lewy bodies.

Abnormalities had been detected in a CAT scan. However, some of my Father's doctors believed that he might have Multi-infarct dementia, which is usually brought on by a large stroke that is followed by many smaller, usually undetected, strokes. Dad had had a stroke when I was twelve and I remember helping him up the stairs. Georgie had held tightly to his leg, pretending he was helping.

"There is no cure both present different problems. Each leads to the rapid deterioration the brain and to brain function, whether through extra proteins in neurons, as is the case with Lewy bodies, or through vascular lesions in the brain, as with Multi-infarct. However, we just aren't sure what it is. The brain is a tricky thing. Both can move quickly, usually they do, and they ultimately lead to..." He stopped. I wondered what my face looked like.

I thought my Father was just crazy. He had always been a little nuts, ever since the stroke, when he had changed ever so slightly. Some things he liked and then he suddenly didn't. He used to eat cranberries by the crate and after the stroke he just stopped... I used to hold tightly to his calf and he would walk around the house calling out for me.

"Where's my boy?" He would call.

"Catherine, have you seen my son? The little man, the one that is ticklish?" He would call.

"I have an itch on my leg, Catherine, let me scratch it," and he would reach down, pick me up, and make me laugh. When my brother, your son, would latch on, you would shake him off and retreat upstairs. Now you were sick and there was no getting better and I didn't know what to think. How do you feel when the man who broke apart your family, the man who took away your home, how do you feel when he is dying?

"I understand that this is a lot to take in, David. I am sorry to do this to you so quickly, but you need to understand that the clock is ticking. Henry has been deteriorating rapidly and at this point," he said with a sigh, "I do not know how long he will last."

"There isn't anything to slow it down?" I asked.

"I'm sorry. I don't want to give him anything until we really know what Henry has. Even then, most of the drugs out there right now are experimental and don't cure anything. They just slow the deterioration of the brain. Most come with side effects that are less than desirable."

"How long?"

"I honestly have no idea."

"An estimate. How long does he have?"

"I really don't know, David."

I slammed the wall with my fist harder than I expected. I asked again, "How long does he have? Don't bullshit me, Yee."

He seemed afraid to give me a straight answer. I needed to know how long my Dad would live. I needed to know and he had no right to withhold that information from me. I was his Son and he was my Father and I had a right to know.

"Six months. A year?" Dr. Yee said uncertainly. "I just don't know."

"That wasn't so hard was it," I snapped.

"I'm sorry, David."

"I go by Davey." I opened the door to the examination room where I found my Mother and Father quietly talking. She was sitting on a chair by the window and my Father was on the table. Their heads were close together like they had been whispering and both looked

up when I walked in. I looked at him. He was trying to place me. It was 2002 to him and my 29 year-old body didn't look like the 19-year old body he saw briefly when I was home after my first tour. Soon after this – in his timeline – Mom would finally give in and he would win the house in the divorce settlement.

I realized that my father was gone, and this old man was nothing more than a ghost. He was the apparition of a man who I had buried many years ago. I had left him for dead when I enlisted and I finally realized that the Dad I knew was long gone, replaced by a mannequin that would sometimes rise and pretend. He would stand and for a few moments or hours it, was Dad breathing, talking, and being. Then he would fall back into the molten pit of memories that his consciousness inhabited and the mannequin would fall limply. The puppeteer's hands would drop until the next show, until the next curtain call.

"You know now," he said. It was a statement, not a question.

"Yeah, Dad." I wanted to treat him gently with my words. I like he could break and snap right back into wherever he came from.

"Good," he said, nodding his head and looking at my Mother. "Good, he needs to know."

"You gonna be okay?"

"I am going to need you to help me remember."

"Yessir."

"Memory is very important and when I trust you with the responsibility of keeping my memory, you had better do so with the utmost urgency and attentiveness."

"Yessir." He wanted me to be a bank with unlimited withdrawals.

They did another CAT scan and we returned home. My Father retreated to his bedroom upstairs while my Mother and I sat on the downstairs lanai, tea in hand. The air was chilly. Clouds rolled in and it was overcast. The breeze came in off the ocean but there was no sun to warm our skin.

"So where is Lily?"

"Mom..." I said, turning away and shaking my head.

"You didn't just leave did you," she said, grabbing my chin, forcing me to face her.

"Dammit, Davey."

"What did you want me to do? You saw him today! One minute its 2002 and the next he is asking me to be his memory, just like he made me do with that fucking clock." I continued in a gruff voice – my father's voice – like a key running on a metal screen door.

"Keep the time, Davey. Useless information is just that, useless." I was defiant.

"She deserves a lot better than that, and you know it." My Mother looked at me the same she looked way at my Father when we were in the examination room. Her way would be the right way. "Lily has been nothing but good to you and you know it. She came out here, you know, when you were off on your tours. She would come and visit with your Father. Just a few times, but she talked to him more than you!"

Lily? Here? Why would she do that? She had never even met them, only heard their voices on the phone when I called home for Christmas. Even then I never called. He was never there for Christmas, or was he? Was he standing there, on the other side, silent, and listening to my words? Every year, when Mom suggested that I call him, I would beg off politely, saying something about weekend minutes, or phone bills, or dinner plans. Why did Lily come and see him?

"What was she doing here?" I asked, after a pause.

"That's none of your business."

"Mom, this isn't funny."

"It's not meant to be," she said. "Do you think it is funny to leave your girlfriend without even so much as a goodbye? You haven't talked to her yet, have you?"

She already knew the answer.

"Davey, I swear, one day, you will finally drive her away and she won't be there when you come running back. Everybody has a limit and you may have hit hers on this one."

"I don't want to talk about this with you."

"Fine," she said.

We sat in silence for a while. I couldn't help but think of Lily and why she came. She never told me and I would have told her not to go.

"Will you be okay with your Father?" She asked, breaking the silence.

"He didn't want me to come with,"

"Of course not. Why would he want you to see him like that," she said, taking a sip of her tea.

"He has been worse than that in front of me."

"But this is different. Being poked and prodded and tested like they do to him. You will understand when you have kids, Davey. You used to worship him; thought he was invincible. You used to curl up in his lap and he would put his arms around you. He used to be able to protect you and now, on most days, he can barely put on his shoes. He feels like he can't be your Father anymore."

"He hasn't been that in a long time, not since he left." I said.

"And you did your damndest to make sure he couldn't do what Father's do. Part of the reason he hasn't been in your life is because you wouldn't let him in. He always had a tough time being with you because you were constantly pushing him away."

"He left us here, and then he fought like hell to make sure that this house was his... He took away our home. This house isn't home anymore and it hasn't been since..."

"He left." She said. "Yes. He left and no, it hasn't. That is what happens when people get divorced. Home doesn't feel quite the same. It feels empty and slowly you come to realize that you need to move on and make something new."

"We didn't go anywhere. He left. He did that."

"You have been saying 'we' and 'us' a lot, but you haven't been apart of this family in years. You ran away as soon as you graduated high school and we hardly heard from you, except for those couple of months you were home with Red. You took the divorce the hardest and I think it was because you understood what it meant, more so than Ella or Georgie ever could. But you ran away and your Father never did. He stayed right here and fought to be in each of your lives even if he didn't know exactly how that was going to work."

"He left us, Mom. He did. He did it first, and after he did..." I trailed off.

"Davey, your Father never went anywhere. You left us... and you left me. My own son didn't want to have anything to do with me..." She paused.

"Mom."

"Stop, just stop," she said, putting her hand on my arm. "He stayed and fought and you have just been running your entire life. I don't know what keeps chasing you away because I have looked, I have tried, I have called. I just don't know. It's not me, is it?"

"No. God no, of course not."

"Then stop it. Just stop it!"

I had never seen her like this before. She was always composed, ready to deal with my Father (and his frequent outbursts), skinned knees, or divorces. My Mother was stoic but now she was weak and permeable. I didn't want my words to trickle through her because she needed to know that it wasn't her. It was never...

"I am so sorry..."

She hugged me tight and said, "Be here now. Don't go running off."

"I am so very sorry, Mom." I said, my voice cracking. I held her so tight. I felt the Mother who held me when I cried after she came into my room and told me that Dad was leaving. Cat and Dog watched from above as she held my head in her lap and I begged her not to let Dad leave. The masks watched her leave every morning, but she came back because she was needed, because I needed her.

"Just because your Father and I aren't married doesn't mean that we aren't a family anymore. It takes more than that, more than the feelings of two people to destroy a family. I love you, Davey, all the time, no matter what."

She had to leave, she said as she picked up her purse. Something about another appointment. There was some change in my Father after our visit to the doctor. He no longer held the attention of my fear. He was a creaky old man. His large form, which had once haunted me, had melted away, leaving a frail, pitiful thing. I had to be his hands and feet now, moving for him, feeling for him, and with each day I began to take control of his mind, reminding him of what he had forgotten. I became his memory.

Our life together developed a pattern; the way two people develop habits after living together. I always woke up before him, which was early, so that I could listen to his steps as he made his way down to Bobby's coffee shop, the first step of his morning routine. He would return about 30 minutes later. Bobby usually gave me a phone when he left the coffee shop. We kept a close eye on when he came and left either the house or the store. His freedom was carefully constructed. When my Father would return home, he would stamp his feet on the mat by the front door and make his way up to his bedroom to change his shirt, which was always covered in white powdered sugar.

Sometimes, when my Father was my Father, our relationship from before he lost his mind would return. We slipped between these roles seamlessly. One day he would need help down the stairs and the next, we would role-play, living in one of his fantasies. I his young son and he my sane Father.

Six

We stayed out late and came back to our old homes, and for a moment it was like he had never left and I had always stayed. The cab dropped us off at his front door and we parted, and as I walked away from Ian Eggers towards my house, I remembered what he had told me. It was as if he didn't want me to because he spilled when the music was loudest.

"Davey?"

"Yeah... What?" I said, turning from the bartender.

"I'm back because we are selling the house."

"Cool," I said, turning back towards the liquor. "You want anything?"

It didn't register then, but now it did, and the weight of it came down on my windpipe, like a steel-toed boot pressed hard with angry intentions. It is loud when I am alone and the wind yelled as it pushed past me. It was picking up and I could feel a squall fighting to form. I walked along the rocks, back towards my house and the water kicked up and into my face. I held my arms tight across my stomach and even the heat of my intoxication couldn't sate my hunger for warmth. The Eggers were moving and Ian was here as an advance party, beginning the steady retreat from the old house down the beach from ours. But, I didn't know when the house had last been occupied by any of the Eggers. Ava, Ian's sister, hadn't been back in years. Ian only came back to see me and I wasn't staying here. The house I walked to now wasn't mine, it was my Father's. I didn't have a home right now because the house I grew up in sure wasn't mine. Homeless.

Ian and I had grown up together, and we were born only a few days apart. He had always been smaller, but he was the one in charge when we played ship in my old treehouse and I liked being his executive officer. I always watched Ian's back when he was up to something, and he usually watched mine. We had been apart for a long time now, but it never mattered and our wheels would fall right back into their old ruts as soon as we spoke to each other.

Ian wasn't coming back.

When I saw him the next morning as he came through our front door with coffee, I knew that there was nothing I could do to convince him otherwise.

"Thought you could just slip that little factoid in there, didn't you."

He walked towards me and handed over a coffee, passed, and then made his way to the lanai. I followed and we sat next to each other, facing the ocean. The squall hadn't broken last night, which left the ocean calm. It was overcast and no wind blew, giving the feeling of dusk, but it was not dusk. It had been like this for a few days now. The forecast foretold some sun next week. Sitting on opposing chairs, we listened as my Father came back from his morning routine. We heard him say from inside the kitchen, "Well, Henry, you have done it again. You have gotten that white donut powder all over yourself. You look like a goddamn crack addict."

Ian and I froze. Dad didn't know that we were on the lanai and he grumbled a bit before leaving the kitchen. The thought of my Father as a crack addict was too much.

"Maybe that's why he shakes so much..." I smirked.

"I always thought Uncle Henry was funny," Ian said, wiping the tears from his eyes. Only the Eggers called him Uncle Henry, because to everyone else he was Mr. Henry. My Father was their family, just like Ian was my family.

"Are you kidding me? That man is as dry as they come."

"He used to get mad while grilling on Sundays and mutter things under his breath. You know, when his accent came back and he had that southern drawl rolling around the yard. Ava and I used to shit ourselves with laughter. Your Dad is a funny dude."

When my Father was mad, or frustrated, he would slip into his old tongue, which he had lost after years of living in Hawaii. His vowels would elongate and when he said "oil", it sounded like he wasn't pronouncing the "l", as his tongue retreated to the back of his throat. He could suffocate on that word. I knew he was pissed when he returned to his roots.

"Unintentionally, maybe, but that accent means danger."

"Sweatin' like a whore in church, boy", Ian mimed. He sounded like an outlaw, but maybe that's what my Father was, an outlaw, on the lamb from his native land. Texas was his home. I guess that I have never asked him why left in the first place, why him and Mom ended up here, so far away from everything. I know he came for a job, but that was temporary. And then he bought a house, this house. I resolved myself to ask about the reasons he left home next time I saw my Mother.

"You think he would recognize me?" Ian said suddenly.

"Depends on the day. Sometimes he remembers and sometimes he doesn't. He's put me to work a couple of times already, calling me a free-loader, and some other stuff. Other

days he doesn't even remember his name. Paces out there when he can't remember or forgets, whichever," I said, pointing out towards the backyard.

"That bad, huh. I heard from George a while back, but at the time he was just forgetting appointments and things like that. Man, I am sorry, Davey."

"No skin off my back." But it was.

We were quiet for a while and Ian looked like he was going to say something about my Father. Probably about the way Dad had kept an eye on the Eggers after Uncle Kalani, Ian's father, had passed, which was when Ian was only thirteen. Ian wanted to tell me about the way that my Father filled a hole in his life and treated him like his own. He wanted to tell me about the good things my Father had done but I wasn't going to listen, so he didn't.

"Anyway, we decided to sell the house. It's not worth it anymore. No one comes out here and frankly, we can't afford to keep this place up and running now that Mom is gone." Aunty Kathy had passed away right after Ava left for college (when she was just 18) and the Eggers were just Ava and Ian now. Ava had married and Ian was on track.

"How is your lady friend?" I asked.

"Her name is Emily, and Em is doing fine." He said, raising his eyebrows at me and taking a small sip of coffee, then cradling the warm cup in his hands. "We are moving into a new apartment. A bigger one, with windows that look at things that aren't brick walls."

"Move back out here, Ian. The weather's great and there is a big house not too far from here that doesn't have any rent."

"Our lives are in Boston. Em and I are happy there. It is where our friends are, and her family lives there. There isn't anything left for me here, Davey. It's been a long time since there was." His eyes were on the beach, not on me. He wasn't talking to me.

His eyes shifted up the beach and then out to see.. Ian turned away and continued, "Ava and I decided that we couldn't keep that house as a shrine any longer. It was just that, a shrine, with relics of a life neither of us has lived in a long time. We don't call it home anymore and it was useless trying to pretend that we did. So, we are letting go. It was never the same after Dad died, but now that Mom isn't there, there is no point in coming back."

"We are here.," I said of my family. "I am here."

Ian shrugged, setting the coffee on the wooden railing in front of him. It was smooth, rough with the aging of salty wind. He ran his hand across the wood, and looked at me.

"But how long will you actually be here? We haven't talked in years. Our families aren't one anymore. Our parents are dead, or dying," he said, pointing into the house where my Father lurked.

"You can't just up and go, you know." I said, standing and walking away from him, a hand on my hip. My unfinished coffee was roughly placed on the railing next to Ian's.

"You did," Ian accused.

"So what?" I said, angrily. "You can't compare the two of us." I was pacing.

"Why not? You decided there was nothing left for you here and you left. You enlisted and you left. We were supposed to go to NYU together, the two of us a half a world away, remember? What happened to that? When you left home you left a whole lot more behind than me," Ian replied, his finger pressed against his chest.

"There was nothing left for me here, Ian, and you know it."

"Yes there was. I was here. Ava was here. My Mother, and your Mother, and Georgie and Ella too. We were all here. What did enlisting do that NYU couldn't?"

"I am not talking about this right now. Don't come over and talk to me about this. I don't want to talk about this," I said, walking down the steps and onto the lawn. Back and forth I turned, shaking my head. Ian fell back into his chair and just looked at me.

Pointing my finger at him, I formed my attack, but before my mouth opened, he asked, "How is Lily?" He must have talked to my Mother.

"Fine," I said quickly, turning from him.

"You didn't even say goodbye."

"I know." My tempest was broken.

"I will kick your ass if you keep treating her like this." Ian was looking at me with a serious frown stretched across his face.

"You know I had to come back. We were laughing at him earlier, but he is getting worse by the day. He couldn't take his own shoes off yesterday. I have no idea what I am supposed to do or be for that man. I haven't had a real conversation with him since that afternoon when we 'borrowed' the car and drove it into Bobby's shop."

"You did what you had to do, but you did it wrong. Lily deserved a lot better than what you gave her and you know it."

I was silent.

"Well, I came over to see if you wanted to help me start moving. There is a lot of shit in that old house and most of it needs to be thrown away," he said, taking a sip of his coffee which was too hot and he burned his mouth. He leaned forward and spat into the bushes, over the railing.

"I swear to God... I think Bobby superheats his coffee so that no one will notice how cheap it is," Ian said, examining the cup. "I bought this thirty minutes ago!"

He took the lid off and dumped it in the bushes. He walked down the back steps and called back after me, "If you want to help, come on over. I am about to get started."

I walked over to the Eggers after a silent lunch of quesadilla's with my Father. He was unusually grumpy, or rather grumpier, than he normally was. The edges of his mouth were turned down and he would examine each bite with a frown. There was something wrong but I wasn't going to ask him. Soon after, I stepped off the rocks and onto the sand, making my way to the backdoor of the Eggers household. I heard music from inside and it was loud, some band I had never heard of before. It was electronic and as soon as the screen door slammed behind me the music stopped.

"Davey?"

"Yup." I called back, climbing the stairs towards Ian's voice. We were going to act as if nothing had happened. That is how we were and would always be.

"You have got to come see this."

He was standing in the doorway of his old bedroom and in his hand was a picture of the two of us in snorkel gear about to go spearfishing. Ian's father had taken us about a year-and-a-half before he died; when we were just twelve. He had taught us how to hold the spear, keeping the rubber band taught and dangerous. He made us chase minnows close to shore for a few hours one afternoon before taking us out the next. We were excellent swimmers and in the photo all we had on were board shorts, masks, and flippers, which looked enormous on our tiny frames, especially on Ian, who was almost a head shorter than I was at the time. We held the spears at our side, standing in rapt attention like saluting soldiers.

"Do you remember that day?" He said, laughing.

"I thought you killed me. It's not that funny, you know." I said, grinning.

We had gone out in the ocean, following Uncle Kalani to the reef spots that were about a hundred yards off shore. Here, the fish were plentiful and within 20 minutes, Uncle Kalani had speared a small Ulua, which is a meaty fish. Ian and I were racing around the reef, looking for our prey and not wanting to let the other out of sight, in case he cheated somehow and caught the next fish. He was behind me, and I held my breathe and dove down to see if there were any fish underneath an overhang in the coral. Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain in the fatty part of my right thigh and I turned to find Ian's spear jutting out of my leg. Another Ulua had swam just behind me as I dove, and in his excitement, Ian had landed an even bigger fish. Under the water, I watched as red plume of my blood blossomed towards the surface. I screamed, which is not very effective at any depth of ocean, and immediately inhaled seawater. In an instant, Ian's Dad had my head above water and was taking powerful strokes into shore, with his left arm wrapped around me. We hit the sand and he carried me straight to the car, leaving Ian still struggling up the beach, and we sped off towards the hospital, which was about 20 minutes away. He reached behind the seat and pulled up a towel, which he told me to wrap gently around the little spear that juttet from my leg. It wasn't very long and made for a child, so the barb was not very large but it hurt like hell. Up until this point, I had been quiet, in shock, but as soon as the towel touched my leg, I could feel the metal in my flesh. I could also feel the dying shakes of the Ulua that Ian was aiming at, which was still on the spear that stuck out of my leg. My Father grilled it up for us at our weekly Sunday barbecue, which was held in the yard behind our home.

"That was my catch." I said.

"Bullshit. I threw the spear, I get the fish." He responded, turning around and retreating back into his room.

I still wore a small circular scar on my leg. Luckily there was no muscle damage and I could walk normally after about a week on crutches. Ian didn't show up at our house for a while after that, embarrassed I think, and worried that my Father, Mr. Henry to him, would retaliate. I went to my Father one morning and asked him not to do anything to Ian. He laughed and laughed, and told me Ian had done enough to himself.

Ian and I spent the majority of the afternoon emptying his room, dividing things into "keep" and "trash" piles. The photo dropped into a box in the "keep" pile, along with ball-in-a-cup, which is a stupid toy that has a small string attached to the bottom of a wooden stick with a cup on the end. Aunty Kathy and Uncle Kalani woke Ian and Ava up one Christmas morning and watched as they rushed downstairs to the tree only to find two ball-in-a-cups sitting beneath. Uncle Kalani had asked what they thought of their gifts. Ava, who was six, began to cry. Ian, who was eight, smiled, picked up the cheap toy, and began to play.

"Thanks, Dad! I can't wait to tell Davey! He is gonna be so jealous," said Ian, who walked right past his Father and out the front door, heading toward my home to show off his gift. Aunty Kathy and Uncle Kalani just stood there, mouths wide open.

"Uncle Henry laughed for days," Ian said, handing the ball-in-a-cup to me, motioning to the "keep" pile.

We sorted through old posters, some of bands he had never seen, wondering why he ever liked Billy Idol. They went directly into the "trash" pile. Underneath his bed I discovered a large plastic box filled with Hot Wheels toy cars and little toy airlines. When we were small, Ian and I founded rival transportation companies with these toys,

converting the hallway into a airstrip and the bedrooms into car rental locations. Looking for high end sports cars? We got it. Looking for pick-up trucks with missing wheels? We got it. Those went in the "trash" pile. There were some old letters Ian had from his grandfather, who lived in Oregon. He always wrote to Ian after Uncle Kalani died and I never asked what was written. They went to the "keep" pile.

"Is Ava coming back to help?" I asked. We were tossing out a heap of old t-shirts, many from high school, that probably still fit but were not worth keeping.

"Yeah, but not for a while. A month or two. I am just an advance party. She is the one who is really going to sink her teeth into this mess," he said, arms waving around.

"Ella will be glad to see her," I responded. Ava was two years younger than me, which made her four years older than Ella. Ava had always taken Ella under her wing and despite the age difference, they remained close friends.

"They haven't talked in a while, I hear. Ella has that new boyfriend who takes up all her time. She been out to see you yet."

"Nope."

He grunted and worked his way towards the corner of the room where some old two-by-fours leaned against the wall. They were from the treehouse my Father tore down. Ian and I had spent the night in a tent on the back lawn. We awoke to the sound of chainsaws buzzing and rushed out to find men in orange safety jackets getting ready to cut down our tree. As quickly as we could, we scurried up the tree and wouldn't come down until Uncle Kalani and my Father came up and took us by force. We were ten. Ian managed to salvage a few pieces of wood and we had grand plans to rebuild our fort in one of the trees by the beach, but that never happened.

"I say we finish it." Ian was admiring the wood, holding it up and examining it in the window light.

"Sounds good, let's get started. We can play ball-in-a-cup all day in our new treehouse."

"Should we keep the wood?"

"Toss it, Ian. It's just wood."

"Once you throw away stuff from the past, it won't be there to remind you of forgotten things ever again."

"Sometimes broken things aren't meant to be fixed," I said, taking the wood from his hands and gently placing it in the "trash" pile.

"This is probably why Ava doesn't want me going through all of this stuff." Ian was a packrat. The "trash" pile was a third the size of the "keep" pile.

In it were toys he would never play with, a broken baseball bat -- the wood splintered, an old deck of playing cards with old faded poker chips, and an old alarm clock, built in the late eighties with a yellow tinge that plastic gets with age.

"That alarm clock woke me up every day when I still lived here. I am bringing that back with me. The bat, the bat can go."

"Keep the bat," I said, finally remembering. Mr. Chee had made that bat, out of maple wood, just like the big leaguers used. He had made my family a set of wooden utensils from the same maple wood. Mr. Chee lived a few houses down from the Eggers. We passed him each afternoon on our way back from school. He rocked on a white wicker rocking chair and carved things from maple, kukui, and koa wood. My Mother prized the maple utensils

that he made us, and the koa mixing bowl, which was used as decoration because it was much too nice for daily use.

"I am."

"Mr. Chee made this. You can't throw it out."

"I know."

"Good." There was something about that bat that needed to be saved. It's sharp, splintered end was a reminder of Mr. Chee and besides the wicker chair, there was nothing to remember him by. If this wasn't around, how would we know that Mr. Chee was on this earth, down the street, ready to lend a hand or a story. The Eggers home was carefully pieced together, like a puzzle sitting on someone's dining room table. After weeks, years, of each family member stopping briefly and adding a tile, they finally built a home. The Eggers admired the puzzle and someone suggested they frame it, but there was a soft voice from behind and Ava suggested that they break it apart, so that it could be redone later, when next they needed a puzzle. The puzzle was complete and puzzles, when completed, are destroyed, broken up. Puzzle's are rarely used twice. People buy new puzzles.

Reaching into the "trash" pile, I pulled a fading photograph with a white ring in the upper left corner, where a cup had sat with condensation. It was of Ian and Ava, his arm around her shoulder at her high school graduation. Leis covered her up, with only her eyes peeking out over the mass that hung around her neck. Graduation in Hawaii was an extended family event, and everyone showed up with leis and congratulations in hand. Family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, they all added a lei to send you off to a college usually far away from home, across the ocean to the mainland.

"You need to keep this," I urged.

"There are plenty of photos like that. There is a whole box full of them in one of the closets. Plus, look at the cup stain on it. The photo is ruined. You can't even see my face. Why would I want a photo that doesn't show these pearly whites?" He said, taking the photo from me and grinning broadly while holding it next to his face.

"I just think you should."

"Trash."

We emptied most of his room, remembering the things we had long forgotten and each puzzle piece brought with it a feeling. We remembered where we were, what we were on our way to doing, when we placed each particular piece. There was a bottle of cologne hiding in the bottom of one of Ian's dresser drawers. I opened it up and the stench that wafted strongly into my nostrils threw me back in disgust. In the seventh grade, Ian decided that cologne would attract the ladies and he bought a cheap bottle from some supermarket/ It was the kind of cologne that burns your nostrils. We arrived at school and in the parking lot he whipped out the bottle and we sprayed some in our armpits like we would deodorant. The more we had on, we thought, the more girls would come running. Uncle Kalani was the fire chief and he showed up with the yellow firetruck when our parents got the call to come get us. They sprayed us down with fire hoses in the school parking lot.

There were the clay chess pieces we made in ceramics, little men with no arms or legs, and horrified expressions. The King held their limbs in a bag, slung over his back. Ian found an old pocket knife. It was his Father's eagle scout knife, and Aunty Kathy had given it to Ian when he became an eagle scout. Uncle Kalani died from excessive smoke inhalation after giving his mask to an elderly woman trapped on the fourth floor in an apartment

building. He had stood silently for a minute or two turning the thin, burnished metal over in his fingers, feeling the raised words and the eagle that adorned its side. Looking up at me to see if I had seen (I had), he put the knife in his pocket and didn't say a word.

In his desk we found more letters, valentines day cards written to him by his second girlfriend in high school, Elizabeth, who went by Liz. He laughed and read to me her love, which was grammatically incorrect and often misspelled. Liz spent an extra year in high school after failing her senior year classes, not for incompetence, but for just not showing up. Underneath the letters was an old sock, that had never been washed since he last wore it, probably to go running. Ian was on the track team in high school. Above his old desk was a shelf that held his only trophy, and on it were draped medals of all sorts, from meets all around the seats. Picking up some of them, he laughed and held out a hand full of silver medals. "The best first loser there ever was."

Hanging on the walls, in between the movie posters, were old photographs, many of Ian and his Father. One was the two of them at the top of Mauna Kea, bundled up and standing in the snow. We placed each frame gently into a box downstairs and wrapped them in old towels. We took down the pictures in the hallway, one was both our families standing in my backyard, my Father, grill in hand, smiling, with his arm draped around Uncle Kalani.

There was a stool, which Aunty Kathy had painted, that sat in the corner of his room and Ian decided that it could go into the trash. "I can't bring it back to Boston with me," he said, carrying the stool downstairs and setting it on the side of the road. I helped him move his dresser downstairs and out onto the road.

Getting my Father's old pickup truck, we moved the dresser, stool, and his old desk out to Kamehameha Highway, leaving them on the side of the road with a free sign taped to the dresser. He took one last look at the stool, which had sea foam green legs and a blue top with white stripes. Aunty Kathy had take blue painters tape and criss crossed colors on the seat. Putting his hand on the wood, feeling the places that his mother had once felt, he nodded, and we got back in the car, leaving his furniture for some other family to take. We left some of his things on the side of the road and we threw some of his things away, keeping only a large, 3x3 cardboard box full of trinkets, knick knacks, broken baseball bats, and one pocket knife, tucked safely in Ian's pocket. It was dark and we left the room bare, with only a small twin bed on a wooden frame.

Seven

When I return to the house I must call my home, it memories are dredged like trash buried deep below the thick sludge that accumulates at the mouths of harbors. That house is drenched in memories, memories that remind me of lives past. These lives haven't been mine in so long that the reconnection hurts sometimes. It is as if a limb, my arm, was taken from me. Sometimes the unconnected nerve endings pretend to feel the hard oak wood of a table at a nice restaurant. My arm is gone, blown off by a stray grenade, and yet in the space where my arm should be, I feel the smoothed, varnished wood. These brief reminders render harsh memories of things that have changed and will never change back. It is constant reminder that my hand, no my home, was taken from me. I am not bitter. I am not.

Georgie had his kid. His wife was pregnant. Now she is not. I forgot what the boy's name is and I do not want to ask him because while he was getting hugs and kisses from the family in the waiting room, I was at home with Dad. I couldn't be there. He knew it.

We were about a half-mile out, trying to catch a few waves but the air was still and the water smooth. Sets would come in but they came few and far between. When the Kona winds blew, the east side of the island would sit still beneath the sun. The ocean was clear and we could see the bottom: small corral mounds amongst vast swaths of sand. Georgie sat on his board, a gun, which are meant for big waves. He insisted that he bring the gun out, big waves be damned. He used to look at me differently before I enlisted. Georgie was so small then, his body a twig next to mine. His head at my belt and my hand on his head, walking to a movie, or following Mom through the grocery store, that is how it is supposed

to be. Georgie on my right, Ella on my left, Dad and Mom behind, that's how the family photos were taken. Georgie used to come to me and ask questions. He used to be a Brother.

It was a sunny day and he was scrawny for eleven. A duffel bag was packed and sat by the front door. I hadn't told him yet and my Mother was right when she told me I couldn't just leave. She wouldn't be the one to let him down like that. She made it seem like I was going to disappoint Georgie, which I wouldn't because he would listen.

"Hey. Kid. Come here." Georgie was on the couch watching some cartoon.

"I'm watching TV."

"Just come here for a minute. I need to talk to you." I sat down on the steps by the front door and he slowly got up, turned the TV off, and threw the remote onto the couch.

"What?" His hands were on his hips and he stopped in front of me with his head cocked to the side. His eyebrows were raised. Georgie was always too busy to be bothered. He thought this was going to be another joke about his big nose.

"Look. I'm leaving and I won't be back for a while," I said, looking at his bare feet.

His posture straightened. "I knew you were going to college. When do you leave?" His eyes caught the duffel bag. "Now?"

"I'm not going to college. I enlisted. I joined the Army."

"But you are supposed to go to college." His voice was soft and he held his hands behind his back. Georgie wouldn't look at me.

"Look at me, kiddo."

"Why?"

"Because I said so."

He looked up and my Brother was about to cry. "I don't want you to go. Why do you have to go now? How come you didn't tell me before? How come?" Georgie said, stamping his foot, fists in hand.

"Come here." I said, opening my arms.

"No," he said quietly, as if making up his mind about something. He was gone, out the back door and nowhere to be found when I threw my duffel bag in the back seat and my Mother reversed out the driveway. I probably should have written him a letter or called the house more often. I never really did. Sometimes, and by the time I came home with Tate, Georgie was tall, lanky, and his hair was cropped short, just like mine. Except, it wasn't like mine and he didn't really want to talk to me.

I walked through the front door and my Mother's arms were around me while Tate stood back and watched awkwardly. She saw him and let go of me.

"You must be Tate."

"People call me Red Man, Ma'am."

"Well, Red Man, it is so nice to meet you." She wrapped him up in her arms, which amazed me because he towered over her, his large frame filling the doorway where he stood.

"Mom, where is Georgie? Ella?"

"Ella is at dance. She should be back in about an hour and Georgie is around here somewhere."

I didn't see Georgie until dinner and when I tried to say hello he just grunted in return. Mom tried to coax him into talking to me but he wouldn't, asking to be excused from the table so that he could go read. I was home for a few months and he treated me like a

unwanted toy, leaving me around the house, forgetting where I was, and not much caring if he lost me or not. My Mother said that he spent the first month waiting for me to call but that I never did. I should have called. Maybe if I had called he would look for me, lost in our house.

We haven't talked much since. He comes by the house every once in a while to play Scrabble with Dad and I never play with them. Georgie kills me every time. He came today to surf. Georgie asked me, which was a first. The sun was cooking my dark skin and salt lines wrapped around my body. On days like these, the sun dried your skin faster than you could get wet again.

"Davey, you look like a pretzel," Georgie yelled. He was a ways off, trying to tame a break that didn't look too promising.

"And you look like a fucking marshmallow."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I can see your veins, you pale shit. When's the last time you went outside" I said, paddling over to him.

"Not all of us were adopted. Haole over here; cursed with pale skin."

Georgie used to tell me that I was adopted because I was always darker than the rest of the family. My skin was brown. I spent my days in the sun and he spent his inside on the couch, reading.

"Jealous?"

"Not particularly."

We were quiet for a while, waiting for a set to come in. It wasn't coming.

"Dad always liked you more. You were a man in his eyes. I was just a scrawny little kid, the runt of the family." Georgie said. "Let's go in." He turned to head in.

"Whoa there, kiddo."

"Would you stop calling me kiddo? I am twenty-fucking-three years old and I have a son. Some of us have grown up, you know." He had filled out and I hadn't realized it. When I was last home with him, almost 10 years ago, he was just a boy, no more than twelve. Or was it eleven?

"Georgie, what's going on?"

"Sometimes things change and they never change back." Georgie turned and paddled in, leaving me out there, alone, floating offshore, our house in the distance. I watched him paddle in, pick up his board, and disappear into our old house. Slowly, I followed him. I reached shore and went to the outside shower at the Egger's house. There is nothing more wonderful than washing the caked salt out of your hair after spending a few hours in the ocean. The salt runs down your face and you can taste it on your lips, like kissing the ocean. I stood under the water for a while, letting the cold water raise goosebumps from my skin.

Georgie was shouting for me. I turned off the shower, grabbed my board, and went to the house, walking along the road so that I wouldn't get as much sand on my feet. I saw him come sprinting down the road with only boxer shorts on.

"He's gone. I can't find him."

"Wha..."

Georgie interrupted.

"Dad's gone. I don't know where he is. I checked all over the house. We shouldn't have left him alone. Why did you leave him alone?"

"Me? This is not my fault." *How could he blame me?*

"Shit."

I dropped my board in the grass next to the road and sprinted towards the house. My wet board shorts squelched with every step. Through the house I went checking every nook and cranny for our Dad who was missing. Georgie was behind me the whole way and kept saying, as each room turned up empty, that he had already checked there.

"Call Bobby."

"What?"

"Call him. He watches to see if Dad wanders down the road."

Before he could respond, I was out the door and headed for the Egger's old house. Sometimes, on his way back from coffee, he would wander into their empty house. Ava had been by a couple of weeks after Ian had been here to finish emptying the house. The furniture had all gone to Good Will and she had thrown out a dumpster full of stuff. I had salvaged our prom photo. I was a senior and Ava was a sophomore, and Ian had thought that it would be a good idea. It was not.

My wet shorts chafed the insides of my legs and bowlegged, I entered through the front door. Kitchen. Living room. Bathroom. Bedroom. Dining room. Stairs. Master bedroom. Bedroom. Closet. Then, through a window at the end of the upstairs hallway, I saw him sitting on a foldout beach chair underneath one of the barrier pines. He had a book. My Father was just reading a book beneath a tree. He had scotch in his hand and a cigar was balanced on his armrest. He usually had some sort of scotch. I went outside, out the back door, leaving a trail of wet footprints behind me.

"Dad?"

"When did you get back in Davey?"

"In?"

"From surfing?" He was looking over his shoulder and he took a sip of scotch.

I didn't know what to say.

"Davey?"

"How long have you been here?"

"I came out after you two left with your boards. I figured I would come watch." My Father turned back to his book and set his scotch down in the sand. The condensation gathered a ring of sand around the bottom of the tumbler. I approached him and sat down on the sand next to him. My chafed thighs burned.

"You can't run off like that."

"I have been meaning to talk to you about that for a while now. I know your Mom and I divorced, but I didn't run off. We just couldn't live together anymore. I had to go." He turned the book over on his knee. I hadn't seen him wear a bathing suit since before he left. My Father's usual white button up was unbuttoned and it fell to the sides, leaving his wrinkled chest vulnerable.

"What are you talking about?" *What was he talking about?* He was speaking in full sentences. Clear. Concise. Coherent. His hands weren't shaking. *He was whole.* A confession came tumbling out of his lips and maybe the cigar had burned it out of him.

"You know I begged your Mother to take me back. I called almost everyday, but she wouldn't have me. I thought that if I got the house, she would come with it. I dragged the divorce through the mud so that I could still see her... Four years before I finally gave up... I thought that those fleeting glances in the arbitrator's room were my chance to get back in.

We didn't get divorced because of you, or George, or Ella. We just couldn't live together anymore." He cleared his throat and shifted in the fold out beach chair, looking away from me, pretending there was something in the sand.

"Why are you telling me this."

He reached over and placed a hand on my shoulder. "You need to know that this is my fault. I just wish you hadn't run away like you did. I love you."

"You don't think I don't know that, Dad?"

"It was my job to protect you, my job to shelter you, and I failed. You went to war. You were so young. I failed." He was crying. My Father, the man of stoic demeanor, had tears coming down his face. *Where did he think he was? What year was this to him?*

He had been trying to protect me for years and instead of sitting snugly under his outstretched arms, I ran away. Maybe that is why his weighted shoulders struggle with something unseen; my grief, my grief at the loss our home, at the loss of a complete family, and the loss of him, my Father. I dumped it all on him and he didn't complain. My Father, *he will never know*, my Father. I looked towards our house and I saw Georgie appear around the side. He scanned the beach and saw us, dim figures, hazy mirages of his Brother and his Father. Georgie always had bad vision and tentatively he came towards us until we finally crystallized. Then he ran. He was relieved. I could see it on his faced as he approached.

"You left. You were one the one that left, Dad. It was you. It has to be you because you weren't there anymore." I had to tell him.

"I am here now." His hand fell from my shoulder.

"You just don't get it do you? What about what it meant to me? We never got invited to any of the Sunday night barbecues after you left because the Eggers didn't know who to

invite. The other families didn't know want to be near us, like we had a disease or something. Like if they spent time with the divorced family, that they would catch it." *I wish he could just see for one moment. I wanted him to see what we did to us when he left.*

"You don't think it was hard on me? My own family didn't want to have anything to do with me... The neighbors ignored you, so what? Try having your own son ignore you. My own son, he went and enlisted and I couldn't stop him. I wanted him to just be safe and he wouldn't even talk to me. Do you know my son, Davey? My son, my son, my son, Davey. He enlisted and sometimes I worry about him and if he is okay. My boy, my little boy... Oh god, why did he enlist?" My Father rose and began to pace on the beach. He was gone again.

Georgie arrived. He sat down in the beach chair and together we watched our Father pace on the beach in front of the Egger's house.

Our lives are like novels. With each passing day we begin to know less and less of what we just read. The novel is clear until you pick up another and like a loose thread on a cashmere sweater, the story begins to unravel. Slowly, unintentionally, and without consciousness of our actions, we begin to forget. The events that seem so clear are shrouded like a thick fog rolling into some distant bay. Novels can be reread. Our lives cannot. We can discuss the substance of our own lives but there is no text to refer back to. We experience, forget, and then misremember over and over again until we have libraries filled with volumes of history written from memory. These inaccurate volumes are recounted as truths and I hate it. Maybe that is why children, those with less to remember, are often the most alive. They haven't been stained by the curse of time, an ever-churning train that takes me farther and farther from where I am supposed to be.

Eight

It's been four long months. He gets worse and worse by the day. Last week, when Georgie and I lost him, I thought my time was up, however terrible that sounds. His birthday is tomorrow, Saturday, and Ella has been planning a barbecue. I am not sure who she will invite, or for that matter, who will come, but Ava is in town and she will be there. Ella, Dad, and I have been helping her clean out the house. Dad doesn't do much because he can't. He needs to be near. We have to watch him closely.

Ella has always looked up to Ava, who was a couple of years older. She used to be beautiful but now she was small, unassuming, mousy in a homely way. Her rich dark hair was spindly now like an angel hair pasta with light grey hairs peaking through the unorganized mass upon her head. She has three kids now, twin boys and baby girl. She was so young to aged so quickly, only 27, two years younger than me. Ava had married right out of college and her husband, who was in the Navy, was usually on tour in the Gulf so she had to run the house by herself. Every so often, she would turn and the light would catch her just right, reminding me of the wondrous woman I took to prom. We almost dated, not because we liked each other but because I was Ian's best friend and he felt comfortable with me and her together. That never worked, nor should it have. Ava was a brave. Beneath that haggled mass of hair was an intelligent, fierce mother who would do anything for her family. I remember talking to her after Uncle Kalani, her Father, died.

She was standing in a black dress in the dining room of this house, the one we are helping her clean out. She had a glass of wine in her hand and no one dared take it away from her even though she was 18 and too young to drink. I was walking behind her to the

kitchen for some water when she turned and stopped me. "I'm not going to let this happen to my kids, you hear?"

"Umm... What?" I had no idea what she was talking about. I do now.

"My kids won't grow up in a broken home. No sir, no they won't." She turned back to photo hanging on the wall. It was her family, her whole family. Uncle Kalani and Aunty Kathy sat in fold-out beach chairs on the sand in front of this house, the house we were helping Ava move out of. Ian, no more than 5, and Ava, nor more than 3, sat in their laps. That framed photo, the one that hung in the Eggers dining room is being packed away in a box marked "Ava".

My Father sat on a chair in the dining room reading the newspaper, though the paper was upside down. Nevertheless, he continued to make approving and disapproving sounds at the "changing markets" or the Texas Rangers box score. Ella and I were packing the framed photos in the living room, wrapping each in an old beach towel. She helped me carry out the dining room table to my Father's old pickup. It was going to the Salvation Army and once the chairs were securely fastened, the three of us, my Father, my Sister, and I, took a little trip. My Dad sat in the center seat, squished between Ella and I. We took him with us because Ava didn't need to deal with our Father. He wasn't her burden.

"Dad, how was the newspaper?" Ella was always trying to get him to talk. He was like a teenager who was just introduced to the wonders of puberty, overcome with angst, too cool for conversation.

"Fine," my Father responded. He had a section of the paper in his lap and he tried to open it up and continue reading. In a grand motion, he spread his arms, trying to hide

behind the Style section. The paper blocked my vision and I nearly crashed the car. Ella swatted the paper, ripping it in half, and restored my vision.

"What in the hell are you thinking, Dad?" I yelled.

"Davey, stop that." Ella tried to put her arm around our Father but he pushed her away.

"Look what you've gone and done, Ava."

Ella was shocked. She still didn't understand that our Father was gone.

"I'm Ella, Dad."

"Who?"

"Ella," she said, patting her chest.

"That's what I said."

"No, that's not what you said. You called me... Oh, forget it." Ella rested her head against the window and we sat in silence for the rest of the trip. When the three of us got back to the Eggers, Ella jumped out of the truck and slammed the door. She stormed into the house and she stayed upstairs, helping Ava all afternoon. My Father and I were in the garage emptying boxes. There was a large dumpster parked in the Eggers' driveway and I began to fill it: an old fake christmas tree, three boxes of New Yorker magazines that Ava didn't want, an enormous bag of useless, broken golf balls, three broken electronic ghosts (the ones that hang by doors during halloween), seven binders of Ian's notes from high school (I figured he wouldn't need them), a bin full of deflated basketballs and footballs, two boogie boards cracked in half, a pack of dried up dry erase board markers, and a moth eaten bathrobe from Turtle Bay Resort. All the while, my Father was entranced with a game of Connect Four. He must have played himself thirty times, standing up, walking to the

other side of the game, and pretending to be an opponent. He muttered nonsense to himself for the majority. It was almost six o'clock when Ava and Ella walked into the garage.

"Davey, I think we can call it a day. Thanks for helping out," Ava said.

"Anytime. How much more do you think you have left?"

"Probably a couple more days. My flight leaves next Friday so I guess it will be done by then. I really appreciate the help."

"We couldn't not," said Ella.

"Ava, Ella and I were going to start marinating some of the meats for tomorrow's birthday bash. We were going to make some dinner and hang out. Want to join? I would hate to see you stuck up in this house alone all night," I offered. Ava perked up.

"Thanks, but I am going to meet up with an old friend in town. I should probably go clean up if I am going to meet her in time," she said, looking at her watch. "Well, thanks again. I will see you three tomorrow at the barbecue. Happy pre-Birthday, Mr. Henry."

"Thank you, Ava. Have fun at dinner," he responded with a slight smile.

"Dad, you with us?" Ava asked.

"Who?" Nope. For just a moment he was and then, like lightening, he was gone again.

Ava went upstairs to get ready and Ella, my Father, and I, walked up the road back to our home. I could see the disappointment on Ella's face when she asked Ava who she was meeting.

"Just an old friend from high school, Janine Tanaka. Haven't seen her in years but we have kept in touch and tonight is her only free night. She is doctor at Queen's."

Ella didn't want to spend the evening with her absentee Brother and her crazy Father. She wanted a night with Ava. We made our way along the road and our Father tripped on

the front steps because the light wasn't turned on. The last bit of light was fading behind the Ko'olau Mountains. We entered and I locked the door behind us to keep Dad in. Ella and I made the rounds, making sure each door was shut securely. He would not be escaping tonight; a prisoner and we the gatekeepers.

"I'm going to put on some music," she said, climbing the stairs towards our Father's records and record player.

"You sure that is a good idea?" I said. "Remember how he used to freak out when we touched those things when he wasn't around."

"Fuck him." Up the stairs she went and after a moment, the sounds of Fats Domino's *Let the Four Winds Blow* echoed down the staircase. Ella danced down the stairs and we listened to Fats while we marinated the meats: kalbi ribs, shoyu chicken, and orange chicken. My Father's door was shut. Half an hour later when the record hit the end and the static sound of needle on blank vinyl echoed down the staircase, my Father's door opened. Ella and I froze. We listened as he shuffled, in his house slippers, to the record player. The static died. There were some odd sounds and then we heard a record slide onto the the deck. New sound began. I didn't recognize it. We heard the door shut.

"What is this?" Ella asked.

"I don't know."

"I know this. ELO. It's ELO. Electric Light Orchestra. Evil Woman, such an evil woman, evil woman? Come on, Davey, you know this." She was singing the words, tossing her hands about, spraying the shoyu marinade all over the kitchen.

"Watch it, Ella." I said, covering my face.

"You," she said while flicking marinade at me, "don't know how to have fun."

"I do. You just aren't any fun." I said, taking a paper towel and wiping down the spoiled parts of my shirt. "Fun is not more laundry."

"That has to be the first time he didn't freak out about his records," she said, washing her hands in the sink.

"That has to be the first time those speakers have ever been used." My Father always listened to his records with headphones, his legs crossed and foot bobbing with the beat. I really can't remember ever having heard the speakers used.

"There are firsts for everything. When's the last time we were in this house together with Dad?"

"Very true."

"I love the sound of vinyl. Feels real and authentic, the way music is supposed to sound."

"I remember when Dad told me about how records work, how its sound made solid. I thought that was the coolest thing. There really is no other way to listen to music," I said.

"Yeah... I should start a collection. Get a deck. Funny how parents give you

She quieted and we finished making the marinades. I took the fun out of Ella and that was hard to do. Into the fridge they went and out came lettuce, tomatoes, and all of the fixings needed for a subpar turkey sandwich. Ella took one up to her Father and he opened his door to accept the offering before retreating to devour it. He had recently stopped eating with me. All his meals were taken in his room. I think it was a reaction to the stricter security I had imposed on him since he ran away. My Father was free only on his walks to an from the coffee shop. Even these were now monitored. Every once in a while I would

follow him on his daily routine. This only happened when he was acting especially odd, which was becoming the norm very quickly.

"You want to play Scrabble or something?" I said as she was getting ready to leave. Maybe she pitied me, all alone in this house with no friends and a distant family, or maybe she wanted to play Scrabble, but she stayed. It was a Friday night. She was 22. Ella had better things to do and it seemed that she wanted information. My Sister had a way of making people talk. She could get anyone to tell her anything she wanted and so she went to work on me.

"How's Lily?" She asked after playing "quilt" for 24 points, Q on a double-letter tile.

"Mom already tried. Ian already tried. Georgie tried. They all tried to talk to me about Lily and they didn't get very far. What makes you think I am going to talk to you?" I said, playing "cart" for 6 points.

"Maybe because I talked with her on the phone the other day."

"You what?!"

"Your turn." Ella played "carrot" for who-gives-a-shit-how-many-points. *Why did she talk to Lily?*

"You had no business talking to her. What happened is between me and Lily and no one else." I had knocked over my pieces and bent down to retrieve them.

"Apparently not, because she reported you missing and the State Troopers were convinced that you had been kidnapped by Mexican drug lords."

"You've seen Dad. You understand. I had to leave and come take care of him. You and Georgie are too young to have this responsibility," I said loudly, gesturing around the dining room.

"You didn't even say goodbye." Her arms were crossed and she looked at me accusingly. "Even Dad said goodbye when he left."

"I am not Dad," I yelled, pushing my chair back and standing. I began to pace behind the chair. "Georgie called me and said that I needed to come home, that Dad was in bad shape. It was Friday and Lily never got back until really late on Fridays. What was I supposed to say? What was I supposed to tell her?" I was dancing around the dining room in a fuss and I knew it.

"You could have said goodbye." Ella was not amused.

"Georgie said I needed to get back as soon as possible."

"I could have watched him for a few days. You didn't need to come running back."

"What do you want me to say, Ella?" I had my back turned to her. She was 22 and she was more adult than I was.

"You can either say goodbye or hello?"

"I snuck out and left her, okay, is that what you need to hear? I didn't want her to have to come here and deal with him," I said, pointing up towards my Father's room, "or any of the shit our family has made. Georgie wants nothing to do with me. Mom, well, Mom is Mom. You, you barely talk to me. What kind of life is that to bring Lily into?"

"Its what you make of it. I stayed to play Scrabble with you not because Scrabble is something I want to do on Friday night but because I miss my big brother." She picked up her purse and walked right out the door. Ella got that from Mom. They both know how to exit a room.

It was a small affair. Mom, Ella, Ava, Georgie, Georgie's wife, baby Henry (a terrible name), two of Georgie's work buddies, Bobby and his family, and me enjoyed a quaint

afternoon on our back lawn. I spent the majority of it talking to Bobby about the house and how it was falling apart. Years of my Father's neglect and the bad effects of salt air on wood. It was due for a new paint job. He offered to help, free of charge, but I declined. If anyone was going to do it, it should be me, I told him. We all had a few beers, ate some food, and my Father behaved himself. All and all, it was an uneventful afternoon and no one overstayed their welcome. If anything, Georgie left too soon. While Dad was opening his presents, which all seemed to be white button-up shirts, I saw Ella sneak off with a phone to her ear. She glanced at me from across the lawn and I saw guilt. Maybe that's what made up her mind, my expression, the way I squinted at her accusingly.

Nine

It had been almost five months since I last saw her and now she was standing at the front door with a suitcase in tow. It was late and I saw Ella's headlights weaving their way down the driveway towards the highway. Lily had hair like my Father's, auburn, that was bright in the sun. Her light brown eyes were peering through the screen door, which was always locked, looking for someone to let her in.

"I see you, Davey. Open this door and let me in." Her hands turned the knob again unsuccessfully.

"What are you doing here?"

She stood back, dropped her suitcase, and put her hands on her hips. "What am I doing here? The question is, what are you doing here? If I remember correctly, your driver's license was issued in the state of New Mexico. Coincidentally, the address on that license is the same as the one on mine. Legally, you live in my house, and you sleep in my bed, next to me. And yet here you are, on the other side of the god-forsaken planet, having left without even a goodbye."

"Lily, I..." I passed the masks as I walked toward her, unlatching the screen door. She came through, brushing my shoulder with her. The door clacked shut with her luggage on the other side. I retrieved it and clicked the latch carefully behind me. My Father had been sneaking out the front door so I began to latch it every morning, doing so after my Father returned from his morning routine. I spent the majority of my day on the lanai, so I could see when he went into and out of our house. His shaking fingers couldn't grab hold of the latch anymore. I found him there one afternoon, fumbling unfortunately with the latch and

when he caught me watching, he retreated upstairs to his bedroom. My Father now leaves through the back on his morning routine, and so slowly I am training him, almost like a dog, as tragic as that is.

She was standing just inside the living room, looking down the hallway to where Georgie, Lily, and I had our old bedrooms.

"You sleeping in one of these," she asked, pointing.

"No, I am upstairs in the guest bedroom."

"Well, you can put my luggage up there and move your pillow down to this couch," she said nodding her head in the direction of the leather couches.

"Now hold on," I began.

"No," she interrupted. "You don't get to say anything. You left me, you left me and you didn't even say goodbye, and I didn't even know where you went. If you hadn't called, talking about business you needed to take care of... I don't know," she said, walking away and then toward me again. "I was going to report you missing. I thought you were dead, Davey. I thought that we had been robbed because all of your records were gone and because the rug was gone, but you were here, not telling me, and running away like you always do. If Ian hadn't called. If he hadn't said something." Her voice was trembling and delicate.

"I am so sorry, Lily. I didn't know." I had the suitcase in my arms, shielding me from her.

"You are a real piece of work aren't you. Move." She was motioning past me and so I stepped to the side. I followed her back to the front door and then up the stairs and there my Father was, standing at the top, looking down on us.

"Hello, Mr. Henry," Lily said.

He didn't respond and she continued up the stairs to the landing, sticking out her hand when she reached him. My Father took it and she said it was very nice to meet him. Lily told him that she would be staying for a bit, but she wasn't sure how long.

"I am going to whip up an amazing breakfast for you tomorrow, does that sound good?" She was leaning towards him like you would when asking a child a question.

"Sweetheart, I get breakfast from Bobby. So, no thanks." He said gruffly. He was frowning.

"Well, that's okay, maybe some other time."

"How long did you say that you would be here?"

"I am not sure."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Lily, Mr. Henry. We have met before. I came a few years ago and we had dinner. We had dinner a couple of times, actually."

"Hmmm." My Father turned around and went into his bedroom mumbling something, and locking the door behind him.

"Hmmm." Lily replied to the empty space, and she went into the guest bedroom. I set her luggage down next to the unmade Murphy wall bed and looked up at her.

"You get one more chance, Davey. One more. Then I am gone. One chance."

"Let me take you to dinner tonight."

"No, thank you, but no." She was looking through the salty glass windowed doors. "It's late and I am tired. Shower?"

"Over there," I said.

"Clean sheets?"

I retrieved some from the linen closet downstairs and by the time I came back up she had stripped the bed and my used sheets were folded neatly and sitting by the door. Placing the clean sheets on the bed, I picked up the used ones and said goodnight.

"I'll see you in the morning, Davey."

I made my way downstairs and lay down on the the couch. She was here, sleeping in my bed, and I couldn't stop thinking about her. My two worlds were colliding like vegetables on a shish kebab, the one of my past skewered and now next to the one of my present, the world with Lily. I woke up to the sound of the back door opening and my Father leaving for his morning routine. Usually the sun woke me, but the living room didn't have sliding glass doors.

Lily was in the kitchen and she must not have said a word when my Father walked out towards Bobby's. She was mixing something in a bowl and the radio was playing softly: NPR. They were babbling about a small business in Idaho that did cheese sculptures. I leaned against the fridge. Her back was turned to me and I didn't say a word.

"Would you prefer strawberries or blueberries?"

"Um... What?" She hadn't even turned around.

"Would you prefer strawberries or blueberries in you pancakes, or both?"

"I dunno. You choose."

"Strawberries it is." We had strawberries growing in our backyard, or rather her backyard because it was her house that I had lived in. Lily would send me out to pick them in the mornings. She was an incredible chef. Her restaurant, "Strawberry", was aptly named and received some of the best reviews in Northern New Mexico. She cooked the food and I

did the money, that's how it had worked for three years now, and now that system wasn't really working because she was in the wrong kitchen. It was two years before I left the Army when we met. I was twenty-four and she was twenty-three. She was only three months younger than me, so we met in between birthdays.

It was a blind date and neither of us still talk to the friends who set us up. They faded away like most people do when they are friends of convenience. I was a broke, enlisted marine, with my hair cropped closely to my head and the first thing she asked was if she could feel it. Rubbing her hand on my stubble she nodded in approval and we ordered garden salads. These salads had strawberries and strawberry dressing, but I do not think she remembers this. We left the restaurant, both of us disappointed with the cuisine. I didn't know better, but she was beautiful and I would have agreed anything. The quiche tasted just fine to me, though I have discovered, through Lily's tutoring, that I absolutely despise quiche. It was a warm summer day and the air conditioned grumbled loudly as I drove her home. I walked her to the door like a gentleman and asked if she was free the next Wednesday to which she said yes. The door shut. I was about to pull away, when there came a rap on the passenger window and I put my foot on the brake. Lily was just standing there. I turned off the car and rolled down the window.

"Hey."

"You are really dense." She snapped. Walking around the front of the car, the headlights setting her red dress on fire, she came to my window and I rolled it down. This took me a few seconds or so because I drove an old pickup, like my Father, and the windows were manual.

"I am not sure what is happening."

"Go on. Kiss me. I didn't put on all this makeup to see you walk away without me having made you weak in the knees."

I opened my mouth to reply but decided that this was the wrong way to proceed. Without getting out of the car, I leaned through the open window and kissed her slightly. It was a peck and our lips rubbed uncomfortably against each other.

"There," she said. "Now you have done it and you won't have to do it again until at least tomorrow. Next, we work on the details." Turning around, she walked around the front of the car and back into her house without so much as a glance to me. She wasn't wearing shoes.

The sun was coming through the window that looked out onto the back lanai and Lily was washing her hands in the sink. She turned the water off and wiped her hands on her apron, the apron my Father used to wear while grilling. It was a plain, white apron, just like the plain, white button-ups he wore every day.

"The glass doors upstairs are pretty gross."

"Yeah, I should probably clean those."

"Well, after breakfast then. I am going to be here for at least a week and I won't have our room look like the one you kept in the barracks."

"Our room?"

She gave me a good, hard look. "We are not okay. We won't be okay for a little while. But, you are momentarily forgiven because of your Father. I swear, Davey, if you ever run again, I won't come looking."

"Lily. I won't." I moved toward her and wrapped her up in my arms, kissing her head. "I promise you, I won't ever run again. Not from anything. I promise."

She pushed me away and wiped her eyes. "Go on," she said. "Get cleaned up. Breakfast will be ready soon. Move your clothes downstairs to one of the other bedrooms too. You sleep on the couch still. This doesn't fix everything." Lily turned away and lit the stove.

"I love you."

"I know."

We had a silent breakfast, interrupted by my Father's return from his routine. He had spilled coffee on himself this time and Lily followed him upstairs, retrieving the shirt to bleach it clean. I cleared the table and filled a bucket with water and soap. I spent the morning cleaning the caked salt from the glass-windowed doors, sneaking glances at Lily on the other side unpacking her clothes. By lunch, the glass was invisible, as glass should be. The screen door would be dealt with another day when I had more patience.

It was coming up on a year in this house. Lily was getting impatient. She came back often, every month or so, shutting down her restaurant, or leaving it in the hands of one of her trusted managers. We would sit on the lanai and watch my Father pace, and she would look at me worried. She hoped his death wouldn't make me run again. I reminded myself daily that he wasn't there anymore. This was just a body, that happened to be my Father's body, and I was here as a caretaker, waiting for it to die. She would sit and pull my arm around her, nudging her head against my chest, and wrapping her arm around my stomach.

This is my life now. This is what I do. My Father's voice is constant surround sound and his presence is my reminder. This is routine. There are things you do, in order, sequential, all on time, or you did it wrong. I have been doing things right for a while. But, I cannot understand why I inherited this home again. I guess had always been mine though. I have never let go. I called this place my home because it was where I felt I belonged. It

seems that it never stopped being home. There is an order to my life and my Father stands at the center of it. I keep his memories and I keep him in time, here and now. I know when to let him be and I know when to remind him that today is today, not yesterday. I know my duties.

"How much longer do you have to stay?" Lily murmured.

"I don't know."

"Ella and Georgie, its their turn now. No one has done this as long as you."

"I know," I said, kissing the top of her head. She was curled up in the nook beneath my arm. We sat on the on a wicker couch that my mother had bought to pair with Mr. Chee's wicker rocking chair. She left the two-seat couch even though she got it in the divorce. We were on the downstairs lanai and there was a thick breeze coming in off the ocean. The forecast was rain, and lots of it. A tropical storm has been circling. The east shore was expected to get 10-15 foot swells and Georgie and I had had plans to go out surfing but work interceded. The development had to plastic up some houses to protect from the storm and that job fell to Georgie.

"Come home, Davey."

"Not yet. It's not time." I didn't want to tell her that home was right here, beneath my toes, no matter my denial.

"You don't owe him anything."

"But I do."

"What's your plan? How long is this going to last?"

"I just don't know, Lily. I just don't. I will just keep doing until it doesn't need to be done anymore."

"Well, what do you want to do, Davey? Doesn't really seem like you want to think about life after this. This house, your Dad, its sucking the good bits away and all I'm left with is the used shell of a man. You have got to want something!" She was agitated, and she sat up, removing my arm from around her.

"I know. I know." I said with exasperation.

"Stop saying that. Just stop it."

"Dammit, Lily, don't do this right now." My voice was louder. I didn't want to talk about this right now. I didn't want to change things right now. We had routine. Isn't that what it is about? Routine. It's what "it" is about. It's routine.

"Do what? Not do what right now? I can't keep flying out here forever. Don't you..." She had her hands on my arm and I pushed them off, jumping from the chair. I couldn't take it anymore.

"I want you. I want you to stay. I want you to be with me forever. I want to build a home with you and I want to leave this place, this goddamn place and all of its goddamn ghosts. Every time I walk through the front door and I see those masks, I want to rip them from the wall and throw them into the ocean, but I can't. I have responsibilities and I have a routine. My Father is sick and there is no one but me and I won't leave him like he left me. I won't do it. I can't do it. I'll never do it and it kills me." My knuckles were white. I was gripping the wooden railing. "This place is killing me, Lily."

"You aren't your Father, Davey. You never were."

"But if I leave, I leave for good. This house, these things, they were my life. I can't just leave. I can't just let this place wash away. It's not just him, don't you see?" She rose and

hugged me from behind, her thin arms wrapping around my chest. Whispering, I continued, "I won't run away. Not this time. I won't leave until its through and done with."

"I know. I do. I know. It's just you don't have forever."

All the while, my Father was pacing. He was always in my periphery. He was the one I blamed for keeping me here. He hadn't had a good day in weeks. I was beginning to worry about him. He paced in the backyard more than ever. Sometimes his words were slurred, and when it was really bad I could hear him struggling to speak to the ghosts he conjured in our yard. Wandering from edge to edge, he would ask questions, give orders, sometimes beg for forgiveness and it pained me to watch. Henry, my namesake, had been a powerful man, with a sharp mind, a shrewd sense of the world, a man who never begged. He was a taker and now he was in the yard, pleading with people long dead or long forgotten. He was now a beggar. I had tried several times to stop it, running outside and lifting him from the ground, reminding him gently that there was no one there, but he would react harshly. He seemed to sink deeper into madness each time I tried to save him. He ruled a fake empire, one buried and lost many years ago. His palace was crumbling and he spent much of his time trying to rebuild it, repairing the cracking walls and building fires to warm its empty halls.

This house was my blood and sometimes I could see the things my Father saw. He was standing in the lawn, like he usually was, for the entirety of Lily and I's argument. There he was, just pacing, and then the air would shimmer and I would be thrown back to yesterday. Living with my Father was like living in a waking dream. I straddled two fake empires and I knew it. When I watched him pace, sometimes I would see his clothes change, his body expand, and suddenly the strong man he used to be stood on the lawn, grilling steaks. It

was a Sunday afternoon barbecue and the Eggers were over. Ava Eggers stood next to my Father, watching him intently, trying to figure out how he knew the meat was ready. My Father had the ability to look at meat and tell you if it was rare, or well done, or anything in between. His eye for meat was superb.

Something caught his eye and he abruptly changed expression, demeanor, and then the air shimmered, and he wasn't just cradling an imaginary child, he was in my Sister's bedroom with her small body in his arms, rocking back and forth. He stood there, in our yard, cooing her to sleep, except he wasn't in our yard, he was in her old bedroom and the sun was setting. Just as suddenly as it began, the sunset ended and it was dusk and that startled my Father.

But, there was something in the quiet surprise of darkness, a darkness that fell while he held her, that made my Father realize that every fleeting moment was (and is) the same as the one right after. Shimmering again, I saw wispy shadows stretched lazily across a foreign street, grabbing at things that were just out of reach. Right then, just before the sun was gone, but right before it set, my Father saw the small space in time when the world is gold. The dark dank walls of the Eggers home down the road gleamed like fresh caramel squares and the girl riding her bike across street had red licorice hair. The wood picket fence, around a house that wasn't ours, was made of graham crackers, freshly baked and waiting to be devoured. Memories danced across the windowpane and laughter rang out across the empty sky. Daises swayed beneath his palms, waiting to be picked and placed in his lovers' hair. The sun hung just above the trees, trees very far away, and never wavered because in that moment right before night set in, he was there forever; at least until forever ended. Just as every moment, it left, replaced by another that was never quite as fair.

Grabbing and clawing at lost moments, believing that the one he left behind would never be as rich as the one before, he mourned. Whether day or night, the house, the girl, and the daisy all faded slowly into dark recesses of his mind, just like most everything that had happened before the Dad I knew became a ghost; before he lost his memories. That time, when everything was beautiful was a yesterday so far gone, it seemed my Father began to doubt if it ever existed. I began to doubt it existed myself. In that moment, the quiet shock of 'just before' disappeared, just like that afternoon with the girl and her red licorice hair. These images fell in on each other and I beheld a confused man, flabbergasted at the sudden change in landscape. There was a ghost in his body, waving his floppy skin, and speaking unfamiliar words with a familiar voice.

"Dad. Dad, its time to come in now. There is a storm coming and I don't want you to catch pneumonia or something pacing in the rain."

It took him a few moments to readjust and he came tottering in. I closed all the windows and Lily and I went to bed, leaving my Father on the couch watching replays of old baseball games. The next morning, I took Lily to the airport. Her flight left just before dawn, which meant we only slept for a few hours. She kissed me and I held her for a long time before I drove back home through faintly falling rain descending on a bleak morning world.

Ten

There was a storm coming to a head and the skies were grey. The ocean was bubbling, frothing with anticipation. He left this morning on his morning routine: coffee, donuts, reading glasses, stain shirt, change. Except this time he hadn't returned and it was almost nine o'clock. He was usually back by now. He was always back by now. I hopped in his old pickup and went down to Danao's Coffee and found Bobby, lounging in one of the chairs outside, waiting for customers. I hopped out of the car.

"You seen Dad around Bobby?"

"He didn't come by this morning but I figured Mr. Henry had an appointment this morning," he said picking at his finger nails.

"I heard him leave, around seven like he usually does, but he hasn't come back yet. I am getting a little worried." Bobby had stopped and he stood.

"Let me close up and I will help you look. Have you called your Mother, or Ella, or Georgie?"

"Not yet. I do not want to scare them. He is probably just pacing in some poor family's yard."

My hands were on my hips as I tried to think of the places he could be. I had checked the yard before I left and he wasn't pacing. He wasn't in his room or in his favorite chair on the downstairs lanai. The beach had been empty, and I had no idea where he could be.

"Let's walk back to the house along the road, see if he stopped or fell or something," I said as Bobby finished locking up the shop and flipping the sign to "closed". We set off down the road and called after my Father.

"Dad, Dad, can you hear me?"

"Mr. Henry!"

We walked all the way to the driveway of my house and he was nowhere to be found. Our words fell on deaf landscape. The wind had picked up and I wasn't sure if it was raining or the waves were slamming against the rocks hard enough to spray me where I stood by the front door.

"I am going to see if he is at the Eggers." No one was there now. I had a key, or did and there was a spare sitting in the bowl of change in the kitchen. He could have taken the key and gone over there. There was no time to check the change bowl and I moved quickly down the road. We had to find him soon. He couldn't go far.

The Eggers home was dark and empty. Unlocking the front door, I slipped through a crack in door. Wet and dripping, I had taken off my shoes and arranged them by the front door. This is what you do when you come to someone's home, you take off your shoes. It is respectful. I moved through the house flipping on lights and searching through rooms. I checked closets (empty ones) for my Father. He wasn't there. There was no where for him to hide. The furniture was gone and the house was empty, especially empty, and my Father wasn't here. He wasn't here. Damn it, he wasn't here. I had left a trail of wet footprints through the house, but it didn't matter. No one really lived here anymore.

This was a house, a house with wooden floors and picture-less walls, a house where he wasn't, and so I shouldn't have been here. I should have been outside looking for him. My Mother needed to know, and Georgie and Ella too, so I went to an obsolete cordless home telephone. People didn't need home phones anymore; they had cellphones and you could reach them anywhere. Yet this house did, and so did mine, and I was surprised by the

working dial tone. I called my family, first my Mother first, and then my Sister, and then my Brother, each coming to my aid in earnest.

I went out the back door and down new steps that had been installed by Ian to up the house's resale value. They had yet to be varnished and the unprotected wood was soft and dark, soaked through by the rain. Moving past the buffer trees, I looked down the beach for a sign of Bobby but his figure was lost in the tormenting grey rain. I realized I had forgotten my shoes at the front door, but I wouldn't really need them so I left them behind. From where I was, I could only just make out our house and returning to the road, I went towards the patch of pines that separated our street and the highway. Perhaps he had wandered into the dense pines and couldn't find his way out? He was an old, frail man who wouldn't have known better. After a quick scan, I decided that he wouldn't have gone in there, he shouldn't have, so I went back to the house for one more look inside. Perhaps he had come back. Perhaps he was home.

I took one large stride up our front steps and then I went room to room, sparing no nook nor cranny's privacy. Ella should be here soon and she could help me check along the road again. Each room was empty and each left me more desperate than before. He was my responsibility and I let him go out there into the world, a world he couldn't possibly face on his own. He wasn't ready for things like this, things so real and so dangerous. I should have followed him out, walked with him to Bobby's, guided him home. Now he is lost in a storm and there isn't anything I can do but keep looking for him. The backyard. He could be pacing again. Empty backyard. No Dad. It was hard to see in the rain and I shielded my eyes. My bones were chilled. He wasn't by the old dock. The dock was creaking as the ocean

roughly shoved it to and fro. Back to the house, then around the house, and there he was, moving toward the rocks. Where did he come from?

Lava once poured into the ocean here but after years of rough grinding, the porous rock had broken away and left sharp edges. Just walking on the exposed rock would cut your feet like razor blades. These outcroppings struck boldly out into the sea, steeply falling away as they met the ocean; miniature cliffs with debris strewn below. Some parts had broken away, eroded from below, leaving sheer edges where land fell into sea.

My Father's eyes were crossing back and forth across the yard and I wondered who the girl with the red-licorice hair was, and where the house that had walls like caramel squares had been. But, he was moving again, swiftly and nimbly, and there was no time to think. He left our yard and I watched as my Father moved purposefully through the rocks. I stood, confused, frozen, useless as the day I was born. Those rocks were dangerous, he had told me so many times. My Father came to the edge of them and carefully lowered himself down onto a section of rock that had fallen into the ocean. It lay a few inches beneath the water and waves would rush up and cover his knees, only to recede and regroup. Now, all I could see was his head and so I chased him. A wave reared up and threw itself onto my Father. He stumbled and fell back onto the rock shelf. He rose and his shirt was ripped with small splotches of red blood dotting his back. He must not remember. He must not know that this was dangerous. He was slowly moving out towards the open ocean and by the time I came to the ledge he had dropped down from, my Father was at the place where the rocks dropped steeply into murky depths.

"Dad. Henry. Stop. Just come back quickly before the waves take you out," I shouted. Gingerly, I began to lower myself onto the invisible outcropping about four feet below. My

feet were bleeding and I could see more cuts on my Father's arms and legs. He was at the edge of the rock and water now. Dad turned and put his hand up, warning me away. He was telling me to stop, like he used to tell me when he was on the phone and I had a question.

"Daddy, Dad. Dad. Can I go to the movies with Ian? Dad. Dad. Please?"

My Father would raise his hand and look me in the eye. Not now, he was saying, not now, but I didn't understand and he frustrated me with his indifference. It was patience he wanted me to learn. I listened then, and I listened now. I was patient. I waited for him to return with my left foot hovering in the air above the water where it had been feeling for a place to land. This is where I watched him from, with my hands behind me, holding tightly to the rock, and my left foot stretching below towards an invisible rock shelf just beneath the water, and not so much sitting, but rather holding on, trying not to move. I was doing what he told me, being patient.

He was still looking at me, hand raised, and then I knew differently. It was brewing realization that he was more than I made him. His cold eyes were hazel and bloomed before me. His body was beaten and weathered, and the wind and the rain whistled through the valleys of his wrinkled face. He stood on the rocks unsteadily, with his usual white button up clinging to his body, white, wet, translucent, and red polka dots scattered haphazardly. My Father had no shoes, and it was my Father this time, not his hollow frame. He knew what he was doing. Whitewater rushed by his feet and he stumbled, dropping an arm to steady himself. Eyes back on the ocean, he mustered himself. He moved easily towards the underwater cliff, fully submerged, invisibly lurking. The water receded and he found a footing, carefully securing his feet, and my Father brought his arms up to his chest and stood mightily, like a boxer primed for a knockout. Lips framed with a little "c" on each end,

he frowned at the water. A wall of water reared back and he stood there eye to eye with the ocean that beat at our house each day. The wind blew like a great Spanish armada, bearing down on my Father's lonely pirate ship. It struck him down and his body crumbled flat on the rocks below his feet. Recovering slightly, he returned to his post, while I watched helplessly, silently understanding that there was nothing I could do, and knowing there was nothing I should do.

Waves thunderously crashed again and again against his body, and he knelt, unable to stand, to withstand the powerful force. It pushed him down, threw him back towards me and then sucked him out. The ocean receded with its prey, dragging his limp body out to sea. He was bowing before an open ocean before I lost him in the surf. I didn't hear his words, if there were any.

"DAD!" I was frantic.

"DAD! COME BACK!" I thought about jumping in but what would that do. He was gone. My Father was gone. All I could think of was the clock in the wall that hadn't worked in years. I kept my Father's time. Useless time kept wasted.

His body reemerged, face down, in the dead man's float some twenty yards away. I watched the current and the steady push of sets, of potential waves, carry him to the beach and dump his lifeless body there. Bobby, who was making his way towards the house, back from his search of the beach, stumbled upon my Father. He looked upon the old man like a beached sea monster, one of those fascinating prehistoric creatures that occasionally wash up on the distant shores of Peru.

I watched from the rocks and he looked up, searching for me, feeling for my Father's pulse. Nothing. I was cold and shivering. The rain was searching for a crack in my skin, a

place from which it would begin to drown me. The pines on the beach bent backwards against the enormous onslaught of wind and rain. A car glided down the driveway and stopped the front of our house: Ella. Then another, and another, and my Mother and Brother were there. I watched Bobby who doing chest compressions on my Father. Georgie ran up to me, clutching a rain jacket around him tightly. He stood at the edge of the rocks.

"What in the hell are you doing out there?" He asked. "Did you find him yet?" He was shivering, his jacket pulled tightly around him. There was fear in his voice, rightful fear. I pulled my foot up and worked my way carefully through the rocks to the grass of our yard.

I didn't respond. He followed my eyes and saw Bobby on the beach, by where the rocks met the sand. He ran, letting his black jacket flap behind him, whipping through air. Ella saw Georgie and followed quickly. They arrived next to Bobby and my Brother looked down, putting his hands over his face. My Sister arrived and collapsed in the sand, her hands on our Father's chest. She lifted his head and cradled it in her arms, holding him like a newborn child. Georgie turned away and his head dropped. Bobby stood back.

I felt my Mother's hand slide across my shoulder and together we went to the group huddled beside the foreign creature sleeping on the beach. We reached the rocks that separated our house and the beach, and followed the little path through them. Safe passage through. Ella stood up and then unable to stand it - stand what she saw - fell into my arms, and Georgie looked at me with stone eyes, eyes like my Father's. There was blame in those eyes and my Mother went to him. Bobby stood, hands in his pockets. I struggled to keep my eyes open as the rain came tumbling in. It pinned my eyelids shut and we all struggled to see. Ella let go after regaining composure - after how long I do not know - and knelt by him, taking his hands and placing them across his chest like a man in a casket. The corners of his

lips were turned slightly down and I saw the little "c's" that framed his mouth. Georgie was moving towards me. I put my arm around his shoulder and his head fell on me. It was like when Aunt Meredith had passed away and he came running to me, curling up in my lap, asking his Big Brother why she wasn't coming back. I didn't know then. I was just twelve.

"Come on, help me with him." I said, removing my arm. He wiped his face, uselessly, and we knelt on either side of him. With the help of Bobby, we lifted my Father's body and carried him into the house, and upstairs to his bed, where we left his wet carcass. My Mother called 911 because no one had any idea what to do and Bobby left, making sure we knew we could all for anything. The men came and took him an hour later, with none of us venturing upstairs to look at him. Silence overcame. The storm continued to beat down on our house and this family. Ella lay curled up, with her head in my lap and her feet in Georgie's. My Mother was making the phone calls, all of the calls that needed to be made, and we sat patiently waiting, the three of us, on the couch in the house we grew up in. Ella was shivering and I piled another blanket on top of her.

Sometimes broken things aren't meant to be fixed. This house was my home, but home was wherever I was with Lily and I knew it. She knew it. I just hadn't said 'good'-bye yet. It needed to be said and I couldn't say it. The words stuck in my throat and my Father's ghost stood before me, his finger silently hovering over his mouth, begging silence. He was dead now.

I remembered this house so fondly. When the tracers would fly across the valley, I imagined walking through the kitchen with my bare feet and feeling the cool blue tile. The masks smiled at me and welcomed me to our home. Making my way upstairs, I would find Mr. Chee's old wicker rocking chair, and with a cup of coffee, I would greet the new day,

making sure to open the sliding glass doors so the salt caked glass wouldn't impede my view. At night, I would sit on the downstairs lanai, dragging the Papasan chair, my decompression chair, to my favorite spot. I would pass the masks that hung by the front door and they would watch me just like they watched my Father. The family would gather, and we would sit outside, each preoccupied with individual attentions: my Father -- sipping whiskey and fingering a cigar, my Mother -- nursing a cup of tea and reading the latest installment for her book club, my Sister -- pacing in the lawn on her phone and laughing, my Brother -- lying flat on his stomach on the couch reading also, and me, my Father's Son - - fingering a cigar and sipping scotch on the steps, the same steps my Father helped me build.

Everyone was different though, my Sister old enough to drive, which would have made my Brother almost fifteen years old. Yet, he was not. He was older, about as old as he was now. He was sitting next to me and he was married. These memories were misplaced in time; constructed and formed from the best and the most favorite times. The things I identified with this house weren't there either, because Mom had gotten Mr. Chee's wicker chair in the divorce. The masks hung on the wall, right where they had been for years, leaving imprints on the paint, so when we finally took them down, each left behind a silhouette. Cat and Dog were still here, moved from my room to your study and back again. The armoire my Mother bought on Highway 51 stands ominously by the door to the downstairs lanai. That armoire at my Mother's house now. Things weren't what they should be. They aren't what they had been. I don't seem to be remembering how things actually were.

Sometime later, after silence had fallen, Ella said, "Let's get out of here," throwing the towels and blankets from herself. She uncurled and gathered her things. My Mother looked up and silently acknowledged. Georgie was already getting his car keys from the kitchen table and I still sat on the couch.

"Come on, Davey. Let's go," Georgie called.

"Where?"

"We aren't going to let you stay here alone. That is just cruel. We'll go to Mom's."

We all left the house, our backs descending into the darkness. Quickly we hurried into the cars, with me following Georgie, venturing through the pines behind. I turned my head to watch our home and the last thing I saw was the front door, specifically the steps that my Father needed help getting up after his stroke. Fading slowly into the greying light, I left the house empty, something it hadn't been in years. No one lived there anymore and I heard a boy's heavy footsteps echoing throughout. The screen doors were accumulating salt and the glass-windowed doors were dirty. The boy was looking out from the guest bedroom into a grey world that was shimmering loosely, unsure of its existence.

Part Three: To My Dad

Eleven

The entire funeral procession, of more than hundred people, many of whom I had never met before were out on the sea in all manner of craft: surfboards, kayaks, sailboats, two motorboats, and many outrigger canoes. I was in six-man canoe with my Brother, my Sister, my Mother, Ian, Ava, and Lily. Ella held your urn tightly. She sat on the ama, the outrigger's arm, the only one who didn't paddle. The urn that held you was plain because we wouldn't need it after. We left from the beach by the Eggers home, which wasn't their home, but an empty house. The dock my Father had built all those years ago had been swept out to sea, the salted wood finally giving out.

We were burying you. The ocean fed on your ashes. Its vast depths swallowed you whole. The ocean was calm today, paying its respects to the host of uncountable dead who littered its bottom. From the slave ships that crossed the Atlantic whose hungry bodies were tossed overboard. From those swept out too sea when a tsunami slammed Hilo. From the frozen bodies on the sinking Titanic. From drowning. From war. From death.

There were creatures that lurked deep beneath us. Creatures who watched above with foreign eyes as your ashes fell to them. It was like faint snow tinting the ocean floor, covering the dead and the living. The creatures looked up in wonder, admiring the cascading grey dust and just as quickly, looked away, uninterested. All that was left of you was above in the things and memories that we used to hold you here. You were bound to this house, bound to the masks that hung by the front door, bound to the gold watch around my left wrist. Yes, that gold watch, the watch I bought so that I would always have the time for you. I wondered that if on some other Earth there was another me and another

you. Had we made the same mistakes and led the same lives? Would we be different or were we the same? Always the same, unchanging.

Let me tell you a story about a boy who made a mistake, a rash decision that forced him away from his family and his home. He was young and he ran away from the things that scared him, from the monsters lurking in the ocean depths. There was his home on the shore, with rocks instead of a beach, with wooden floors and glass windowed doors. He stood and watched as the others boarded a raft to escape, refusing to join as they cast off. Everyone looked back as they left him there, in a house that echoed when he breathed. He went back inside, up the steps that he built with his Father, whose rough and calloused hands guided his. Into the living room that was filled with the things that cataloged their lives, the armoire that his Mother bought in a shop on Highway 51. There he waited, imagining empires built on sand, of going to war, of living in the mountains of New Mexico. A single man appeared in a creaking wooden skiff, using the oars to beat back the tentacles that rose with the intent to drag him below. He docked his boat and walked up to the young man -- the boy -- who was daydreaming in the yard and took him inside. Together, they prepared for a journey and out onto the wooden skiff the boy went about a week later. The man helped him in the boat and watched as the boy rowed away. The boy came back, many years later to find the man, now old, sitting on the steps of the downstairs lanai. The old man couldn't remember, and he never did.

My Brother stood in the outrigger canoe on unsteady legs. There were no tears in his eyes and he spoke a few words, words I didn't listen too. He was being strong. Stephanie, his wife, was on a Boston Whaler just to our left and he spoke only to her. Lily caught my eye. Behind her were people who over the years had come in and out of our

home. Most were older, bodies failing, the years having taken their penance. Some men were stoic. Some were not. Some had tears falling obliquely down their faces. It was a scene of mixed reviews; each person had a different memory of you. It was my turn, I didn't say much, and what I said was not important. I am saying what I need to say to you now. There isn't any need for others to know.

Ella stood up. Everyone was silent. She popped the cap off the cardboard urn and dumped your white ashes, like ground flour, into the blue water. Our companions dropped maile leis and plumaria flowers into the water after you. Our mother tossed her old wedding ring into the ocean. Georgie just watched. Ella was crying, her hand over her mouth, and her tears fell into the water below while I comforted her. I saw Georgie drop a small piece of paper into the water. It was ever so quiet and I will leave that between you and him. Bobby was singing something in Hawaiian and everyone was quiet and listening. His voice was clear and beautiful. I had never heard him sing before. I am not sure what you would have thought about this, whether this was how you wanted to be buried or not. My Mother (your wife), your Daughter (my Sister), and your Son (my Brother) seemed to like it. Your ashes sank quickly, but the flowers, the leis, and the knick-knacks, lay floating in the midst of a circle of people who all came to pay their respects to you. Many people were there.

We returned to the beach and most left their boats in front of the empty Eggers house. It was in escrow and soon to be sold. We descended on your old home. In the backyard was a buffet and people gathered in groups on our lawn, eating and mourning and remembering. Bobby had a crowd around him and he was laughing about the time that Ian and I drove your pickup truck into the side of his coffee shop. People told stories and I

listened to some, discovering parts of you that I never knew. After all, a man is made of memories and I heard parts of you that I hadn't heard before.

Martin, your roommate from college, introduced himself to me. He asked if I remembered him. I did not. Apparently he visited when I was young. There was a statue on campus, he said, and everyday you would walk by and promise to chop off its head and take it as a souvenir before you graduated. Well, I guess you kept your promise because Martin had a look of admiration in eyes, like he respected you for your word. An older lady, almost ninety, had come to the reception but was unable to come out on the boats to see you off. I never got her name and don't know how she knew you but she kept taking my hand and calling me Henry. Wrong Henry. I didn't tell her otherwise. Bobby reminded me that you always let him fish off the rocks. With his hand firmly on my shoulder, he told me that you had helped him keep his house, offering a no-interest loan. Bobby told me that even though you and I had had our differences, that my Father, that you, were a good man. You had no brothers or sister, and your parents had died young, so there was no one from your family. My Mother's parents didn't make the flight out. They still resented you.

There was a group of men from the real estate agency that you worked for and they stood in business attire -- khaki pants and silk aloha shirts -- off to the side for about an hour before coming to tell my family that you were a good man. I think they were here because they would have been guilty if absent. Soon after, they left. A woman, probably around your age, came up to Lily while I was exchanging awkward words with the agents. She was your tailor and it was odd that she came to the funeral. She had nothing but nice things to say about you and then she was gone. Joseph, the auto-mechanic who fixed your truck because it always broke down, told me about how much golf you two used to play.

Every Friday at three in the afternoon, he said. The both of you would bring a few beers onto the course. He made it a point to say that he was just a little bit better than you, and won most of the time, but that he missed you and that I should play with him if I have the time.

Tate came. I don't know how he knew to come, but he did. We hugged and exchanged a few words, knowing that our friendship was over and done with. He spat. Red Man Chewing tobacco. He was still in the Army and a sergeant now. I asked him to lunch if he was going to be around for a little while, though he declined, saying he was on leave and was catching the red eye that night. There were so many people who visited you. I guess you met Tate a couple of years back when he was coming through Schofield Barracks on his way to South Korea. He helped repaint the steps that you and I built together. Something to do while he was on leave, he said. He told me this and left. I watched him walk into the house and I imagine he went to see the Michael Palmer painting that he loved so much. It was called "Winter and the Intrepid Beach Combers" and I decided that I would find Tate's address in Korea, and have it shipped to him if no one else in the family wanted it.

"I knew your Father when he was in the Army, son. We were stationed at Schofield together and he fell in love with Hawaii, which is why he came back with your Mother to start a family. Good place the raise a family," said a stranger. He never told me his name but he did lift up his shirtsleeve to reveal the same tattoo that you had. Skull and crossbones with a crosshair etched over it. The eyes of the skull jet-black.

"Your Father had one of these, right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You go into the Army too?"

"Yes, sir. Been out four years now. In for eight."

"Good for you. I am sure your Father was proud."

Linda Baker came. She was the girl who lived next door to you on Bluewater Lane in New Orleans. You grew up in New Orleans and she said you had a crush on her for the longest time. When you finally had the guts to ask Linda out, she was already dating someone else, and then your parents died, which was so sad. After while, when you both were in college, Linda said the two of you would spend your summers together and depart for different ends of the country when fall semester started. She remembered when she heard the news and she remembered not hearing from you for a long time after that. Linda wants to keep in touch with me and she gave me her business card. Lily was delighted to meet her and I think she wants us to visit New Orleans soon.

Countless people came and left, each coming to me and offering an insight into your life, whether I liked it or not. It amazed me that so many knew you even though you had been a ghost for the last two years. The reception wasn't somber, though Ella fell deeper into the realization that you were dead as the steady stream of well-wishers paid their respects. Georgie was stoic, as always. I was the oldest but today he was the head of the family. Slowly, our lawn emptied and all but your old family, including Ava and Ian, remained. The caterers had packed up and Georgie signed something. We all piled into cars, with Ava and Ian in a rental car headed towards Ella's house where they were staying. Stephanie had been gone, sent home to relieve the babysitter, and Georgie went to join her. Lily and I took your old pickup truck and followed my Mother down the driveway. We were staying with her because it wasn't right to sleep in your house anymore, now that you were gone. One by one, our family left our old home.

We receded into the woods, like probing fingers recoiling. The wind danced coyly on our backs and the gentle ocean waves brushing the beach sounded like a wicker broom on kitchen tile; my Mother sweeping the sand out into the back yard. The trees darkened in the places where we went, and our faces, like lit balloons, were lost and alone. The home we left was a place that we were supposed to come back to. Home was where I was supposed to end up, but that house isn't home. That home is gone and so are you. I wondered what I took with me, not the things, the things that cataloged, but the things learned from you. This is the moment when I remembered that I am your son. Your blood rushes through my brain and your countenance inhabits my reasoning. I am your creation, just as this home was. Were my hours wasted running? Did I become you running? Has your ghost filled my taut skin? I feel you rattling around inside of me, working up the strength to interject, when suddenly Lily's hand is on my knee.

We are sitting at the stoplight, the one by Danao's Coffee Shop. There is no one behind, but the light is green and we are not moving. My Mother's car was nowhere to be seen. The sky was clear. I shifted into first gear and then we lurched down Kamehameha Highway towards my Mother's house. A string of green lights, green lights not blinking but holding strong, led me from the steps of that house to the front door of my home, a home where dew dripped from the pointed noses of the strawberries in the backyard. We would eventually end up in the driveway of our little home in New Mexico. The strawberries were waiting to be picked. Lily's face, with light makeup, was turned toward me. She knew that I knew. I am my Father's son.

Twelve

You have been dead for three years now and I am moving into the house we once built a home in. You were sixty-one when you died and I was thirty. Then I was thirty-two when I married Lily and then I was thirty-three when my son was born. You would have been there when I saw him first - vulnerable and free - and you would have been sixty-four. I have been keeping time since you left.

"This is a wonderful house... Don't you think?"

"I do."

She looked at me with eyes brimming, full of confidence, happiness, and a belief that this was a place that we would build a home together. We would live here until we die; our wooden coffin that creaked when the weather turned chilly. Salt still caked on the screen door upstairs in the guest bedroom.

"We should turn that bedroom upstairs, you know, the one with the view and the sliding glass doors, into the master bedroom. Why leave such nice views to guests!"

"The master bedroom is down the hall though. It has bigger closets..."

"We can afford to knock out some walls, you know."

"Whatever you like."

"Think of it, waking up to the sunrise and the sea every morning, sipping coffee on that quaint little lanai..."

No... That's not what happened. You have been dead for six months, not three years, and I am not coming back because you haunt that place. There are many different ways to

die. Some die on the outside and some on the inside. Some people keep chugging along until one day, out of the blue, they drop dead with a smile on their face. Others, like you, wither slowly. You left us a long time ago, abandoning your sinking ship. A vessel with no cargo.

I sold the house, or I am selling the house. I am saying 'good'-bye to the place I have called my home for the past thirty years. There is no such thing as a 'good'-bye. There never was and this house hadn't been my home since you left because it was missing an important member of the documented catalog. The things that mapped, that remembered, our lives were separated, divided amongst the many parties that claimed a piece of this home. Each person took a few things and then took themselves. A home is house when incomplete. This house, which sits on a small peninsula that juts into a roiling ocean, unprotected by the barrier pines, is no longer ours to have.

We stripped this home. We stripped that house. Memories are tied to objects and objects are tied to places but we couldn't keep on keeping the objects in their places. I couldn't either. Home is not a place. Home is a time and home was yesterday. The places are weather beaten, aged, a hollow reminder of what had been and what never will be again. Your body, that empty vessel, had made its peace and so I will make my peace with this home.

No one ever got the bronze clock from the phone nook that you ripped from the wall because we never found it and you never told us where it was. Georgie went hunting for it in the attic, which was where you used to hide things, like Christmas presents. I would hoist Georgie and Ella up into the attic and they would rummage around, calling down what my gifts were as payment for the lift I provided. He never found the bronze clock and I never figured out why he would have wanted it. I never realized how empty the house was. The

black leather couches, piano, armoire, the many-colored carpet, Mr. Chee's wicker rocking chair; these were the things my Mother had already taken. She had taken them in the divorce. It had been so long ago, a hazy yesterday. The house had been half-empty for so long.

Underneath the sink, Lily found the wooden utensils that Mr. Chee had carved. Maple, the same wood that big leaguers used in their bats. This was the only thing my Mom reclaimed. The utensils were in an old paper bag and they looked untouched, varnish intact. Mom spent the majority of the afternoon carefully polishing each spoon, fork, and knife, at the sagging dining room table, the one propped up by a 5th leg, a leg you and I added to get my woodcarving merit badge. The knives in the maple set were useless. A wooden knife is never a successful knife, but my Mother loved them just the same.

"Rubber Soul", the Beatles' records, and every other record were packed carefully in the back of Ella's car. I gave her a few of mine from the ones I brought over when I left Lily to come live here. She had a collection now and with it came the record player. It was beautiful thing and I taught her how to work it and how to replace the needle. While I was explaining, Georgie came in holding the painting of four kids on a beach, the one by Michael Palmer that hung in the hallway by the phone nook. He asked if anyone wanted it and Ella suggested that we ship it to Red Man because he had always loved it. I didn't realize that Ella even remembered him. Georgie said that while I was up in my room reading, Red Man was downstairs telling them war stories, but not the real ones, I assumed. Red Man stayed with us after you left and before you got the house back. I don't know if you ever knew that.

There wasn't much to take. Most of the furniture was trashed, or sent to the Salvation Army, except for a few things like the sagging table. We kept that. The realtor

asked us to do it so that we could show it with the house. We sent your clothes there too and now there is another Dad wearing one of your many white button-up shirts. There were various things in boxes from your past: old photos, a trophy with the name plate scratched off, old letters your Father (my Grandfather) had written to your Mother (my Grandmother) while he was stationed in Japan, and even framed tickets from the first game played at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington. We went to that game when I was young, too young, and after flying halfway across the country, we watched the Texas Rangers lose to the Brewers 4-3. We didn't keep any of those things, stuffing them in a box and mailing them to one of your cousins. Georgie, Ella, and I had never met any of your family so it was a surprise to see the address in Sante Fe, not too far from where I live. Not sure if I will try to meet them or not. Probably not.

I wanted to bring the Papasan chair back with us to New Mexico but Lily would have none of it. The wood had broken in many places and the seat cushion sagged. Sitting down was a chore because safe places to sit were few and far between. I guess it needed to be thrown out. It did. It really did.

Cat and Dog came with me. They had been through it all, even suffered through forced isolation when you moved them from my old room to your study. They are carefully packed away in Styrofoam and packing peanuts. Cat and Dog are sturdy though, made of thick wood, though I am not sure what type of wood. If it were maple wood, Mr. Chee would have been pleased. He loved maple wood. Ian took a baseball bat to remember Mr. Chee by and so I will take Cat and Dog. I also took the masks that hung by the front door. They are yours, they are mine, and I see you standing behind them, peering through their shadowed eyes. Masks, that is how I will remember you.

I asked my Mom why you left me the house in the will. You wrote the will when you still remembered.

"Davey, this house was always more apart of you than me, Georgie or Ella. It was our home and then we moved away from it, and said goodbye. Their stuff, their collected junk, is in boxes in the attic at my house. Most everything left here is from you and your Dad. It's nice to get these back," she said, holding up a maple spoon. "This isn't our home."

There are two types of history, that which is remembered and that which is recorded. I was supposed to keep your memory -- you asked me to -- but I had stopped keeping your time a long time ago. I didn't record, so I guess you want me to remember. I remember.

This will be the last home I run away from.

A home is not supposed to be empty.

A home is not an empty vessel.

That was not a home.

That house is an empty vessel sinking. When it hits the bottom, resting on the sandy ocean floor, fish will come and live in this artificial habitat. A sinking home is recycled.

There is another family walking through that empty house and commenting on the warm feeling the wooden floors radiate. They wander out onto the downstairs lanai and ask if the wooden furniture comes with the sale and the real estate agent nods her head. The upstairs lanai is missing the wicker rocking chair that Mr. Chee used to carve wooden utensils in. The floors are bare and the walls have been repainted in different colors that Ella picked out. They match the ocean, she said. A wife enters the kitchen and sits on the counter by the window that looks out towards the ocean.

"This is a wonderful house.... Don't you think?"

"I do," the man replied.

He will build this home for her, for him, and they will call this house their home from the wooden floors to the glass windowed doors because this is the place they feel they belong. They will fill it with the things that will catalog their lives until the house is full; until the puzzle is finished, and it is time to put it away the pieces. Puzzles are never used twice. This house was a wooden coffin, haunted by the dead who still claim it as home. This family will live among them, brushing lightly against each ghost's opaque and clammy skin, and shivering when unmanned voices echo throughout the house. They will think it just an ocean gust sliding gently through the hall, salting the upstairs lanai screen door. Your identity is fading into a grey implacable world because the shrine that was built to your final home is weather beaten, eroding in the never-ceasing waves that rear back and crash against this house. It is just memory.

One of these mornings, or one of these dusks, we will be home, in the house that echoes when we breathe. That home was yesterday, this is today, and the sun is peeking into the sliding glass doors that are upstairs. I cleaned them before the realtor came. He commented on the room, and how there were no shades, something that might be added, because waking with the sun is never pleasant. I had never thought about that before; how each morning, in the guest bedroom that I had made my home after enlisting, I woke with the sun and never questioned why.

Maybe I was delusional. Maybe what I remember is not so true. Maybe its nostalgia; the past, a safe comfort against my future. After all, like you always said, history is forgotten and then misremembered.

You are split between homes now, and the masks that hang on the wall, the ones just inside the front door in the house Lily and I call home, are watching when I leave, waiting for the moment I return. Home is wherever I am with her. I am going to make this place her home, my home, our home. It could be said that I was waiting for you to die. You may have wondered why I came back at all, why I am telling you this, why I told you this. I honestly couldn't explain. I think I came back so that I could finally leave. There is something to be said about an exit. Exits define. Mom hasn't quite forgiven me for leaving the first time but she will be okay with how I am leaving this time. Georgie will never forgive me for leaving him to go to war. I have to live with that. Ella is Ella and I am going to miss our Scrabble games. I owe her. Ian, when I next see him, will be my friend and we will pick up where we left off, saying hello and then 'good'-bye. Lily is with me now.

We were in your old pickup truck and we were nearing the 210,000-mile mark. Lily sat in the passenger seat, watching my old house disappear through the rearview window. The road turned lazily to follow the curvature of the bay, when we reached the buffer trees the house was gone, and Lily turned away and unbuckled her seatbelt. She slid across and curled up with her head on my shoulder. With one arm around her and another on the wheel, we passed the Eggers house, which was actually the Miyamura house now. They had moved in recently and I had seen them drifting in and out of the trees, but I never introduced myself because I wasn't staying and you had already left, and I was going home.

The End

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