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Face in the Grave

The red soil around it was alive with the smell of burning sugarcane spice and the tombstone glowed with the sun on her name: Evangeline Kanahale, Beloved Mother and Sister born 1949 died 1990. *May the wings of angels touch the palms of her hands and return her to her father.* Perhaps, that might have happened if Aunty believed in God. Anyway, Katrina knew that Aunty Eevee wasn't dead. Aunty was right here in that hot black tombstone. Sometimes when the rays of the sun hit the black marble surface just right, through the shade of the plumeria tree, she could see Aunty's brown smiling face beneath those etched words and that face looked at Trina with those same eyes that giggled when she walked on the reef, with those same lips that cursed God under that black veil, with those same moles that stared at Cameron while he stared at Trina over the dinner table every night. If it weren't for her face, the darkness of the thing would make it ugly, that tombstone; Aunty didn't like it at all. If only it were round and citrus yellow like a tangerine instead of a cracking marble pentagon, perhaps Aunty would be happier with her surrounding. Then she might have found time in her dead heart to be content with Katrina whose eyes would cry like the day she was born, whose lips would kiss the devil, and whose would face absorb the beauty of all things that hurt.

Trina hated the place, but she ventured there every day through the yellowing green cane field, past the pier, through the keawe trees, until she finally reached the Filipino side of the cemetery. It would have been easier to drive there, but sweat is good for cleaning the impure heart and the Filipino side of the cemetery was downtrodden with blankets on top of blankets of weeds and she wouldn't want to chance getting Cameron's brand new car stuck in them. Besides, walking helped her think about what she's going to tell Aunty today. When Trina's not upsetting her, Aunty was usually quite fond of her company. Trina's bringing Aunty lunch today. Rice, lomi salmon, and chicken heka, Aunty Eevee's favorite. Hopefully Aunty wouldn't get angry with her this time. Go suck on a dog's cock. That's what Aunty told her the last time; it nearly hurt her feelings and got her a slap on her face.

Through the weeds and past the Portuguese graves to the Filipino graveyard, Trina's feet were getting dirty. Weeds stuck under her toes and weed seeds stuck to her bare legs. A nail poked through her rubber slippers, but it missed her heel so she left it there and just kept on walking. The wind whipped her long hair, her face, and her sore brown arm. Why was it sore again? She couldn't remember. Maybe she hit it while squeezing through the keawe trees. She couldn't remember. She walked through the city of graves of dead Portuguese and Filipinos. Black, gray, and old cement made the place still and calm, peaceful and beautiful. The plumeria tree behind Aunty's grave was in full bloom and the scent of the white milk flowers streaked with yellow permeated her hair and skin. Trina moved toward the tombstone and lay on the warm red soil. The small grains felt soft against her smooth skin. Scattered grass made knitted patterns with the dirt, giving it the appearance of soft Hawaiian pillows. She felt warm all over. Aunty Eevee was there.

"I brought lunch."

I not hungry Trina. What's wrong?

"Nothing, Aunty. I just came to visit, 'es all."

You just came here yesterday. What's wrong pretty girl? You look sad.

Aunty liked to talk shit all of the time. Katrina didn't feel sad. She was just tired. Two little sisters to take care of and a shitty job can do that to any young woman. She often wondered about her "good fortune" in having a sickly mother with cancer and two little sisters who did not appreciate her efforts to care for them. At least Aunty should be able to understand. Yet, Trina felt that not everything was right. She couldn't remember. She stared at the corner of the shiny tombstone wall where it met with the dirt floor.

How's your momma?

"Still sick." Why does she ask things that she already knows the answers to?

How's your sisters?

"Still fucking brats. Rosemarie started first grade today and Rondell is going out with some white guy from Honolulu."

How are you?

"Fine. Jesus, Aunty, why you asking me all of these questions? I told you this stuff yesterday."

Yeah and you looked like shit yesterday and you look more like shit today.

What's wrong? What happened to your face?

What? Nothing was wrong with her face. Aunty could be such an old jealous lady sometimes. Just because she was old and dead, didn't mean that she could take it out on Trina.

"Aunty, you know what? Stop playing twenty questions with me! I no need come here to visit you, you know. I can find one other aunty, some old lady at church or that lady that works at the Koloa grocery store. You don't need to be my aunty, I can find someone else to talk to, to take care of. You can just be Cameron's mom and leave me alone."

Trina! No get stupid now. Your cheek is swollen and you have a scratch on your forehead. What happened? You tell Aunty okay.

Trina sat up, raised her right palm to her head. Ouch! Her arm hurt. She put it down and felt her face with her left hand. Aunty was right, there is a scratch on her forehead with some dried up blood. Her left cheek was big and it hurt to touch it. "I dunno what happened Aunty."

You can tell Aunty anything girl. Aunty's voice went down to that sweet whispering voice. That was the voice that used to comfort Trina when she got frustrated taking care of her bedridden mother or when Cameron was being a bastard.

Remember that time when you and Cameron got into trouble in Kindergarten? I took care of you then and I can care for you now.

Trina caught sight of a dried up maile lei on draped over the right corner of the tombstone. It's funny how she had never noticed it before. The brown vine, once green, was still fragrant in its sweet forest smell, but the leaves are pale brown like clay. She brushed the dried leaves with her fingertips. She didn't make this lei. It was Cameron's. Her almost-husband Cameron, they were engaged and perhaps soon to be married. He was dark and handsome with hair and eyes as black as stone. He was strong and cared for her well and supported her family with his well-paid construction job. Trina believed that he was a good man, most of the time.

Trina, do you remember?

Yes. Trina remembered. It was at St. Mary's School. Morning recess. Cameron, her best friend, had decided to put his finger up Brandi's asshole. Brandi was this ugly little white girl from Washington. She thought she was better than everyone else because she could talk better than they could.

"If she's more good than us, she won't have an asshole," Cameron said one day on the monkey bars. He snuck up behind her while she was pulling herself up on the bars; he lifted up her plaid skirt exposing her strawberry shortcake underwear. EEEEEUUW. He got his index finger ready and 1, 2, 3, he stuck it up that little white asshole of hers. Brandi was in shock and couldn't make a sound. Cameron made a sour face. He probably felt some sort of ooze seeping through the thin pink material of Strawberry Shortcake's face. He pulled his finger out with one abrupt gesture, leaving the lacy panty still stuck in the crack of her ass. She started to cry, but couldn't tell Mrs. Fernandez the name of the kid who had done this disgustingly violent thing to her. Cameron, the ever-charming bastard blamed it on Trina. She got whacked with a yardstick.

"Aunty, Cameron's a bastard."

I know Trina. I know.

He had whacked her with a stick this morning. She didn't want it, but he gave it to her anyway. The broom. Right across her pretty brown face. Blood stuck in her long brown hair. She had to go to work. But Cameron was angry. His car. He had to have his car towed out of the fucking weeds. Katrina what the fuck were you thinking. He works all fucking day and the best you can do is get his new car stuck in the fucking weeds at the fucking graveyard! Mom has been dead for years and Katrina still talks to her! As if she's still here, as if she's alive, as if she's still walking down the streets collecting soda cans, as if she's still bitching about how Cameron's daddy beat her! Katrina is a fucking idiot!

"I don't like Cameron, Aunty. . . . but . . ."

But what?

Cameron wasn't always a sinister figure. Trina loved him, sometimes. In high school he left carnations in her locker every morning and at home after a really bad fight he would leave her flowers or clean the bathroom or even give mom her medication. And most important of all, he wanted a future with Trina.

"Katrina, lets put the baby's room here."

"Next to my mom's room. I think her yelling would scare the little thing. And anyways, I'm not even pregnant Cameron."

"I know, but I can dream can't I?" He put his muscular brown arm around Trina's waist and kissed her earlobe. "I love you, Katrina."

Trina would smile.

But then there would be times like last night that could destroy all the tender moments that they had ever had. It made Trina damn his temper and her childlike inability to stand up for herself.

Last night. Trina had cooked dinner and fed her two younger sisters. Raw fish with rice, it was good. Cameron got home late and called Trina a fucking idiot. He was all sweaty and dirt was caked into his clothes. He was tired and the girls had eaten all of his food.

"Get these kids out of my house!"

"This is my momma's house and if you don't like it you get out!" Trina had never yelled before. Her voice scared her.

"Bitch." Cameron picked Trina up like how he used to when they would go surfing in high school, but this wasn't playful and this wasn't high school.

"AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

"Shuddup."

He threw her on to the floor of their bedroom. Her leg hurt. Stop Cameron. But he wouldn't. He gently unbuttoned her shirt and stroked her long hair. She was naked. His dirt-oil work clothes still covered his body, except for his groin area, which was growing as he caressed Trina's breasts with his fingertips. Then he forced open her legs and rode her. His body smashed hers into the floor. She would not scream, she would not get hit, or upset her mother. Up and down. Push and yank. Kiss and stroke. Until the ride was over. He brushed a tear from her eye and kissed her eyelids. Then he gently kissed her cheeks and lips while his sweat and dirt were stuck in her pubic hair.

"Now get up honey and make me something to eat," he said with an endearing smile.

Trina stood up; her naked body made its way to the kitchen.

Why don't you eat the lunch?

"I'm not hungry."

Leave him dear. Go away.

"You want me to leave your boy?" Trina was crushing the leaves of the maile lei. Crush. Rub. Release. The rotted leaves would make fresh new soil.

He hurts you. Like his father hurt me. Just tell him to fuck himself.

She had. He took it as a joke and sucked the voice out of her neck. Aunty could see the teeth marks.

"I can't leave him."

You can't tell me that you love some damn Hawaiian Flip fool like that. He'll kill you.

For a brief moment, the graveyard looked like the perfect world to Trina's eyes. She wanted to be part of its vast universe, its holy silence, its still peace. Wind brushed her hair to wipe the tears from her eyes. Her body hurt all over. She had been beaten over and over again. By broom, hand, mouth, and dick. She wanted some peace.

"I'm already dead." Trina dropped her body on Aunty Evee's grave, but her mind floated above the sky.

No you're not. Go find a white man to take care of you, a white man with lots and lots of money. Leave this place.

A white man? Trina hadn't thought of that. Aunty and her old woman ways. Old women always think that rich white men are just waiting out there to save their impoverished young daughters. Didn't she know that today people like Trina didn't like the white man oppressors, even if they did have money to support her and her family.

"I'm pregnant, you know."

Leave.

"I'm too young to have a baby."

Leave.

Could a child be born into dirt? No. Cameron would not know about it. She wondered if she could give birth in a baby grave. A cute little plot lined with soft brown pillows and a mellow lullaby sung by dead bones. Trina could care for it here in the peace of the graveyard. She would feed it where her blood could make the child cleaner than any dirty milk that its father could buy.

"I hate him."

I know.

"And I hate you for making him."

You can't blame me for the things that he does to you.

"I don't. I blame you for making him the man that he is."

Little girl, you listen to me. I was you. To hell with my son. Go find a white man, make your life better.

"I don't need a white man, Aunty. I can take care of myself."

Then what are you doing here?

The tombstone looked at Trina. She stared until she couldn't see Aunty Evee in it. She saw blackness, cold darkness, but at the same time, soothing peace, peace for the dead. Trina wasn't dead. The sun set and its orange rays hit Trina's legs with beautiful violent fire as it flickered through the plumeria tree's shadow. Trina felt the fire, she was alive. If the graveyard earth would part and dig a plot for her baby bearing body, and if the trade winds might chance to push her in it, her body's fire would melt the cold grave until the heated live earth surfaced and the dead particles rested on the bottom.

"I don't need to listen to you Aunty Evee, you're not even here."

That's true.

"You're dead."

I know.

Katrina brushed her long hair out of her face, picked a plumeria flower and put it over her left ear. She looked into the tombstone and put the image of Aunty Evee's face upon it. It was smiling. She searched her mind for her baby's face. It was silent. Her face. It was crying. Then Cameron's face seemed to touch hers in a warm breeze; her beautiful brown eyes were afraid of the dark and those powerful lips shivered on his pale brown face. She laughed. She might leave him, she might not; she wasn't sure. Trina and her baby walked out of the still graveyard and headed for the beach, where warm evening waters could wake her spirit. She may have dreamt about death, but not yet. It was not time for her or her baby to join Aunty Evee under the plumeria tree. Instead, she would spend the dawn of the night at the pier, talking to her unborn child about the future while singinging to it "may the wings of angels toughen your palms and bring you to the arms of your mother."

—Jenny Silva '02