

WILLIAM HANSON

HAWAIIAN HALL, BISHOP MUSEUM,
HONOLULU

Since I can remember, this hall has been an enchanted place
Filled with images of temple gods and sorcery spirits
Still as fierce and unashamed as when first hewn
Born of experiences I cannot imagine

I enter and see rows of metal chairs, setting the stage for a performance
People gather, most of either European or Hawaiian ancestry
I, out of protective habit, secure a seat at the very back
The building's architectural grandeur before and above me

A group of Hawaiians approach
Three or four elderly women, touching, chatting, laughing
And a younger man, calm, silent, physically massive
Their driver, I assume, and likely also a son and a nephew
While the women settle in one of the rows in front of me
The man plants himself right next to me

I then do the unthinkable: I turn and look up at him
Beard, full and wild, hair, long and braided
Skin, smooth, the darkest shade of brown imaginable
Blue jeans, well-worn, a tent of a T-shirt, the color of dried blood
I look down: Feet and rubber slippers, the largest I have ever seen

All the while, he pays no notice to his curious, blond neighbor
He sits upright, hands resting on knees, gaze unwavering
His calm, physical presence radiates timelessness
It is as if I am now witnessing the last Hawaiian
Communing with the most powerful creations of his people

My mind races, but one thought is clear:
This moment will never return

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Fear driven, we gather at this place of dread, island boys of tender age
Bowling to the will of a distant government waging yet another war in a
distant place

We have been summoned to be registered, they say, but where will it end?
As wounded? As missing? As the decaying contents of a flag-draped coffin?
Or as just another young spirit broken by systematic humiliation?

Some pace to and fro, some sit bent forward
But we all struggle with ourselves, desperate to master nerves running wild
For we know, here at this threshold to earthly damnation
That we may soon be reduced to human chattel in uniform
To the expendable members of a dubious culture
A culture of advertising and entertainment at home
A culture of defoliation and carpet-bombing abroad

Then the realization: Here we stand as equals before an unknown fate
The lawyer's son from Kāhala, the construction worker's son from Nānākuli
The speaker of Standard English, the speaker of Pidgin
United, if only for a moment, in our fear of a paranoid empire's insanity

Weeks pass . . . I am spared! It is official
But the war continues, as does a familiar sight on Honolulu's streets:
The bumper sticker upon the off duty soldier's pickup truck shouting
AMERICA – LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT
I leave. I grow old abroad

TEMPLE OF PU‘UKOHOLĀ

Coastal winds, dry and warm, buffet me
Forgotten the long approach, for I have arrived
My first thought, my only thought: So small I am, so very small!
I strain to see the sky's blue beyond the lava browns and grays that
 tower above
Great sloping walls made of countless round stones,
 the labor of thousands
Ominous the absence of the ancients at this powerful place

Then back to Camp Honokaia, our bus slowly climbing the dirt road
Leaving a trail of reddish-brown dust behind us
A shout! One of the boys has taken a stone from the temple!
The transgression makes us fear the coming night, and the nights to come
We all shout at him until he, panic-stricken,
Hurls it out of an open window