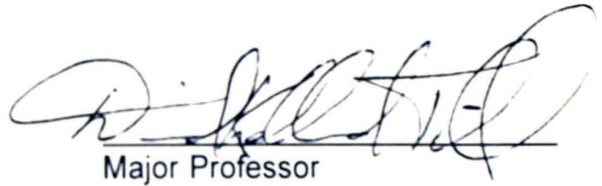


VICTORIA'S SECRET: A NOVELLA

VICTORIA LOUISE BATTEN

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Creative Thesis written by Victoria Louise Batten entitled Victoria's Secret. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.



Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:




Second Committee Member



Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate Council:



Dean of Graduate School

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Date August 12, 1994

Victoria's Secret: A Novella

An Abstract
Presented to
the Graduate Council
of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of
the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Victoria Louise Batten

July, 1994

It is in Victoria's Secret where Vicky, a little girl mixed with Apache Indian, Puerto Rican, and Black, tries to understand why all members of the Makalii family treat her as an animal, as an outcast, as the last black nigger slave on earth.

Surrounding Vicky's need to know why she had been taken away from her mother, raised and mistreated by people much darker than she, is her need to know why her little white sister Tiare was taken from her. Throughout her childhood Vicky sensed a conspiracy by others to take from her everything she loved, down to the dog she slept with for months. She blamed Whites, Hawaiians, Blacks, and her mother Louise for what she had gone through. Yet throughout Victoria's Secret fragmentary scenes reveal that despite Victoria's heavy drinking, her early death and Louise's drinking and whoring, her kids' suffering, as a family, they persevered. But Louise becomes a burden for her children; she becomes a mother who never told them, "I'm sorry." Despite Frank's sleeping with Victoria's daughter, Louise, his jail time for manslaughter and getting away with murder, he dies taking the truth with him; he dies believing he is Theresa's father. Despite Theresa's preoccupation with stuffing her mouth, her incestuous relationship with her brother, John, her family survives. Despite Donna's popping valium and drinking Wild Irish Rose, she searches for the baby she could never have, she lives by drowning her sorrows in the bottle. Despite Johnny Boy's blood condition and his passing it on to others, he fights like a warrior to stay alive, to live; he believes he can conquer the disease. And despite Vicky's guilt for having named her son Boy, for being a stuck up kid, she strives to make it in life; she believes her imaginary world the real world.

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The last time Frank saw Vicky he put her on a plane to her mother in California. Anne, Frank's wife, kicked Vicky out of their house when she was only fourteen. Anne had had enough of her when Vicky scratched her face, leaving a three-inch scar makeup could not cover.

After living with Louise for only two years, Vicky was taken from her mother a second time and placed in a school for girls. Vicky was a mess. Ronnie, her son, was left in Louise's care. While in school, Vicky had help. She did well; she worked very hard on herself. When she was eighteen years old, Judge Cohen emancipated Vicky after she completed her program, got a grip on life. Vicky likened her freedom to the way slaves felt when President Lincoln signed into federal law the Emancipation Proclamation. She was a freed slave after ten years of state bondage.

After she had been on her own for a short while with Ronnie, four years old by now, Vicky left California for Hawaii, trailing her mother who had moved back there six months earlier. Although they had never been out of touch, Vicky's six-month's stay with her sister on the Big Isle gave the two a chance to rekindle their relationship, to make up for lost time. Theresa helped Vicky get back on her feet before she moved to Oahu, the island their mother and grandfather lived on. Vicky intended to stay away from her mother; she intended to stay out of her mother's life. Her grandfather wouldn't let her.

* * *

After learning their mother's secret, Vicky called Theresa. Theresa hated Louise more than Vicky did. Theresa saw first-hand what her mother had become. And

Theresa saw the pain and suffering that her sister Vicky had to go through because of their mother.

"Hello."

"Charmaine, where's your mother?"

"Oh. Hi, auntie Vicky."

"Hi. How are you doing?"

"Fine."

"How's school?"

"Good."

"Are you still a virgin? You're not having sex with Ronald, are you?"

"Nooo," Charmaine whined.

"Nooo?" mimicked Vicky.

"I mean, yes."

"You are?" Vicky taunted.

"Auntie, I'm still a virgin."

"Then why are you on the pill?" asked Vicky in a stern and motherly tone.

"To regulate my period," Charmaine replied.

"Yeah, sure, that's what I used to say when I was your age.

Go and get your mom."

"Vicky, you dog!" Theresa yelled. "Why you take so long to call?"

"It's only been three weeks, Theresa."

"I tried to call you a couple of weeks ago, but your phone was cut off."

"Oh. yeah. I changed my phone number. Too many crank callers. But I got one of them back," Vicky said.

"How?"

"I answered the phone one night and whoever was on the other end said, 'Hhhhhh, hhhhhhhh, hhhhhhhh.' When the caller was finished, I said, 'Hhhhhhhh, hhhhhhhhhh, hhhhhhhhhh, hhhhhhhhhh,' much louder, and the caller hung up on me." They both wailed with laughter.

"Are you going to the reunion at mama's on the first?" Vicky asked.

"Yeah. I'll be there with my family."

"You sure sound excited about it."

"No. No. I'll be there."

"Good, because guess what?"

"What?"

"Guess who's your father? And don't say Figueroa," Vicky teased.

"What the hell are you talking about."

"Grandpa finally told me the truth."

"The truth about what?" Theresa asked.

"The truth about the night he screwed mama on the bathroom floor. Then three months later mama told grandpa that she was pregnant. Mama was pregnant with you!"

"Fuck you!" Theresa said.

"Fuck you!" Vicky followed. "You know grandpa tells the truth when he drinks."

He was tipsy when he told me what happened."

"No wonder I have toes like grandpa."

"That's right. And mama blamed her pregnancy on Figueroa to hide the truth from grandma." Vicky said.

"That's why grandpa visited us at the Makalii's. He never visited John and Donna at the Kealoha's," Theresa said. "He knew I was his daughter."

"Theresa, please, don't mention those damn Makaliis. That's the worst foster home I ever lived in. Thank God you were there with me."

"What about the time when you lived with the preacher, Frank? Wasn't that a bad foster home?" Theresa asked.

"That was a bad one, too. That jerk knew I was ripe for the taking. I was only eleven, you know. He was sick."

"Why'd you let him fuck you?" Theresa asked.

"I didn't. It just happened. Besides, I used it against him. I told Frank he'd better not let his wife hit me for any reason or I'd tell my social worker he was molesting me. She continued; so I told."

"And what did your social worker do?"

"Nothing! She asked if I liked it."

"She was sicker than the preacher."

"Not really. I remember once when Frank gave me a licking for cutting class, I threatened to tell his father he'd touch me all over when I'd be sleeping. And guess what he did?"

"What?"

"He handed me the belt from around his hips, took his shirt off, sat down on the floor, and told me to whip him for all the things he had done to me."

"What did you do?"

"I threw the belt down and ran out of the house. The man was sick."

"I know what you mean," Theresa said. "I was only molested at the Makalii's. I don't think I could've handled being hit the way you were."

"Tiare was the luckiest. She had a good family."

"Vicky, I remember the horrible things the Makaliis used to do to you. You suffered the most. I would cry at night in my bed because I couldn't help you."

"Theresa, stop the pity. I faced the horror once; I won't face it again." Vicky cried.

"You have to! You should write a book about it. You know, write about the horrors we all went through."

"Be for real, Theresa. I can't write about that."

"I am being for real. People like that kind of tragic stuff."

"But I'm shame. And anyway, who cares about what we went through?"

"People care. They get off on other people's miseries, you know, miseries like the time Millie spat thick, green spit on you, or when she threw bleach and Rinso on you, burned your skin. She must've been trying to lighten your black skin," Theresa laughed.

"You know how prejudiced she was."

"Don't laugh at me," Vicky said, offensively.

"Even better would be the time uncle Kainoa gave you licking for smelling stink."

"For smelling stink? I don't remember."

"How could you forget. He used to give you licking because you had stink underarms."

"Oh, yeah, I remember now. But it wasn't my fault. Auntie Margaret wouldn't buy me deodorant, and Millie, she hated me because I was Puerto Rican, Indian, and Black. She always said I was a bean-eating, rain-dancing, black nigga. I hated her."

"Forget about her. Vicky, remember the diary you used to keep when you were eight years old?" Theresa asked.

"Yeah."

"You wrote all about the things the Makaliis used to do to you. That's what I mean--write about those things now," Theresa encouraged.

"Stop, Theresa. I dealt with the pain once; that's enough for me."

"No it's not. Write about them; write about all of us."

"Well, how come you made me throw away my diary?"

"How come? We would've gotten licking if auntie Margaret read it. She would've found out that I was pregnant."

"So what was new? I got used to the beatings. I enjoyed them. Sometimes I even looked forward to them. I remember how I braced my body stiff for Kainoa's hardest punches. He couldn't hurt me by the time I was ten. But don't worry. I got him and Debbie back."

"How?" Theresa asked.

"When Kainoa or Debbie would tell me, 'get me ice wada you black nigga,' I'd

hurry up and do it. Then I'd spit in their water or add powder into their water from the medicine I found in the kitchen cabinet. I watched them drink from their glasses. Once, after putting too much powder in Debbie's water, I laughed at her on the inside when she started washing dishes, sweeping the kitchen floor, and dusting the furniture really fast."

"You could have killed her, Vicky," Theresa said.

"Serves that bitch right!"

"I think you're talking about the pills prescribed by auntie Margaret's doctor."

"They were pink," Vicky mentioned.

"Pink ladies. That was the name of the speed auntie Margaret was taking to lose weight. Vicky! You used to do that? I don't remember reading that in your diary."

"That's right! And I'm proud of it too. At least I got back at them somehow. Biting myself out of frustration wasn't working anymore. And since when you're so holy? Why don't you write a book? I know what Kainoa and David used to do to you when they made me leave the room at night," Vicky said, annoyed by Theresa's pity for her.

"Be quiet!"

"And I used to see uncle Kainoa on top of you early in the morning, before he went to work."

"Shut up, Vicky."

"I guess auntie Margaret hardly gave him any. She was too busy giving it to Buster, huh?"

"So you knew all of that?" Theresa asked.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me you knew?"

"I didn't want to make you ashamed."

"I'm not ashamed!" Theresa screamed. "I hate all those fucking assholes!"

"So what exactly did Kainoa and David make you do to them?" Vicky asked.

"Suck their dicks."

"Is that why you like, you know, giving head?" Vicky asked.

"I guess I like giving head as much as you like being hit."

"We're sure sick. I like fists in my mouth; you like dicks in yours."

"Ha, ha, ha. I know," Theresa admitted.

"But I'll tell you something. Anyone who puts a hand on me now better be ready to fight for a couple of hours. That's what makes being hit so good. The harder they hit, the crazier I go."

"Sounds like me with whiskey," Theresa interrupted.

"Must be the Apache," Vicky suggested.

* * *

Louise never cried at her mother's funeral. She couldn't. She was numb. Her children weren't enough company to ease her grief. Shortly after her mother's death, booze and men kept Louise company. Louise blamed her drinking and whoring on her dead mother. Someone had to take the blame. Using her dead mother as a scapegoat allowed Louise to live her life boozing and fucking. She drank, fought, tricked, slept, and

drank, fought, tricked, and slept. She held in her guilt; it got the best of her.

And Frank knew that he had played a role in Victoria's early death. Like Victoria's sons, Johnny and Stanley, who caused her many problems, Frank knew that he worried Victoria. He leached off of her, wouldn't marry her, fooled around on her, beat her when he felt like it, and was absent when she fell to her death. He didn't even go to her funeral. He couldn't.

When Victoria died Frank was finishing up the last month of his two-year jail term for accidentally running over a Japanese woman after drinking a pint of moonshine and smoking a joint. He didn't even see the lady until her head hit and cracked the windshield of his car after he screeched to a stop and passed out at the wheel. Victoria couldn't handle her two violent sons, her thoughtless daughter, and her wild grandchildren during Frank's absence. They demanded too much from her. Her blood pressure stayed high; she never complained.

Victoria's death came as a surprise to her children. The morning had gone well. Louise received her May foodstamps and had just gone grocery shopping. Victoria straightened up her apartment, moving square pieces of furniture around. After dusting off the picture of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, she admired it. She thought his picture complemented her living room. Tiare and Vicky sat on the kitchen floor, finishing up their oatmeal. They resembled one another in many ways except for skin color and hair texture. Vicky was black; Tiare was white.

The kitchen walls were bare, save for the dried bunch of red chile peppers hanging on the wall above the sink to ward off evil spirits from entering the house

through the kitchen window.

After her grandchildren finished eating, Victoria got on her hands and knees; she scrubbed the kitchen floor. She had a white diaper around her head to hide her matted hair. The knee-high floral dress she wore was loose enough to give her elbow room. She scrubbed the floor for two hours, wiping the sweat from her brow with a piece of the diaper that hung down on the right side of her neck, while Louise slept on her bed, while her sons shot the bull with their friends on the porch, while her grandchildren played, fought, and cried, and while Frank did his time.

Louise, Stanley, and Johnny tried to make some sense of their mother's death, fist fighting and blaming each other for her fatal stroke, as she lay on the concrete pavement with a spoon shoved down her throat.

Vicky vividly remembered how her grandmother died. Like her sisters and brother, Vicky thought her grandmother was playing a joke on them when her body suddenly stiffened and fell head first off the porch. Victoria had been telling Rosita, a neighbor, how to make Spanish rice when she got dizzy, lost her balance, and fell. When Vicky heard her grandmother's head crack against the concrete pavement, she knew that Victoria wasn't playing. Victoria's grandchildren screamed, and Vicky ran to her mother, asleep on Victoria's bed, yelling, "Grandma dead! Grandma dead!" Louise jumped off the bed and they both ran towards the porch, knocking over the cardboard boxes and wooden crates Victoria furnished her apartment with. Everyone panicked when Johnny frantically shoved a tablespoon down his mother's throat. "Keep her jaw open! Don't let it lock or she'll swallow her tongue!" Louise yelled.

"No die, grandma. No die," Theresa cried. But it was too late. Like Johnny, Victoria gave an awful moan when her jaw locked around the table spoon and her throat muscles opened up for her tongue. Johnny continued to pry his mother's mouth open with the warped spoon until Louise and Stanley yanked him away from her. They fought, while Victoria's grandchildren cried.

It was 1964. Victoria died not knowing that her daughter slept with Frank. Victoria hadn't suspected that anything had gone on between the two. She hadn't even the slightest clue that the argument between them on New Year's Day, 1955, was over the baby Louise claimed was her mother's boyfriend's.

While her girlfriends had had the time to go out on dates, to go to the movies, and to go to Ayalas, a club where Puerto Ricans gathered to merenge, cachi-cachi, and cha cha, Louise stayed home.

When Louise threatened Frank that she would tell Victoria the truth, Frank talked her out of it. When Louise decided that she would kill Theresa by placing her in their gas oven, blowing out its pilot light and turning it on, Frank struggled with her for the baby. While they pulled and tugged on Theresa's arms and legs, Victoria walked into the kitchen. They were silent when Victoria came in to see what they were squawking about. "What's going on?" asked Victoria. Victoria looked at Louise and Louise looked at Frank.

"You tell her, Frank," cried Louise, as she ran off, leaving Theresa in his arms.

"Well, what's da matta?" asked Victoria, as her blood pressure rose.

"Wouisa, Louisa's too young. She no can handle da baby. She like act her age

again," Frank said, as he stirred the pigs' feet boiling in the pot with one hand and held Theresa with the other. He avoided Victoria's eyes.

"Too bad! I told da girl, no take off your pantaletas to lie down wit one boy. She neva listen. Now she gotta take care of da baby. I told her Figueroa was no good, fooling around with all da Borinquenas at Ayalas.

Frank looked at Victoria, his lover of ten years, and thought, "If you only knew, if you only knew."

"Wouisa, come get your baby! Come get your baby!" Victoria entered her bedroom and slammed the door.

* * *

It didn't matter to Vicky, though, that her grandfather and her mother had had a fling behind her grandmother's back. Vicky loved Frank dearly. She could not find fault with him, not even when he told her about the rendezvous he had with her mother when her mother was only fifteen.

On her way home from work Vicky stopped over to her grandfather's house, something she did at least once a week. Frank lived in an apartment complex for elderly people on SSI. It sat in the heart of Honolulu, not far from the very streets where Louise made her living after her mother died. Vicky's grandfather was getting old, and she sensed his loneliness and isolation. But her visit, this time, had an altogether different purpose.

Entering her grandfather's apartment, Vicky noticed that Frank was drinking, something he had done most of his life. Frank offered her a cup of coffee. Vicky accepted, and began making it herself.

She was anxious about this visit. She had news to tell him about the visit Theresa received from John Figueroa, a week earlier.

Frank was in his late sixties; he had a heart as strong as an ox. Although he spoke Pidgin English, Frank had a knack for the language. He enjoyed reading Western novels. He relished the days of the wild, wild west. Those days reminded him of his own, when he fancied himself an outlaw, wore a pistol, and used it when he had to.

After making her cup of coffee, Vicky sat down across from him. The dinette set was Frank's life. On it lay a deck of cards; Frank spent hours playing solitaire. There were all sorts of Cowboy books. The Good, The Bad, The Ugly, A Fist Full of Dollars, Outlaw Jose Wales, Rio Lobo, and True Grit were just a few of his favorites. A pack of Kool cigarettes lay upon the morning's Honolulu Advertiser. The ashtray overflowed with butts.

Frank's apartment had a Spanish motif. He had been a paniolo, a Spanish cowboy in his time. A large sombrero decorated the wall above the black couch. Maracas, bongos, and castanets added to the motif. A ceramic bull and bullfighter took space on the cocktail table; lamps, with red velvet and gold fringes on their shades, sat on each end table. "What did you cook for dinner, grandpa?" Frank did the cooking while his wife, Anne, worked.

"Raw fish and rice," Frank replied.

"That's all?" Vicky asked.

"Of course. It's only for me. Anne going eat out with her friend, tonight."

"Got any left?" Vicky asked.

"In da icebox," Frank replied. "Da raw fish real hot. I put a lot of chile peppa inside."

"That's how I like it. Did you mush 'um with plenty soyu?" Vicky loved it when Frank used his hands to mix and marinate the raw tuna in soy sauce.

"But, of course. Ah, babe, how many more days 'till da first?" asked Frank, as Vicky walked into the kitchen.

"Why?" Vicky asked.

"No worry about it. Just tell me," Frank insisted.

"Why, grandpa? You got a hot date?" Vicky taunted.

"Shut up," Frank said, and laughed, showing his toothless gums. "I was trying to figa out how much longa before my SSI check comes," Frank mentioned.

"You need money?" Vicky asked, while she put the raw fish back into the icebox after making herself a small plate of fish and rice.

"Just a few dollars for cigarettes," Frank replied.

"Are you out?"

"I still got a couple packs left."

"I'll bring you a carton of Kools tomorrow," Vicky said. "You only got eleven days left until the first. But you won't get your check then. It will probably come on the second. January 1, 1981, is a holiday. Remember grandpa?"

"Oh, yeah. I forgot. But das not too long."

Vicky sat down on the dinette chair. She began to eat. Meanwhile, Frank fixed himself another Seven-Seven. He walked awkwardly back to the table and sat down. Vicky ate and talked. "Grandpa, guess who visited Theresa?"

"Who?"

"Theresa's father. Figueroa."

"Her fada?" Frank asked. Vicky noticed that Frank's face was flushed; she said nothing. Frank, silent, save for the loud sips and gulps he took from his glass, remembered what he and Louise had done years earlier. Frank had loved her as a father would love his own child when she was a little girl, he loved her even more after they had sex, but he hated her when she slept around and neglected her kids. Now that she and Vicky were back in Hawaii and Louise planned a reunion for January 1, Frank found the perfect moment to hurt Louise for her leaving him and her kids.

"Yes. Her fada," Vicky replied, toying with Frank's dialect.

"Let me tell you something, negrita," said Frank, as he gained his composure.

"Das not Theresa's fada; I am."

"What?" Vicky was confused. Frank wouldn't let Vicky stay out of her mother's life or let her mother stay out of hers. As they both sat at the coffee table, Frank sipped from his glass of Seagram's Seven and Seven-Up, and Vicky from her cup of coffee. While Frank told his story to Vicky, she listened intently.

"You see, babe," Frank grinned, "you mada, she come in da batchroom one night when I was taking a bat. You grandmada was in bed, sick with her diabetes and

asthma; she had too much to drink at Ayalas da night before. She neva even know what was going on. Anyway, once you mada was in da batchroom, she went take off all her clothes and said, 'Frank, I know you like me. We go do it on da floor.' Naturally, I give you mada what she wanted. I laid her on da floor and had my way wit her. Tree months lata, you mada told me, 'I'm pregnant.' So you see, babe--John not Theresa's fada; I am."

Frank smiled and lit a cigarette. He got it off his chest; he relaxed his shoulders. Telling Vicky what he had done to her grandmother was like confessing it to Victoria herself. Frank always said that Vicky was the spitting image of her grandmother. Yet he knew that Vicky wouldn't keep this secret. Frank wanted her to tell it. Frank wanted Vicky to torture her mother with it. Frank wanted Vicky to hate her.

* * *

The next time Vicky saw Frank, he lay in a coffin. Theresa didn't show up for his funeral. She didn't want to talk about it. Vicky wept silently as she viewed Frank's body from a distance. Jack, Vicky's husband, stood by her side to lend a hand. Louise sat in one of the chairs meant for close relatives under the guise of the grieving daughter. She was out of place. Louise became the center of attention at Frank's wake and upset its tone for everyone but Vicky, who found the courage to approach Frank's coffin; she snapped pictures of him. The sound of the camera's clicking seemed endless; its flashes blinded the guests' eyes.

Vicky hadn't said goodbye to Frank out of love or to Louise out of hate. She couldn't. She had known that she was leaving for good. She moved to the South to attend college; she believed it had the answers to all of her questions. She hoped to graduate in 1990. She hoped to be back in Hawaii before Frank died. He only made it to 1988. Vicky had a hunch that the next time she'd see her grandfather, he'd be dead. She hoped it would be her mother. But the sight of Louise sitting in a chair next to Frank's coffin made Vicky pity her mother for the very first time. Louise hadn't earned the right to sit there; Louise was shamed.

Vicky had been gone for nearly three years, living in Georgia, learning to write when she got word of Frank's death. She expected the call from Theresa about his death after she had a dream of her grandfather; he had wanted to know if she was coming to his funeral. She explained the dream to her sister.

"Hello."

"Theresa, it's me."

"Vicky, how are you doing?"

"Fine. How's grandpa?"

"Okay."

"When did you see him last?"

"He just left my house two weeks ago. He's back in Honolulu."

"How's his health?"

"Good. But you know he's getting old."

"I know. I think he's going to die soon."

"Don't say that."

"Really, Theresa. I had a dream of grandpa."

"What about?"

"Well, grandpa came into my dream and asked me, 'Negrita, you coming to my funeral or what?' And I told him not to worry because I'd be there. I called him before I called you and told him not to die yet. I asked him to hold on until I came home. And all he said was, 'You shut up; you shut up.'"

* * *

Vicky intended to learn to write to pay her mother back; she wanted to write to help shame her more. She had had some experience writing during her childhood. It was Mrs. Hanabata, Vicky's English teacher in grammar school, who first encouraged her to write. Vicky took great interest in her English class. Mrs. Hanabata praised her when she did well. Mrs. Hanabata encouraged all of her students to keep a diary outside of class, but she encouraged Vicky more. She knew Vicky had something to tell.

Vicky had been living with the Makaliis for nearly three years when she began her diary:

September 3, 1967

Dear God, I hate living with the Makaliis. They treat me mean. When auntie Margaret and uncle Kainoa get mad at me, they call me black nigga. But auntie Margaret is so

pretty. She has long black hair and white skin. She's a little Portugese. Uncle Kainoa looks like a gorilla with straight hair.

September 8, 1967

Dear God, I don't know why they treat me mean. Uncle Kainoa is blacker than me and he still calls me black nigga. I'm sorry, God, but I hate them all, except for Theresa and grandma Sampio.

September 10, 1967

Dear God, I'm sorry, but I bit the dog really hard today. Uno lifted his leg on the part of the floor I sleep on.

September 12, 1967

Dear God, Mrs. Hanabata asked me who bit my arms. I told her I did. Her eyes got watery. Yesterday night, Grandpa asked me why I eat with the dog. I told him I sleep with the dog, so I eat with it. He said the f---, g-- d---, and the s-- o- b----words to auntie Margaret and uncle Kainoa. I got licking when grandpa left.

September 13, 1967

Dear God, the best fun I have at the Makalii's is when auntie Margaret and uncle Kainoa take us to polo every other Sunday. I like to watch auntie Margaret's brother, uncle Tuna Sampio, ride his horse real fast and hit the ball with his polo stick. He's the best polo player in Hawaii. I always sleep over his house and they treat me nice. They live in a nice house on plenty land and with horses. I play with his daughters Lisa and Renee. On the other Sundays we go to the Marine Base, to the beach, or around the island. Uncle Kainoa is a diver. The base is close to our house. Kaneohe is the best part of Oahu because uncle Kainoa says that the big koolau ranges divide us from the city in Honolulu.

September 15, 1967

Dear God, Kainoa locked me out of the house. I was stuck in the rain. He said I didn't live here. Then uncle Kainoa gave me a licking for not picking up Uno's poop in the patio. Auntie Margaret cut off all of my hair because I had too many bugs in it. The medicine shampoo didn't kill them. Now I look like one boy. I'm shame to go to school. And we can't go fishing at the base or to polo or anywhere for a long time. Uncle Kainoa got the benz. He came up too fast from the bottom of the ocean. I'm sorry, God, but I hope he dies.

October 10, 1967

Dear God, Mrs. Hanabata keeps telling us to tell the truth in our diaries. I am telling the truth.

October 21, 1967

Dear God, they call me one stink black nigga and spit on me. Auntie Millie threw Rinso and Clorox on me. She gave me a hot rash. They make me sleep on the floor with Uno. I love him. He licks my face in the morning. Kainoa punched my arm for a long time. I have a big bruise on it.

October 29, 1967

Dear God, uncle Kainoa took Uno for a ride. He's never coming back. I like die.

November 15, 1967

Dear God, I'm so happy Mrs. Hanabata is my English teacher. Grandpa bought me new shoes to wear to school. I love him. Uncle Kainoa kicked me in my stomach because I told Cindy to shut up. She said I was stink. I couldn't breathe after he kicked me. Kainoa beat me up today because he said I was a black nigga.

February 10, 1968

Dear God, Debbie and Kainoa tell me go get me ice wada you black nigga. I spat in Debbie's water today. I watched her drink it. I was happy. My real grandma came in the room last night. She died a long time ago. I saw her touching Theresa's hair. She was crying when she left.

February 24, 1968

Dear God, Auntie Millie smeared her rag in my face. It stunk. Debbie laughed. When I get big, I going smear mine in their babies' faces.

March 5, 1968

Dear God, auntie Margaret said my mother was a whore, so I clogged up the toilet bowl with toilet paper. She had to pay money to fix it.

May 15, 1968

Dear God, I heard grandma Sampio die today. Poor grandma Sampio. She was the only one who treated me nice. I don't know how she had mean daughters like auntie Millie and auntie Margaret. Grandma Sampio never knew it, but I loved her.

May 16, 1968

Dear God, auntie Millie pulled my hair and bit me on the arm. She was mad that her mom died. Then she spat thick, green spit on me. When I turn ten I'm running away from this house.

August 12, 1968

Dear God, I learned in my history class that in the mainland black people were slaves a long time ago. But President Lincoln set them free when he wrote the Emancipate Proclaim. I think he forgot to free me. I think I'm the last black nigga slave on earth.

September 23, 1969

Dear God, auntie Millie smeared her baby's do-do diaper on my hair. She's mad because her husband has a girlfriend. When I get big I'm going to beat her up.

October 8, 1969

Dear God, old man Kainoa came in the house last night. I saw his shadow. It was black, not gray like old man ghost's. Grandpa Makalii coughed himself to death a long time ago. I remember him when he was alive. He scared me because he had red, beady eyes. I knew he was a kahuna. I wouldn't look in his eyes, but he could still

know me. He always gave me boiled bananas, raw fish and poi. He talked Hawaiian to me, too. I understood him.

October 14, 1969

Dear God, I saw uncle Kainoa on top of Theresa last night. She was crying. He was making soft, funny noises. He was saying come on, come on, hurry, hurry. I hate when he does that to my sister.

December 13, 1969

Dear God, Kainoa beat me up after he finished poking a needle in his arm. Whenever auntie Margaret and uncle Kainoa go bowling, Kainoa lets his friends come over and they share the same needle. He always makes me get them a spoon and cotton. Then they make me watch. I'm going to tell on him one day.

January 3, 1970

Dear God, Mrs. Hanabata took me to the principal's office. She wanted me to tell Principal Tokuda why I had stitches on my forehead, a bruise on my cheek, and a busted lip. I told him that I fell out of the mango tree when I tried to pick one big, fat, juicy ripe mango. Mrs. Hanabata's eyes got watery like before. She said that Hawaii wasn't in mango season. I started crying because she said she was going to call the

police. I asked her not to because the police would take me and my sister away from each other. She didn't. Mr. Tokuda stared at me. He was quiet.

January 21, 1970

Dear God, Theresa got a good licking from uncle Kainoa because she lets her boyfriend, Mike, come over late at night when everybody's sleeping. I got a better licking from uncle Kainoa for telling.

May 1, 1970

*Dear God, auntie Margaret gave Theresa a licking for fainting when she sprayed hair spray in Theresa's locks. Auntie Millie said Theresa was pregnant. Theresa said she wasn't. But school was fun. We had May Day today and got to ribbon the merrypole. I played the ukelele with my class, too. We sang **Hawaii Pono E**.*

June 15, 1970

Dear God, Theresa cut her wrist with a razor blade. She needed enough blood to put on a kotex. Auntie Margaret wants to see a bloody kotex from Theresa for two months straight. Auntie Margaret thinks Theresa is having a baby. I know she is. Theresa told me so. I'm happy.

July 22, 1970

Dear God, Theresa borrowed Angie's bloody kotex to show auntie Margaret that she started her period. Now auntie Margaret won't ask to see anymore of them.

October 8, 1970

Dear God, Theresa's stomach is getting big. She showed it to me. I ain't going to tell on her. She won't let uncle Kainoa get on her anymore. I wake up every morning at 5:30 to tell Theresa to turn over on her stomach and to hide it from uncle Kainoa when he passes our room and peeps in it to look at her. He might see her fat stomach. And Theresa's going to name her baby Charmaine if it's a girl and Michael if it's a boy. I hope it's a girl.

* * *

Vicky had another story to tell, though, a story which would shame her mother, a story which would expose her mother for who and what she was. But the encouragement to write about their mother and past came not from a teacher, but from Vicky's sister, Theresa. Not only would Vicky write to shame her mother, to give her sisters and brothers revenge against their mother, but Vicky would also write to try to understand why she had been the last black nigga on earth.

* * *

Of all Louise's children Tiare fared best. She was never passed from home to home, molested, or beaten. She was half white. The whiter you are the better you fare. Even Louise said that her other children were victims of the "nigger syndrome." Slaves! That's all they were, a bunch of slaves to the whims of those Hawaii called their guardians.

Louise was to blame! Her kids paid.

Tiare didn't suffer because she was fair, with dirty-blond ringlets and green eyes. But Vicky wouldn't know her if she saw her. They spent so little time together, and Vicky loved her dearly. It's been so many years since Vicky saw her last, and ohhh how she'd love to know her. When Tiare was three and Vicky four, they'd play, fight, sleep, eat, bathe, cry, and beg for food together. But Louise took Tiare away from Vicky. Louise sold the white girl; she kept the worthless nigger.

Vicky knows Tiare doesn't remember her. Louise thought it was for the best that she give Tiare away to people like her. Louise didn't know who Tiare's father was and the pressure of Tiare asking caught Louise off guard. When Louise's tricks came to the house, Tiare would ask, "Is that my daddy, mama? Is that my daddy?" Even to the darkest of men Tiare would ask, "Are you my daddy?" She didn't know color. And she didn't know that she was a trick-or-treat baby. Tiare was born on October 31, 1961. And it didn't matter to Vicky that Tiare's skin was light and hers dark. Tiare was her sister. And it didn't matter to the two that they didn't pass as sisters. They had each

other.

Vicky remembered some of the bad but mostly the good times she shared with Tiare when Louise left all her kids home alone without any food in the house. It all started when Victoria died.

Vicky was Victoria's favorite. Victoria called her negrita. But Victoria was sickly with diabetes, and couldn't handle Theresa, Donna, Johnny Boy, Vicky, and Tiare all at once. They drove her to her asthma attacks when they fought. Theresa used to rub her grandma's back during an attack, while Victoria gasped for air. Theresa owed her life to Victoria. Victoria saved her from the gas oven. And Victoria's hands were full with Johnny. He was crazy. He gave his mother a hard time. He made Theresa put her mouth on his prick, and he showed it to Vicky and Tiare. It was ugly; it scared them. Yet Vicky doesn't pity the girl her uncle Stanley and his friends raped. And she doesn't blame her uncle Johnny for throwing her off the At-Last Bridge. After watching Jezebel get lined up by his brother and friends, six in all, Johnny didn't want to come last; he refused to screw the girl. After Jezebel threatened to accuse Johnny of rape if he didn't lay her, Johnny picked her up, walked her up the hill to the top of the bridge. Stanley and his friends cheered him on, thinking that he was going to fuck her on top of it. Instead, Johnny threw her off the bridge, watched her as she fell close to five stories and landed on the debris discarded under it. Jezebel was left for dead. She wasn't dead, though, just numb from the neck down. She came through on her word when she was found. Johnny took the rap like a man; he didn't snitch on his brother or friends. While serving his time in Koolau Boy's Home, Johnny became a victim to fate. During

a construction project at the home, a large piece of metal swinging down from a crane cracked him on the temple. It was a wonder he was still alive after the accident. But to Victoria's despair, Doctor Lum pronounced her son crazy. He looked crazy, too. Johnny stood six feet tall and weighed 220 pounds; his left brow remained arched as high as it could while his right brow lay much lower. The deep gash on his left temple deformed the roundness of his head, making it look like the head of Frankenstein's monster. The brain damage he received from the blow to the temple made him drag his left arm and leg when he walked, and drool as he talked. Unlike Igor, though, only Johnny's left eye bulged out of its socket. Judge Reuben suspended Johnny's five-year term, releasing him into Victoria's care; she did her best to care for her crazy, violent, and perverse-minded son, a son she loved dearly.

* * *

Louise forgot to cry at her mother's funeral. Victoria looked so stiff lying in her pink coffin, dressed in white lace. Victoria's face was made up like a Geisha girl's with white powder and rouge on it to hide the dark stains on her otherwise flawless skin. The dark blue shadow on her eyelids and the cherry red lipstick on her lips livened Victoria's face. She looked like a clown to Vicky and Tiare. Louise was dazed. She sat in a chair meant for grieving children with her eyes of glass, staring just in front of herself but directly past Victoria's coffin. Johnny lifted his mother's upper body out of her casket; he shook her; he tried to wake her up. Stanley sat talking to himself; he sat shaking his

head. He cursed anyone who tried to console him. Theresa, Donna, and Johnny Boy wept, while Vicky and Tiare laughed at their grandmother. To them, she was a clown lying in a magician's box. "Grandma going do magic, Vicky," Tiare said. "She's a clown."

"Let's wait and see her pop out of the box," Vicky said.

"Hee, hee, hee, hee," they giggled.

Louise and Johnny fought after their mother's funeral. Victoria had looked like a slut to Johnny.

Three weeks after Victoria's funeral, Louise moved her family to a Filipino neighborhood in the heart of Honolulu. Frank had just gotten out of jail, but Louise hadn't told him where they lived. Louise needed him the day Victoria died. She needed him to catch her mother as she fell off the porch to her death.

The area Louise moved to was different. It was unlike the projects where Victoria had lived. At least her apartment had had a view of the Arizona Memorial, which stood in honor of those who died during World War II. Victoria had witnessed the attack on Pearl Harbor from the very porch she fell from.

The neighborhood Louise and her children moved to was on Hickina Lane and it had a view of the Filipino slums. Houses on stilts lined the alleyway of Hickina Lane. At the end of this lane was the apartment complex Louise and her children lived in. At the entrance of the alley was a decrepit store owned by an old Japanese couple. The store was green, its paint chipped and flaked with dried algae. But the store was sturdy blocked up two feet off its base.

Louise always bought her rice and manapua from Tamashiro's. Her children loved this type of meat-filled pastry. Whenever they bit into one of the half-circled rice donuts, they knew the type of meat it would be filled with. She had to be very careful who she bought manapua from. The Koreans and Vietnamese filled theirs with cat. And cat tasted nasty. Yet there was no manapua like the manapua the old Chinese man sold. Everyday at 3:00 p.m. after Theresa, Donna, and Johnny Boy got home from school, Louise's kids listened to hear the bell ring.

"Manapua, pepe au," hollered the old man, as he rang the bronze bell he carried with him on his afternoon run through Hickina Lane. They'd run out of the apartment in order to be the first at the old man's side. He was an interesting looking man. His hair, mustache, and beard were long, grey strands that hung down past his shoulders. Vicky could not figure out how he could see. His eyes were practically shut over the dark circles above his cheeks; he was a sight to see.

Over the back of Mr. Wong's neck lay a long bamboo pole. Hanging from the ends of this pole were bamboo steam-baskets filled with freshly made, pork-stuffed manapua and pepe au. Although Louise's children loved oriental pastries, they loved candy more, and the old Chinese man didn't sell candy. That's why they visited Tamashiro's everyday. Upon seeing the old Japanese couple when they entered the store, they'd say, "Hi mamasan and papasan." That was the way to show respect to elderly, oriental people.

Theresa, Donna, Johnny Boy, Tiare, and Vicky knew when the Filipinos were going to have a big party. Luau is the Hawaiian word for big party. A roasted pig is

served at a luau. A roasted dog was the honored guest at a Filipino's party.

As the Filipino men prepared for their feast, black dogs, large and small, sniffed, whimpered, and fought over the smell of blood in the air. Dog blood covered the street. Surviving dogs cried and howled, fearful that they'd be slaughtered and cooked next. Women with water hoses sprayed the area, diluting the blood with water as it found its way to the sewers.

"The blacker the dog, more tender the meat," Vicky once overheard one Filipino lady say to another.

"Yeah, and more juicy, too," the other woman said.

When the Filipino kids invited Vicky, and her sisters and brother to a party, they'd never show up, fearing that they wouldn't be able to tell the pork or beef from the dog meat.

Life was good to Louise and her kids on Hickina Lane. They wore brand new outfits everyday. They ate well. Louise bought them food from Tamashiro's and clothes from the black market. Filipinos were good at blackmarketing. Besides, by the time Louise washed their dirty clothes, they were soiled with mold and mildew. It was easier for her to buy them new outfits to play in. Louise hated washing clothes.

Mamasan and papasan loved it when there was a certain black man hanging around their store. That black man was Vicky's daddy. Vicky and the others jumped with joy when Louise would tell Theresa to take Vicky to the store to see her daddy. Louise wouldn't let him come to the apartment. And Vicky would never forget the good times she shared with her mother and father.

* * *

Mama and me would visit my daddy in this dark room, filled with tables, chairs, and the smell of cigarettes. Pretty ladies visited table after table, returning with glasses filled to their rims with drink for the people sitting at them. I'd see my daddy up on a small stage, sitting behind a piano, singing and smiling with his pearly white teeth. Mama and me sat on odd looking chairs, chairs on stilts, chairs with long legs placed behind a horse-shoe shaped table.

I drank cherry sodas. Mama's drink made her happy. She smiled the whole night, snapping her fingers to the beat of the songs my daddy played on the piano. Every now and then I'd stand up on my chair and shake my booty to a familiar beat.

All kinds of people came to hear my daddy sing. Some of the men came and left with some of the ladies who sat at the same table mama and me sat at.

When mama stopped taking me to see my daddy, my daddy would come to see me at Tamashiro's once every seven days. I used to count them go by.

Theresa, Donna, Johnny Boy, and Tiare walked me to the store. My daddy and me would spend time together while my sisters and brother played with their fingers, watched, and waited.

My daddy was a pianist. Ernest Washington was his name. His hair was wavy, slicked back with pomade, shiny and black. He was short and stout. But his eyes twinkled like stars as they drooped at their ends. When daddy chained-smoked Kools,

the thickness of his lips covered a cigarette's filter, and I could see the smoke pass through his big, flat nose.

I hated when my daddy's visits ended quickly. But Theresa, Donna, and Johnny Boy didn't. After our visit my daddy gave each of us a silver dollar. I often thought the silver dollar he gave me was to make up for lost time. Mamasan and papasan loved my daddy for giving us a silver dollar. Within a week's time we'd spend five silver dollars in their store.

Walking back to our apartment after my visit with my daddy was heaven for us. Our mouths were filled with candy, as were our little brown paper bags. When we'd approach the Filipino section of Hickina Lane, men, sitting on crates, gambled at their chicken fight. Feathers scattered everywhere, as the cocks, up in the air, exchanged blows with blades attached to their feet. The sight of blood coming from the fighting chickens excited the gamblers and the birds, too. The closer we got to our apartment, the closer the Filipino children got to us.

'Nooo!' screamed Theresa, after Jo Jo, one of the Filipino girls I played with, asked me for a piece of candy.

'Vicky's fada came,' yelled Donna, Johnny Boy, and Tiare, as their spit, brown with chocolate, ran down their mouths. Feeling special I stuck my tongue out at Jo Jo, drooling, while trying to control my spit and balance a piece of candy on the tip of my tongue.

Theresa, Donna, and Johnny Boy protected me. They were responsible for me. No one could hit me and get away with it. Not even Tiare was as important as I was

to them. But she was important to me. Tiare was my best friend. She wanted my daddy to be hers. Theresa, Donna, and Johnny Boy didn't. They wanted my daddy's silver dollars.

When mama asked my daddy for money he stopped coming around. He knew I was his. I had his eyes. He cared for all of us. He showed mama how to trick-or-treat for us. I still remember what mama told me when I asked her why my daddy didn't visit me anymore.

'That's a nigger for you. Ask for a little money for his kid and you never see him again.'

* * *

Things changed when Ernest stopped coming around. When Louise's girlfriends came over to the apartment lots of Filipino men did, too. Louise had pretty girlfriends. All of them had curvy bodies, long hair, and big chee-chees. But some of them looked weird.

When Louise's girlfriends went into her children's rooms some of the men followed. Louise kept watch, making her kids stay in the parlor.

It was very busy this one night when a scream coming from the bedroom Theresa, Donna, Tiare, and Vicky shared woke them up as they slept on the parlor floor. Louise ran to where she thought she heard the scream; her kids followed behind her. When they got to their bedroom door, Louise had already swung it open.

"What's wrong?" asked Louise.

"This lady is a man," the Filipino man answered, as he covered himself with a sheet. Louise's kids stared. They never saw anything like it.

"God don't make mistakes," Vicky thought to herself. "God forgot to give her a coochie," she whispered to Theresa.

"Na aah. God forgot to cut off her chee-chees," Johnny Boy said. Then it dawned on them that it must've been the Filipino man who screamed. On busier nights Louise called Frank to get her kids. Vicky was glad she finally told him where they lived. By the time Frank got to the apartment there were men waiting in line on the lanai to take their turns in one of the bedrooms with one of Louise's girlfriends. Some men didn't even mind going with the fag.

"Come on; let's go. This place going get busted," Frank would say as he hurried his grandchildren out of the door to go to eat noodles. Night after night Frank took them to eat saimin, ice-cream, or to the movies. They had fun. Louise's haunted house--that's what the Filipino kids called the apartment Vicky lived in because Louise's girlfriends tricked or treated there. It was Halloween every night at Louise's place.

Vicky thanks God for her grandpa on this one night, though. He saved them all from jail. Vicky tells the story better than Theresa can because her side of it seems never-ending:

Grandpa treated us to Dairy Queen that night. We walked or caught the bus wherever we went with him. He didn't have a car or a driver's license. His license got taken away by the police. We had been gone at least three hours. On our way

back home the cops were just leaving the crime scene: the bedroom my sisters and me shared.

Maybe that lady deserved what she got. Stealing is wrong, you know. It says so in the Ten Commandments. My Catholic priest told me so. He always made Tiare and me say "Thou shalt not steal" over and over again after church when he took Johnny Boy to his bedroom. That's what Johnny Boy called it because there was a chair-bed in it, and the priest made Johnny Boy lay on top of him while the priest lay on top of it.

I overheard mama telling grandpa that her friend was stabbed over and over and over again. She shouldn't have stolen that man's money when he fell asleep after they did, you know, that. Mama's friend tricked and treated Bernardo. She knew that Filipinos carried knives and weren't afraid to use them. After Lucy died, the men stopped coming over and things got worse. Mama left us alone at night. Grandpa came over sometimes, but mostly during the day. He had his own life. Mama slept all day, woke up in the late afternoon, began drinking Vodka and orange juice, made up her face and dressed after showering, and left for the evening unconcerned whether we ate or not. I still remember the day mama gave me a really good licking for being hungry. We didn't have any food in the apartment for days. A friend of mine who lived in the apartment below ours came over with her jar of grape jelly. It didn't matter to us that around the rim of the jar were two or three baby cockroaches that had been squashed as someone twisted the jar's lid back on. This jar of jelly was

half empty. Jo Jo, Tiare, and me had been eating from it for a couple of days, dipping our nasty little fingers as far down as they could reach to get the most jelly out.

Suddenly, Jo Jo covered the jelly jar and sat it on her lap. Tiare and me looked at each other. We didn't understand. 'I'm not going to share my jelly with you guys anymore. You folk are too poor.'

'Okay, wait then,' I said as I slowly got up, went into our bathroom, opened up the cabinet above the sink, watching all the roaches scatter for safety, picked up mama's razor, and removed its double-edged blade. When I returned to the parlor, Jo Jo was in our door way getting ready to leave with her jar of jelly. I slowly walked toward her with the blade in my right hand. As she looked up at me, I raised my right hand and sliced her left cheek open. Her blood gushed. I stood straight up.

'Aaaaaaa!' Jo-Jo screamed. 'You see what you did you stupid black nigga,' as she held her face and ran out of the door. Mama woke up hollering. When she found me hiding in the bare pantry she gave me a licking I still bear the scars for: I hate grape jelly.

* * *

Vicky stood proud against the neighborhood kids she had come to know when Louise packed boxes and men carried them to a waiting truck. They were moving. Vicky overheard Theresa, Donna, and Johnny Boy talking about it. She told Tiare that they were moving, but all Tiare said was, "So?" Theresa and Donna believed that they

would spend the rest of their summer having fun in the sun; they didn't have to worry about getting run over either. There were very few cars in Nanakuli. They were happy. And Vicky didn't miss her daddy anymore. Louise was going to spend more time with them. Living in the country would get her away from Honolulu, the Filipino men, and her naughty girlfriends.

* * *

Summer in Nanakuli was fun. Louise stayed home; she slept a lot. She bought groceries with her foodstamps, but never forgot to buy her Vodka. As long as Vodka made her happy her kids didn't mind if she drank that stuff. Vodka made Louise laugh.

The summer of 1964 passed and the month of October was approaching. Victoria had been dead for nearly six months. Tiare said that her mother was fat. Vicky knew why. Thesesa and Donna told her. Johnny Boy hoped for a boy.

When Terrance was born in November he shook a lot. When he began to crawl he squinted his eyes and bumped his head on the walls. His sisters and brother were happy when he was born. Their mother stayed home to care for him, and they believed that Louise had changed and wanted to love them all. Poor Louise--she was young, pretty, and stuck with five kids and an infant.

When spring, 1965, came around Louise was back to her usual self. Terrance was nearly six months old. Louise made her kids go to the store to buy her gum. They were afraid to pass the ranch on their way back from the store. They thought that the

bulls would rush them when they saw the red pack of Dentyne. Vicky made sure to cover the pack of gum when they passed the bulls in the red wagon Louise bought Tiare for Christmas the year before. She bought Vicky a black doll. Donna called it a black nigga doll.

Donna, Tiare, and Vicky loved the drinking parties Louise had. They drank from her cup. Louise let Vicky drink from her cup because she was her favorite. Vicky was her little nigger. But the stuff in Louise's glass was too strong for Vicky, so she drank beer at the parties. Theresa snuck Donna, Tiare, and Vicky beer into the bathroom while Louise yelled, played cards, and lost money.

Theresa was a sneaky nine-year old who got her sisters drunk; she wouldn't put a bottle to her own lips. But Vicky knew her secret. She knew all her sisters' secrets. Louise was too drunk, snoring as she slept, to hear Theresa cry, "Oweeeee, oweeeee," while Joe screwed her on the parlor floor. Louise was too drunk to even care.

But at least she was happy. Everyone was happy. Louise's kids could get their way on nights like this. Louise even let her children's flea-and worm-infested puppies in the house. They were strays Donna, Johnny Boy, and Vicky found on their way home one day after buying their mother's Dentyne Gum.

Like their apartment on Hickina Lane, the house in Nanakuli became haunted with trickers and treaters--pretty ladies and drunk men. When men began lining up at the door of the bedroom Vicky shared with her sisters, they knew why. There were lots of men waiting at Johnny Boy's bedroom door to take their turn with Diane, Louise's

prettiest girlfriend. And from time to time even Louise would disappear into one of the bedrooms. She made it clear, though, that her children were to stay in the parlor.

Vicky knew why Louise's girlfriends were in the rooms, but she didn't understand why her mother was. Tiare was too busy asking the remaining men in the parlor if one of them was her daddy.

"Are you my daddy?" Tiare asked this pitch-black man. Johnny Boy and Vicky rolled their bodies on the wooden floors; they laughed. Theresa and Donna weren't laughing, though. Theresa snatched Tiare up and looked at the man with her suspecting eyes; he touched himself, there.

On this same night Louise ran into the bathroom just as Vicky was getting off the toilet. Louise had just come from one of the bedrooms. Vicky heard the bedroom door slam shut and got scared, thinking that one of the men was coming into the bathroom. It was her mother. "She must be coming from the bedroom that Diane was in?" Vicky thought. When Louise entered the bathroom she was half dressed. The bathroom was down the hall from the parlor. And Vicky knew that she was to stay there, but she couldn't hold her pee anymore. "Why you naked, mama?" Vicky asked her mother, as she rushed into the bathroom and slammed the door.

"Be quiet and hurry off the toilet" said Louise, as she pulled a miniature, rubber-looking flying saucer out of herself.

The flying saucer was covered in tapioca pudding. Vicky looked at it while Louise held it in display for her. It made Vicky sick. "Ooooh, yuck," Vicky said, as Louise laughed and stuck the flying saucer under the running water that was coming from the

sink's faucet, dried it off with toilet paper, and stuck it back up her. Vicky quickly jumped off the toilet, slipped on her soiled panty, and ran to tell her sister Theresa what she saw.

"Mama's coochie is sick," Theresa was quick to say.

"Na aaahhh. Mama stuck it back up her coochie after she rinsed it off. Then she went into another room."

"Ooooooh, yuckie," Donna and Johnny Boy said, while Tiare gagged.

* * *

Terrance learned to live with tight pains in his stomach, pains Theresa tried to ease with sugar water on the days Frank couldn't bring milk. When Terrance was eight months old, Louise began leaving her kids home alone. Theresa, being the oldest, gathered them into a meeting. She and Donna would pick mangoes, guavas, lilicois, and litchees while Johnny Boy would beg for food, taking Tiare and Vicky along to get their neighbor's pity. "Johnny Boy, when you ask for food, don't forget to ask for a can of cream so Terrance can have a bottle," reminded Theresa.

"No worry. I know how for beg," Johnny Boy said. Poor Terrance whenever he cut a tooth it came in rotten. But he wasn't ashamed to smile. Despite the raw white patches in his mouth and his empty stomach Terrance always found time to smile. And Vicky will never forget the journey Johnny Boy, Tiare, and she took to feed themselves on this balmy afternoon:

While Theresa and Donna lassoed mangoes and litchee from the big trees, Johnny Boy, Tiare, and me walked down Maile Road towards a neighbor's house. We took a brown bag with us to hold the guavas and lilicois we might find growing wild. We saw a Japanese lady gardening in her yard. I was afraid to approach her, but Johnny Boy and Tiare pulled me closer. As she squatted, pulling weeds, Johnny Boy asked her if she had any extra food that she could spare. She looked up at us and we thought that she might offer us last night's leftovers. Instead, she said, 'Get da hell out of hea 'for I call da cops!' We ran from her in a hurry. My feet were trying to catch up with my heartbeats. Johnny Boy was in front of me; Tiare, behind me. We didn't stop running until we heard Tiare's cry. Stopping in our tracks we turned to Tiare and saw pee running down her legs.

'Don't cry, Tiare; you'll dry off,' I said.

'Yeah, don't cry. It's only pee. The sun will dry your panty and shorts,' said Johnny Boy.

The Japanese lady reminded Vicky of an old Chinese man who hit her on the head with his rolled up newspaper for yelling, "1941!" Chinese people didn't like being mistaken for Japanese, especially in Hawaii during the 60s. Anti-Japanese sentiment in Hawaii didn't disappear until the early 70s, nearly 30 years after Japan's involvement in World War II. Vicky was silent when he yelled, "Get da hell out of hea you black nigga!" and hit her on the head. Vicky later learned to distinguish between the different nationalities among the orientals.

Vicky wondered to herself, "Black nigga? I must look like a black nigga. What's a black nigga?"

She was a black nigga like her doll.

As we continued to walk, we saw mongooses running across the dirt road, not having to worry about getting run over, and we not having to worry about snakes. In the country there were hardly any cars for the mongooses to worry about. They crossed the road as if it were a part of their house. And we didn't have to fear snakes. Snakes are prey to mongooses. This is what makes Hawaii such a paradise--no snakes.

Further down the road we saw a brown house. We stopped off at the side of the road to pick and eat pigeon peas off the wild gandule trees that were growing in the thicket to our right. We put some in our bag. After we were tired of gandules, we crossed over to the other side of the road and ate cherry guavas. Johnny Boy skinned his knees when he fell in one of the potholes in the road. Tiare and me picked him up; she smelled like ammonia.

Cherry guavas were smaller than real guavas. They were the size of cherries, but looked exactly like a ripe guava on the inside and the outside. They were tart and nectarous, too. We ate and ate and ate; our tummies swelled; our bag overflowed.

Johnny Boy, Tiare, and me moved towards the little brown house. Tiare smiled and skipped down the road. She was happy now that her panty had dried. I spared her feelings; I didn't tell her that she smelled like pee. Johnny Boy galloped in front of us. He held the bag full of fruit. I twirled myself for a time. My head spinned.

Tiare and me approached the porch of the brown house, while Johnny Boy mounted its stairs. He climbed the stairs as if he were climbing the stairs of a haunted house. We tip-toed behind him. Tiare tried talking to me, pointing out the pretty brown, white, and black spotted cat which lay on its side on a wooden rocking chair to the left of the house's door. It creaked with every switch of the cat's tail. I motioned to Tiare to hush by putting my right index finger to my lips; I stared at her.

We were finally on the porch. We couldn't see Johnny Boy's face, but we could sense his fear. Tiare's eyes were as wide as mine. We weren't sure what to expect. All we knew was that we'd better get something to show for our begging. Theresa might get mad at us if we came home empty handed.

Johnny Boy turned around and whispered, 'I'm going to knock on the door.' He knocked. *Tiare and me squeezed each other's hand, digging our nails into each other's palm. When a white lady came to her door to see who it was, we hollered, 'Oweeee!' as our nails dug deeper still. But we stood very still as Johnny Boy stuttered, 'Do, doo, dooo you ha, have bread and Vienna sausage?' The lady smiled, as she looked at us with love in her eyes. She was unlike the Japanese lady. We were sure she would give us food.*

With my skin dark like cocoa, my large, oozing scabs of impetigo-infested chicken pox on my arms, legs, and face, my kinky hair infested with lice, my bowels infested with worms, my teeth spaced with rot, my clothes soiled with mold and mildew, and no shoes on my cruddy feet, I smiled back and said, 'We need the food because we are starving. My mom didn't buy food and she left us home alone.' Tiare

didn't look any better than I did. Like me, she had sores on her body, bugs in her hair, rotten teeth, and soiled clothes, but the lady admired her more; Tiare was like her. Before she left to get the bread and sausage, Johnny Boy asked her for a can of cream. She didn't have any. After we waited for what seemed to be an hour, Mrs. White returned and handed us half a loaf of Wonder bread, three cans of sausage, and each a grape popsicle. Johnny Boy thanked the lady for everything. Tiare and me were too busy tearing the paper off the popsicle with our rotten teeth and filthy fingers; we threw our wrappers onto her porch and left, thanking her with the popcycles in our mouths. 'Tiare, that lady was the same color like you,' I said, as we headed home.

'So. What color you like?' Tiare asked, as she licked her popcycle.

'Same color like my doll.'

'One black nigga color?' Tiare asked, surprised. The only difference she saw in me was my kinky hair. Yet I was the one who screamed and hollered for a ponytail like Tiare's. I was the only one with naps. It was impossible to remove lice and their eggs from my hair. That's why I just kept them. I had sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, grandpas, grandmas, great-grandpas and grandmas, and great-great grandpas and grandmas living in my hair. The part in my hair gave them a path to walk on. But I didn't mind having them there as long as I didn't have to cut my hair.

Johnny Boy, Vicky, and Tiare took the food back to the house. The bag lay open on the floor. Lilicois and cherry guavas rolled onto the hardwood floors. Everyone

scurried toward the food, eating it like starving vultures, ravenous scavengers. Terrance's stomach bloated; he cried. There was no milk to settle it, and he refused to take sugar water any longer.

* * *

It was too late by the time Louise had John Figueroa take rice and beans to her kids. After two days of not eating well their stomachs ached, growled, and burned. Louise's kids drank lots of water and slept for hours.

When Figueroa got to the house he had to break in. Theresa wouldn't open the door, thinking it was old-man ghost. Vicky may have been only four years old at the time, but she knows what she saw earlier that day. It is a memory that will stay with her for the rest of her life:

Two days after we ate the Vienna sausage and bread, John Figueroa came to the house to bring us food. Theresa, Donna, Tiare, and me were playing with mama's makeup that morning. Terrance was asleep. Johnny Boy watched us, wishing he had been born a girl. I wanted to be Diana Ross, so Theresa put a lot of eyeliner on my eyes, whipping the ends of my eyes with the liner to give them a cat shape. Tiare pretended that she was Diane, mama's prettiest girlfriend. Donna made believe that she was mama, acting like her and asking Johnny Boy if he wanted a date even. 'Shut up.' Johnny Boy sounded like a little sissy. When Theresa was putting Donna's makeup on I left the bathroom. Tiare stayed there, watching Theresa apply Donna's

makeup with expertise. Theresa learned how to apply makeup by watching mama. Meanwhile, I hopped on the left arm of our brown sofa. The sofa was in front of our large, glass parlor window. In front of our window was the large, glass window of old-man ghost's broken-down quonset hut.

I began to dance and shake my booty in front of the window to the imaginative beat in my head, acting as if I were Diana Ross live on stage. I began to sing "Love Child." Then the grey figure of old-man ghost appeared in front of his window, looking directly across at me, grinning from ear to ear. My eyes got big, my heart beat fast, my skin became goosed, and my hair stood straight up like wire bristles on a brush. I jumped off the couch and ran towards the bathroom with my feet trying to catch up. Theresa noticed how pale I was, how I shook.

'What's wrong, Vicky? You look white and your hair is standing straight up. What happened?'

'One ghost. There's a ghost next door. I saw a gray ghost. It's one old-man ghost.' After Theresa snatched Terrance off mama's bed, all of us ran out of the house, believing we were better off outdoors. When the sun began to go down, Theresa felt it was safe to go back into the house. We headed straight for our mother's bedroom, the last room in the house, the farthest room from the grey ghost's hut.

When Figueroa finally got into the house Vicky and the rest believed it was old-man ghost who slowly crept down the hallway. It was Figueroa in search of his daughter, her sisters and brothers. They were sure it was the grey ghost who knocked

on the front door, then broke into the house. When Figueroa slowly opened Louise's bedroom door, he found the six of them huddled in the far right corner of their mother's sheetless, blood and pee stained bed. With every step he took they heard the wooden floor creak. They thought it was old-man ghost. When the bedroom door slowly opened they screamed with fright. "Hey, hey. It's only me. Don't be scared."

"Daddy," said Theresa, as she set Terrance down on the bed and ran toward him.

"Uncle John, we thought old-man ghost was coming," Vicky said.

"Who's that?"

"Daddy, Vicky saw one ghost next door," Theresa said.

"There's no ghost next door. No one lives in that hut. The old man who lived there died a long time ago." Tiare shivered. "Joey, Tony, bring the food in the kitchen. Come you guys. Go to the kitchen and eat some food. Your mother will be home soon."

After they ate they threw their paper plates into the trash bag Tony brought into the house. Figueroa laughed with his buddies to keep from crying. Tiare had just finished throwing up the last of her food. She ate too fast. Theresa's father noticed how skinny all of them were; he said nothing. He even noticed how skinny Cannibal was, as the black cat scavenged through the trash bag, eating Tiare's puke. It made him sick. John Figueroa left; he promised Theresa that he'd be back. Louise's children were happy that they had leftovers in the icebox for the next day.

Louise came home a day after she sent Figueroa to take food to her kids. She was happy. She bought a water sprinkler game, rice, hotdogs, and pork 'n beans. She even bought a brand new dress for Tiare. Vicky poked her bottom lip out; she, too,

wanted something new. After they ate Louise let them play with the water sprinkler. Tiare and Vicky slid, flipped, and fell on the wet grass; they showed off for their mother. Theresa and Donna were busy showing off in their bikinis for a bunch of guys who passed by in a car, looking at Louise who sat on the porch in her shorts and halter top. Louise was beautiful. After having six kids, she still had a figure. Her long, wavy, jet black hair complemented her strong Apache features. Her high cheek bones gave her an Asian look, but her petite nose and plump lips gave her an exotic, cosmopolitan look, a look almost Negroid in silhouette.

Louise smiled pretentiously as she watched Tiare and Vicky vie for her attention. She chain-smoked. Under the glaring sun Louise's somber expression told not her age, but what she had put herself through. Her eyes told a story.

Tiare was taken from Vicky on this hot, summer day. They both stopped playing, in wonder at the large, sparkling car that pulled up and parked, hugging the edge of the dirt road at the end of their soaked lawn. They couldn't see inside of the car. The sun's reflection on the car blinded them. Its tires were diamonds and its windows were mirrors.

"Theresa, go and put Tiare's dress on her and comb her hair," Louise said. "Donna, put up the sprinkler, then you guys go inside the house." Once in the house, Vicky peeked outside of the parlor window. She was at Terrance's side; he lay on the

floor with his bottle propped. Louise didn't learn how dangerous it was to prop a baby's bottle. She knew what happened to Dorothy's baby.

"How could she take chances with Terrance's nose?" Vicky thought to herself. Poor Peter--he's so ugly now, with no nose and all. That rat sure had a feast, slowly nibbling every bite, enjoying every piece of nose soaked in sweet milk and vomit.

Tiare looked so pretty in her ruffled dress. She even blushed and pulled her jaw in when she saw that Vicky saw her. But Vicky continued to look out the window. She had to see who was in the car.

"Tiare! Look! Real rich people. And I think they have a bag of candy." Vicky's stomach began to rumble, probably from the pork 'n beans or from the butterflies which fluttered in it. She paid no attention to her stomach as she watched two white people, a well-dressed man and woman, walk towards the porch. She couldn't hear what they and her mother talked about, but she saw the lady give Louise the brown bag. Vicky drooled. As soon as Louise and the couple walked into the house, Vicky farted. It was one of those farts that smelled up a room. Mrs. Houston puckered her nose and lips when she walked into the parlor.

"Ha, ha, ha. Vicky went fut," Johnny Boy said.

"Not!" Vicky hollered, smelling it. "Terrance did." But Terrance was as innocent as an angel, as he lay on the floor, content with a full tummy, drooling with the puke that he spat up from the milk he drank out of the bottle which lay at his side.

The Houstons were disgusted by the house. There was dog and cat pee and poop on the hardwood floors. Terrance's soiled diapers lay around the house. One of

them, dried with shit, looked as if it had been on the kitchen counter for weeks. The maggots were using whatever they could to make the change from little worms to flies.

Mrs. Houston finally approached Tiare, something Vicky had expected. Tiare stood still; she blushed, thinking that Mr. Houston was her daddy. She didn't ask this time.

"Would you like to come to our house, Tiare? We have ice-cream in the freezer, a dog named Kimo, and a big, beautiful home with a swimming pool," Mr. Houston said.

"Can Vicky come?" Tiare asked. Tiare put her fingers in her mouth and drew her jaw in. Vicky stared at her mother. Her heart beat fast. Mrs. Houston looked at her husband and her husband looked at Louise.

"No. Vicky cannot, but she'll visit you," Louise said.

"Visit me?" Tiare thought out loud. "Where I going?"

"Now you go with Mr. and Mrs. Houston. They have goodies for you."

"Only if Vicky come," Tiare whined.

"She's too black! She, she's not white enough." Vicky put her head down.

Theresa, Donna, and Johnny Boy eavesdropped from the hallway. They, too, sulked.

"Nooo. Noooo. I don't want to go," Tiare cried. "You faka! You bitch! I kick your ass," Tiare screamed, as she scratched and bit Mr. Houston, who snatched her up and carried her off to his car. Mrs. Houston followed behind him.

"Don't worry," Mr. Houston said, while trying to keep Tiare from falling out of his arms, while trying to keep her crinoline from bobbing. "Vicky will visit you tomorrow." Then they left. Louise lit a cigarette and took a swig from her bottle of Vodka, while

clutching the brown bag. Vicky bit Johnny Boy on the arm, Donna pulled Theresa's hair, and Theresa scratched her face; Terrance had the runs, and Mr. Houston lied.

Louise didn't mourn Tiare. The next morning she woke up, played her albums--she loved the Temptations and Diana Ross--drank Vodka, put on her makeup and got dressed after having showered. Louise looked good. She had on a tight fitting dress, full of glitters, black high-heeled shoes, and a matching black bag to keep her money in. Her hair was teased to the height of a beehive. "How do I look?" asked Louise.

"You look pretty, mama," Johnny Boy replied.

"Yeah. You look nice," said the girls.

"See you guys later," Louise said, as she left out the front door, down the porch stairs, into her Mustang, and down the road.

Two days passed, and when a knock on the door echoed through the house, Louise's kids ran to the door like scavengers, thinking Figueroa was bringing them food. They were tired of eating the boiled beans Frank cooked for them the day before. Frank had been a nervous wreck that day. He preoccupied himself with Tiare. He worried about all his grandchildren. Theresa, Donna, Johnny Boy and Vicky rushed to the door. The eldest opened it; they were stunned when they saw a tall, slender, white woman with short bleached hair in the style of a pageboy. Two husky cops, one Japanese and the other Hawaiian, accompanied her. Vicky's mouth watered. She thought of grape popsicles. "Is your mother home?" Mrs. Yap asked.

"No. But she'll be back tonight," Theresa lied.

"When did she leave and where did she go?"

"I forgot," Theresa said, as she began to cry. Donna ran and hid in her mother's bedroom closet.

"Theresa, has your mother been leaving all of you home alone?"

"Yeah. And she didn't buy food for a long time. We ate guavas and lilicois, mangoes and litchee. They tasted good. But grandpa's boiled beans were nasty," tattled Vicky.

"Shut up, Vicky," Theresa said.

"But we ain't going to pick mangoes or guavas from old-man ghost's tree. He scared me. And the lady in the brown house was nice; she gave us bread and Vienna sausage and grape popcycles. She looked just like you."

"Vicky, shut up!"

"The Japanese lady was mean. She said she was going to call the cops. Did she call you folk? Did she tell you Theresa's name?"

"You big mouth," Theresa cried.

"It's true," Mrs. Yap said. "Call it in and we'll try to contact their mother. There are six in all. I'll go and count heads. In the meantime, officer Kanazawa, go and buy some burgers and fries for these kids to eat. Here's twenty dollars from the fund. Bring back a receipt. Thanks." Johnny Boy and Vicky grinned at the thought of eating burgers and fries.

"Do they put ketchup on the french fries?" Vicky asked Mrs. Yap, following her as she counted heads. Donna was still in the closet, crying.

"One child is missing," Mrs. Yap said. "Theresa, where is the fourth girl?"

"She, she..."

"She lives somewhere else. Mama gave her to the rich white man and lady in the big, shiny blue car."

"Be quiet, Vicky. Is my mom in trouble? Can you call my grandpa? He'll come to watch us until my mom gets home," Theresa said.

"We need to call someone. What's his phone number?"

"247-1350."

"What's his name?"

"Frank Rosario. He lives kind of far, but he'll come."

"Officer Kanahele, please call Mr. Rosario. We'll wait until he gets here."

When officer Kanazawa walked into the house with sacks full of burgers and fries, Johnny Boy and Vicky fought over who was going to get Tiare's share, with Vicky winning when she drew blood from his left hand by biting it with her jagged, rotten teeth.

It would take Frank too long to get to the house. Mrs. Yap sent officer Kanahele to pick him up. When officer Kanahele and Frank pulled up to the yard, Theresa began crying for her grandfather. And as usual, Vicky and Johnny Boy were fighting. Mrs. Yap held Terrance; he cried, angrily. She was relieved to see Frank. Donna was still hiding in the closet.

Louise got in at 1:00 the next afternoon. Frank had just finished cooking his grandchildren lunch. With the leftover bacon from breakfast he made a large pan of fried rice. The kids were full. At Frank's request, Johnny arrived at his sister's house earlier that day. Louise was glad to see her brother and father tending to her kids.

Louise looked like she had been in a fight when she walked in the door. Her beehive hairdo was no longer standing upright; it lay to the right. The dark circles under her eyes for lack of sleep looked like she had two black eyes. The glitters on her dress were dull; the dress no longer fit her snugly. The black bag still hung over her shoulder. In her hands she held her high-heeled shoes. The heel of her right shoe was broken; it had walked its last.

"Louise, I gotta talk to you," said Frank.

"Not now; later. I need to take a bath. Got any coffee?"

"Yeah."

"Make me a cup right before I get out of the tub. Johnny, you got any cigarettes?"

"Yeah."

"Give me one. I ran out on my way home."

Frank began boiling coffee; Johnny handed Louise a cigarette. Louise lit the cigarette and headed down the hall towards the bathroom, without noticing that Vicky had a fist full of her brother's hair, shaking as she gripped it, turning red in the face while doing the best job she could to make him keep his mouth shut. He was going to tell his mother that Vicky told Mrs. Yap what happened to Tiare. Johnny Boy laughed as Vicky

ended up on her back with her legs and feet on the livingroom wall, holding on to his thick black hair in a tight clench. Frank broke them up.

After going to the store to buy their mother a pack of cigarettes, Louise's kids entered the parlor and overheard their mother yelling at Frank.

"Who told the lady about Tiare?"

"Vicky told," tattled Johnny Boy, to win his mother's approval.

Louise snatched Vicky up by her kinky hair and began yanking at it while moving her head to and fro. "What did you tell the lady?"

"She told the lady you left us alone for a long time with no food, we begged for Vienna sausage and bread, and you gave Tiare away to rich people."

"You stupid kid," Louise screamed, as she slapped Vicky across the head, causing her to fall to the floor. "Why did you tell that lady my business."

"Louise, leave da girl alone. She neva know any betta. You should slap da one who called da cops in da first place."

"Get over here Theresa, now!" Louise hollered. Frank picked Vicky up from the floor.

"It wasn't Theresa's fault. Why you like pick on her for?" asked Frank.

"These are my kids. I'll pick on them if I want to. Now why didn't you make Vicky shut her mouth. Why didn't you give her licking."

"I told her to shut up the whole time, but I was afraid to hit her in front of the police," Theresa cried.

"The police? For crying out loud, I taught you how to lie to those kind of people. Why didn't you tell them I was at work?"

"Because. Vicky's big mouth." Frank squinted his eyes at the sight and sound of the slap Louise gave Theresa across her face.

"You see what you did Vicky. You stupid head," Theresa cried, as she ran down the hall.

"I'm giving all of you away. You make me sick. You can't even lie to one lousy lady for me," Louise said, as she took a drag from her cigarette and put it out.

"Louise, I'll take the kids," Johnny said, looking like an escaped child molester.

"You see what you did, Vicky?" Johnny Boy said, as he followed behind Theresa.

"It's all your fault, Vicky. Now we might go to live with uncle Johnny," Donna said.

"I'm sorry. I won't open my big mouth anymore," Vicky said, trailing behind her sisters and brother.

"Too late," Theresa said. "If we move in with uncle Johnny he's going to show us his thing again."

"Do you think mom will make us move in with uncle Johnny?" asked Johnny Boy.

"No way! I'll tell the police what he does. And if they still make us live with him, I'll run away," Donna said.

"Yeah. If mama makes us live with uncle Johnny, all of us will tell on him."

"What you got to tell about uncle Johnny?" Donna asked.

"He used to show you his thing too, Johnny Boy?" Theresa followed.

"Yeah. But don't tell grandpa. I'll get licking," he whispered.

"Why?" Donna asked.

"Because. Uncle Johnny said he would give me licking if I told grandpa that he showed it to me and put it in my booty."

"How come?" Vicky asked.

"I'm not talking to you Vicky; don't ask me questions."

"Well, how come he put it in your booty?" Donna asked.

"So something wet could come out."

"Pee?" Theresa asked.

"No. Tapioca pudding."

"Ooooh, yuckie," Donna said.

"Shut up. You guys better not tell, especially you, Vicky, you big mouth."

"Johnny Boy's a sissy; Johnny Boy's a fag," sang Donna.

"No I ain't," Johnny Boy cried, as he jumped on her and began swinging. Vicky jumped on her brother's back and began biting and scratching it. Theresa pulled Vicky off her brother and pulled her brother off Donna. When Donna got up she was bleeding from her mouth.

"Donna, you got blood on your lip," Vicky said. Donna licked her lips, and upon tasting her own blood, attacked her brother. The fight began again.

"Grandpa, grandpa!" Theresa yelled. "Donna and Johnny Boy fighting." Frank moved to the bedroom as quickly as he could.

"Hey, hey, hey. Stop fighting. You guys gotta get along. What you two fighting for?"

"Donna, don't call your brada dat." You girls go and take a bat. Johnny Boy, you shower after them. The lady coming at 4:30, two hours from now."

"I want the shower cord," Donna screamed, as she grabbed a shirt and shorts from the pile of dirty clothes on the floor of the bedroom she and her sisters shared.

"No, you take too long with it when you rinse off your coochie. Let me and Vicky have it first so we can have hot water," Theresa said, as she also grabbed herself an outfit from the pile and handed Vicky hers and a towel.

"Okay." But as usual, Donna lied.

* * *

Donna hadn't lied, though, when she told Frank that her uncle Johnny raped her. Fifteen years after she made love with the shower cord, Johnny attacked her. It was something he had always wanted to do. Although Johnny tried on several occasions, sex never happened between him and his sister. Once, when they were in their late teens, Louise fought her brother for an hour to keep him off her. Victoria had been at the welfare office that day. Stanley slept off his drunkenness. Frank was in jail. Louise quickly learned to fight that day. She went off. Johnny backed off, but he still had to have a sister, an aunt, or a cousin. Louise, on the other hand, wasn't having it. For Johnny, years later, a niece would do. But poor Donna, she had had such bad luck with sex as a teenager. It all started when she caught the drip the same night she had had

sex for the first time. She kept it for six months until her pain and smell prompted her to see a doctor. She had to have immediate surgery to remove her left ovary and fallopian tube. Following her surgery, Dr. McKenzie had given Donna a fifty percent chance at conceiving a child. Johnny took her chances away.

Under the instructions from Louise, Donna went to her uncle's apartment to borrow two-hundred fifty dollars for a plane ticket to California. Donna wanted to be with her mother after losing part of her womanhood. She had been out of the hospital for only a week. Vicky was already living with Louise, pregnant with Ronnie. Giving Donna the money, in Johnny's mind, meant that she'd sleep with him. When Donna refused (making Johnny feel like he had been tricked without being treated), he raped her. He felt that if Donna could sleep with niggers, she could sleep with him. Unlike the nigger who had his way with Donna when she was only fourteen, Johnny didn't have a dirty dick. Donna screamed with pain as her uncle forced himself upon her, tearing the sutured incision Dr. McKenzie had made. The more Donna hollered the harder her uncle thrust. Johnny rode Donna like a cowboy rides a bucking bull; he thought her screams asked for more; he thought he had been Donna's first when she began to bleed. He grinned when he was done; he had forgotten that Donna was spoiled. That same night Dr. McKenzie removed the rest of Donna's battered insides.

Theresa, Donna, and Vicky talked while they showered. "Donna, do you think mama is going to give us away?" Theresa asked, as she waited for Donna to finish wetting her body.

"If she does, I'll run away." Donna handed Theresa the shower cord and began soaping herself. Vicky stood in the right corner of the shower, shivering, waiting for her turn to get wet. Vicky tried for the cord when Theresa finished drenching her body, but Donna snatched it from her reach.

"Let me rinse off first, Vicky," Donna said, "then I'll let you get wet."

"Hurry up before all the hot water is gone."

"Vicky, do you want to move away from mom?" asked Theresa, while she washed herself. The white lather dripped off her body and found its way to the drain.

"No. I want to get wet."

"But what if mama gives us away? What if she makes us move in with uncle Johnny?"

"Then I'll tell grandpa that uncle Johnny showed it to Tiare and me when she used to live with us. Then grandpa won't let us move with uncle." Theresa continued to wash. Donna sat on the shower floor with the shower cord between her legs. She hadn't heard a thing Theresa and Vicky talked about.

"Hurry! Donna. You're using all the hot water. I hate the way you take a bath. I'm telling," cried Vicky.

"Yeah, hurry Donna. I want to rinse off," Theresa said. Donna was unresponsive to their commands. "Come on, Donna. You're taking too long. My eyes are burning."

"Wait! You, you always russsshhhh meee," Donna said, as her body tensed and her face strained. Vicky snatched the cord from Donna as she lifted herself from the shower floor. She began wetting her body while running the soap over it, trying to wash away any signs of neglect.

"You see, Donna, the water's getting cold." Donna said nothing. She stood in the exact spot where Vicky had been, staring heedlessly at Theresa.

"Well, hurry then Vicky. I got to rinse my eyes," Theresa said, as she reached for the cord with her eyes squeezed shut. "Quickly, my eyes are burning."

"Wait! It's my turn. I have to make sure I smell like Ivory. Grandpa's going to smell me to make sure I washed."

"You better hurry, Vicky," Donna panicked.

"Wait!"

"Hurry up. Theresa's got blood coming from her coochie." Theresa opened her burning eyes; she saw the blood running down her leg. The lather, no longer white, looked like strawberry froth. It still found its way to the shower's drain. Vicky jumped out of the shower; Donna looked fixedly with fright at Theresa's lower half.

"Maaa! Maaaa!" yelled Theresa.

"How did you cut yourself," Vicky asked, as the water from her body dripped and puddled the bathroom floor. She shook.

"Call mom!" cried Theresa, hysterically, as she looked at herself; her arms were stretched out in front of her.

"What?!" Louise asked, as she rushed into the bathroom, slipping on puddles of water. Her stern expression made her look like kin to Geronimo.

"Theresa needs a Bandaid; she got blood; she cut her coochie," blurted Vicky. Theresa looked at her mother, pitifully. Her arms were still up in the air. Tears streamed down her face.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha," Louise laughed. Rinse off, dry off, and put toilet paper on your panty to catch the blood. I'll buy you some Kotex later."

"Mama, Theresa needs a Bandaid," Vicky said.

"She needs more than that, baby."

"I don't want to use the same towel Theresa uses," Donna said.

"Use the end she doesn't use."

"Nooo. Why is Theresa bleeding?"

"She started her period." Louise left the bathroom. Donna and Vicky looked at each other; they moved away from Theresa, slipped their clothes on their wet bodies, and ran down the hall, leaving Theresa alone. Theresa looked at herself in the mirror and wept, as she dressed herself.

"Grandpa, grandpa, Theresa got blood; she started her period," Vicky said. "She needs a Kotex Bandaid."

"Shut up!" Louise said and plopped herself on the couch. As Theresa walked down the hallway, Johnny Boy, on his way to the bathroom to take his shower, hugged