

Ynez Tongson | Under the Rainbow

Sea, sand and hurt ribs: A compromised love

The world explodes into light and pain as I fall off my skimboard, crashing into the sand, face first. I will be feeling sand between my teeth for days. A week from now, I'll still be wondering where the sand on my bed sheets is coming from. There is probably sand stuck in my ribcage. I want to lay there and let the tide take me out. Maybe I'm in hell.

Actually, I'm in Makena, Maui, Hawaii—home, once upon a time. The sun is shining, the sky is an impossible blue and I wish an Ynez-shaped hole would appear in the sand and swallow me. Xavier, my younger brother, helps me to my feet. Gabriel, the third born, is yelling at some kids who think my fall is hilarious. They both heave me higher onto the beach and let me collapse onto dry sand. I had tasted greatness and I choked on it.

Darkness sparkles in the corners of my vision. This isn't from embarrassment or the heat. It's already afternoon and we've only eaten seaweed—yes, it's edible there—dredged from the sea floor. I am delirious with hunger. Everything I see has a sharpness, a more-realness to it. I must be dead. Lying on the sand, with my dark-skinned brothers hovering over me, I almost believe it. Gabriel gives me a towel and tells me that we'll leave soon. He laughs, saying “You ate it so hard!” Scars lace their dark bodies—the beach is a cruel mistress, moonlighting as a dominatrix. Clutching my ribs, I am lulled into a restless sleep by the rhythmic crashing of waves.

Xavier is the kind one and Gabriel is the nice one. Gabriel gives good advice and listens to your problems, but Xavier feeds lost dogs and convinces our parents to house runaways. It's a rainy night near the harbor and we're speeding home. In the grimy, wet darkness we see kids carrying blankets and a laundry basket.

"Should we pick them up?" I ask.

"Heck no! What if they try to kill us?" Gabriel worries.

"It's raining. We should pick them up." Xavier glares at Gabriel.

"They're going to kill us. And I'm the one in the backseat."

This conversation goes on for a minute, before we decide to turn around and find them.

We search the length of the harbor, but they're nowhere to be found.

"What if they were swept up by a wave?"

"What if they were ghosts?"

The last two were transient girls, working odd jobs without return tickets to wherever they were from. Maui collects people like this. They wanted to get to the other side of the island. We drove them to a bus stop, and wished them luck. But this one is thin, gaunt. Her skin is stretched too far across her bony frame and her hair is stringy, like dried up seaweed. The woman's crackled voice, the sound of storm waves crashing on the beach, tells us to just leave her on a dark, lonely stretch. Not knowing what else to do, we do as we're told. When we drive away, we see her standing there, looking more and more spectral.

I wake with a start to realize I'm still lying on the beach. Except this time Xavier and Gabriel have gone back to bodyboarding. Lying in the sun has distorted my vision; all I see are saturated hues of blue and yellow. I scan the shore, looking for my brothers. Just when I think I can't find them, just before I get worried, I spot them. They're maneuvering through the water, more seals than boys. One time, we had been in the water with some friends and Xavier and Gabriel got out and walked onshore, signaling I should come. "I want to show you something!" Gabriel yelled. A little annoyed, I swam towards them. As I reached shore, Gabriel pointed to a dark, sleek shape patrolling the water. It was as big as my car. For the past two weeks, there had been reports of shark attacks, all along this area. One of my girlfriends was still in the water. A line of grannies in matching bathing caps were doing synchronized swimming nearby.

"Shouldn't we tell them?"

"Nah, they'll just panic, and draw its attention."

And in a few minutes, the great grey shark swam out of our sight.

We're in the car, near the harbor again, when something huge and final crashes into us from behind. Glass flies up to the front seat. Xavier and Gabriel are silent, as they look at the truck that has made an appearance in the trunk. Gabriel picks glass from his sun bleached hair and Xavier asks, "What happened?" Four other cars are lined up behind us, each having smashed into the rear of the other. We pull over and glass covers the ground, glittering like fatal diamonds in the dying sunlight. Eventually a police officer comes over, asking for registration and insurance. My insurance card has expired, but he looks at us and says, "I know your parents." While we wait for the police to take everyone's information, we get out of the car and

walk around. We find a sewer main exposed beside the road. We swing our legs over the pipe and sit, looking back occasionally to wave at onlookers. We feel like celebrities. Later, a police officer says we can leave. As the car starts, more glass falls from the remains of the rear of my car.

“What are we going to tell Dad?”

I was caught speeding before, on the road to Makena. The officer stepped into the middle of the road and had us pull over next to his Maui Police Department issued golf cart. After making a show of his disgust, after yelling he better not catch me speeding ever again, he let us go. We were barely back on the asphalt when my brothers and I began to fight.

“I can’t believe you didn’t see that! He was like, right there! God, you’re stupid. Or blind,” Xavier spits.

“Whatever.”

“Whatever yourself. You were scared.”

“You should have just driven away. What was he going to do? Chase us on foot?”

Gabriel is trying to laugh it off.

Nevertheless, we still head to the beach, where friends are waiting. After apologizing for being late, we offer them some vegetarian chow mien. One of the girls declines, “I don’t do that vegetarian thing.” When she’s out of earshot, Xavier whispers to me, “It shows.”

This time I wake up when sand is flung in my direction. Xavier has crawled up onto the shore, and sand hugs his body like a white aura. Gabriel waves from the shore break, promising we’ll leave after just one more wave. The ocean just goes on forever. The sun is hesitant about setting, casting an inquisitive glow over the scene. The beach is bathed in gold, and champagne-

colored waves crash onto shore. Despite the dull pain in my ribs and the sharp pangs in my stomach, I realize I'm really fucking happy. This isn't heaven, but it's close enough.