

BANYAN COURT

SAMUEL SCOTT PRESTON

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The translations from Zeami's Atsumori are by Arthur Waley and are in the public domain. His version of the whole play can be read at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/npj08.htm> (accessed June 7, 2014). The video of the Noh play Kenji shows Hank can be seen at <http://youtu.be/3mXuGC16ix4> (accessed June 7, 2014).

“I SHOULDN’T complain,” Dan Kumagai said, setting his coffee cup down with a clatter. “She means well. She just can’t stop fussing. She seems to think I’m going to turn into a lonely old misanthrope as soon as I hit sixty.”

“She couldn’t be more wrong,” replied Ann Burleson. “You were already that when I met you, and you were only thirty-two then. But you may turn into Pantalone, perhaps,” she added thoughtfully. Kumagai had known he could count on Ann to cheer him up. She was good at putting things, and people, in their proper places. Her tidiness was what made her such a good papyrologist and departmental colleague. He made a harrumphing noise. “Pantalone indeed,” he muttered, feigning indignation.

The “she” Kumagai meant was his older sister. Like her brother, Kazuko was a college professor, of Japanese language and literature at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Kazuko had chosen the path well traveled, staying in Honolulu, marrying, teaching her ancestral language—which, however, as with most Hawai‘i *sansei*, or third-generation Japanese-Americans, their war-generation parents had refused to teach them at home. Kumagai, on the other hand, couldn’t get away soon enough. He went to college on the mainland and stayed there,

earning his PhD in classics and taking a very satisfying job at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. He was more Roman than Japanese. He even affected a Hadrianic beard that Ann always teased him about. He secretly agreed it didn't look exactly Roman on him, but at least it hid his face, and it most definitely distanced him from most people's mental image of an Asian.

Kumagai wasn't ashamed of his Japanese heritage, but he'd never been attracted to Asian men. Accordingly, he assumed that few men could be attracted to him, and did what he could to counter the stereotype of effeminacy. He considered himself lucky to be hairy, although he hated that it cast him as a "bear," another type of man he was not attracted to. He knew facial and body hair were more common among Japanese than most people realized. So he used his fur—or, rather, he had when he had still been on the prowl. That had stopped in his early fifties, when, he had told himself, it was time to admit his chances were going from slim to none—past time he should get used to being single.

A cup clicked on a saucer. "So, will you go?" Ann broke in on his thoughts. He didn't answer. He didn't really know yet. She waited quietly. Another of her virtues, one Kumagai envied her, was patience. When he was growing up, he kept hoping he would eventually acquire some kind of innate Japanese Zen thing that translated to patience. He hadn't.

"I suppose I have to," he finally said. "I haven't been back in a while. But I know she's going to go with the whole Japanese shtick about starting over a brand-new sixty-year cycle, make me wear a baby cap and a bib, probably." Ann laughed. He knew she'd be trying to picture it. He gave her time to enjoy it before going on. "I suppose, if I'm going to go at all, I'll try to persuade her to put it off until after commencement. Maybe by then she'll have forgotten, or something will turn up to get me out of it."

"You see? You *are* a surly old misanthrope." She continued to grin.

"I didn't say 'surly,' I said 'lonely.'" And Kumagai deftly turned the conversation. "What do you think of the candidates to replace Thompson for the Latin side?"

Professor Burleson was too tidy to leave her former question hanging. "My publisher expects the final draft of my book by August. I'll be around, and I'll take care of watering your plants and feeding the cat," she said. "No need to thank me. Just make sure to send me a picture of you in that bib and baby cap. There could be no more priceless

reward. Now, I think the specialist in early Roman religion would be most versatile for our purposes....”

KUMAGAI’S WIDOWED sister had moved into a smaller house when she retired a few years back, so she arranged for Dan to stay at the Moana Surfriider Hotel, the Edwardian pile that was one of the oldest Waikiki hotels. Her husband had been a successful lawyer and left her well off. She could afford it, Dan reflected as his cab pulled up to the porte cochere. He savored how the sunset colors shone on its white columns. He was warmed by her remembering how much he had always loved the place and wanted to stay there, even though he had never treated himself to it. He guessed he had only been about ten when he first heard of the Moana’s lasting mystery, the death, perhaps by murder, of Jane Stanford, cofounder of the famous university. For months afterward, Kumagai had bored Kazuko with his latest researches and discoveries about the ancient scandal. He had roamed the hotel as completely as he dared—sadly, the fatal Room 120 had vanished in some renovation or other—and as an adult still made a point of going there to eat or have drinks with friends in the Banyan Court whenever he was in Honolulu. He remembered vividly the first time he saw the hotel, just a few years after statehood, when Waikiki was a lot emptier. He had been visiting a classmate, Sidney (a not-very-happy substitute for his Japanese name, Sadao), who lived in a modest back street nearer the Ala Wai canal than the beach. He was supposed to be taking calligraphy lessons from his schoolmate’s father. He didn’t care much about calligraphy, but as he turned thirteen, he was learning he cared a lot about Sid—and that made him punctual and faithful in attending his lessons. They had discovered *The Lord of the Rings* together, and more important, the novels of Mary Renault, whose romantic depiction of love between men in ancient Greece had set Dan on his career path, while also giving Sid and Dan permission to explore their feelings for one another.

He had infected Sid with his enthusiasm for solving the Stanford mystery, and they had saved their allowances to be able to afford tea in the Banyan Court. This noble tree was a far cry from the more democratic banyan at the International Marketplace just down and across Kalakaua Avenue, their usual haunt. That one was carved with initials and various equivalents of So-and-so Was Here. In fact, they had been so daring, one day, as to leave their own initials there, surrounded by a heart. At the Moana’s Banyan Court, after tea, they had both risen and

touched the smoother bark of the banyan tree there, at first separately, then, gradually, hardly knowing it, entwining their fingers against the strong, smooth wood that felt so much like skin over muscle, until Sid's hand rested on Dan's, and they let it linger as long as they dared, loudly discussing the surfers off the beach to distract any onlookers. A year later, Sid was killed in Vietnam.

Dan didn't even bother to unpack once he was shown to his room. Sid might not have been replaced in his heart, but he couldn't help noticing how handsome the bellhop who carried his bag was—Samoan, he thought, built like a football player. His tip was generous, and the Samoan grinned knowingly. Dan took only enough time to wash the travel grime from his face and arms and to change into khaki shorts, a tent-sized aloha shirt—brick colored, with only the most discreet white outlines of hibiscus blooms—and hiking sandals that made his feet look even more like bears' paws than usual. *Well*, he thought, as he often did when trying and failing to bring himself to some acceptance of his looks, *Kumagai does mean "Bear Valley."* As he took the elevator down to the ground floor, he found himself hoping Samoans liked their men as big as they seemed to like their women. The bellhop was solid muscle. Dan would have been less willing to entertain such questions had he met him in the street after dark. He scolded himself silently, in words that had become a mantra for him, albeit unconsciously. He was sixty now. Time to admit his chances were going from slim to none—past time he should get used to being single.

Within fifteen minutes of his arrival, he was seated before a lavish tea in the Banyan Court. His order given, he had walked slowly, hoping to avoid notice, to the banyan tree. As he always did when he was there, he reached out and laid his palm against it in that same spot, remembering the feel of Sid's hand over his nearly half a century ago. If nobody had wanted to take Sid's place in all those decades, it was time he accepted nobody ever would. He touched the tree bark a long time, feeling Sid's muscular body in the wood. Then a tourist couple, plainly honeymooners, politely asked if he would take their picture standing in front of it. Embarrassed at being caught in so sentimental a gesture, he assented eagerly.

ANN BURLESON would have to do without the baby-cap-and-bib photo, Kumagai wrote in his e-mail to her after the birthday party the next day. Kazuko had been talked out of it by the others. Kumagai was

inventing here—he had no idea whether his sensible, if occasionally overliteral, sister had actually ever intended such a thing. Ann, however, deserved his most artfully improved version of events. She would want to pass it on to her spouse Jillian, a lawyer. His grandnephew Kenji, however, had been a diligent photographer, both during the formal banquet at one of Honolulu’s most expensive Japanese restaurants and at the smaller after-party held at Kenji’s father’s rather grand residence near Koko Head. Apparently he had a new iPad Mini and wanted to test its camera. Kenji was Kumagai’s favorite relation in the newest generation. He was soon to graduate from UH and had already been accepted into law school. He would go into his father’s law office, which had been founded by Kumagai’s father and continued by his brother Gerald and Kazuko’s husband, and now was headed by Kazuko’s son, Kenji’s father. The firm specialized in real-estate law, with a sideline in politics. Kenji, according to a quiet conversation on the lanai with his great-uncle, would keep the tradition. Of course, being Kenji, he kept it in his own way, by writing a senior thesis for his political science degree on disputes over the legal sleight-of-hand by which so much of the land in the islands had passed from its Hawai’ian owners into the hands of the white planters.

Kumagai was pleased, and said so. Kenji basked in the approval. Ever since he had come out to his gay great-uncle a few years before, they had been close. Dan assumed Kenji was glad to have at least one family member who hadn’t plotted out his life for him like an escalator. To his surprise, Kenji had handed him an envelope out on the lanai. Dan assumed it was a card that Kenji, for some reason, didn’t want mingled with the other cards and small gifts from family and friends. He had started to open it, but Kenji stopped him. Just then Kazuko bustled out and insisted Dan return for his brother’s star turn, and Kenji told him to wait till he got back to the hotel.

This, Kumagai reported to Ann, was the same star turn he used at every family gathering. Nevertheless, it was always welcome, and not just from indulgence. Gerald really did get a little better each time, especially now he was retired and had time to practice, and by now the rest of the family could back him up. Every Japanese man, decreed Kazuko, must have a hobby—though Kumagai had refused to touch a calligraphy brush since Sid’s death, and Kazuko had delicately let the omission slide—and Gerald’s was Noh chanting. Dan digressed enough in his explanation to Ann to report what Kazuko had said to him once in private—“If they don’t have hobbies, Japanese men drive their wives nuts when they retire. That’s when most divorces happen in Japan.”

Gerald's party piece, appropriately enough, was the climax of Zeami's *Atsumori*. The play tells how the Genji warrior Kumagai, now a Buddhist priest with the name Renzei, encounters a reaper on the shore where his most famous battle was fought. The reaper turns out to be the ghost, or reincarnation, of the young and beautiful Heike enemy Atsumori, whose flute playing Kumagai had admired at a distance on the eve of the disastrous final defeat of the Heike at Ichi-no-tani, but whom now Kumagai's duty, and Atsumori's own pride, required him to slay.

Despite his noisy proclamation of the superiority of Greek and Roman culture, Kumagai loved Noh, and even more, Kabuki. One of the treats of his childhood had been his walk-on part in the University's English-language Kabuki production of *Kumagai's Battle Camp*, in which he had mimed Atsumori to a slightly taller boy's Kumagai, a traditional stage effect to make the action appear far off in the distance. In the more flamboyantly emotional Kabuki version, Kumagai substitutes his own son for Atsumori, and lets the enemy escape. Then Kumagai and the boy's mother must go through the painful business of pretending not to recognize their own child's head and identifying it as Atsumori's. It was a crowd-stopping scene, the kind of three-hanky operatic moment that Dan secretly loved, though he always disclaimed any such thing when watching it. He had learned to position himself so nobody could see his wet eyes.

Professor Kumagai had often played video of both plays for the students in his popular Greek Tragedy course. His PhD dissertation had been on stagecraft in the Athenian theatre, a topic chosen both because of his early adoration of Renault's *The Mask of Apollo* and because of the haunting beauty of the Noh. So he knew the lines and the dance that his brother now repeated with even more mastery and control than the last time Dan had seen him. "But truly a generation passes like the space of a dream," chanted Gerald.

*The leaves of the autumn of Juei
Were tossed by the four winds;
Scattered, scattered (like leaves too) floated their ships.
And they, asleep on the heaving sea,
Went back home.
Caged birds longing for the clouds,
Wild geese were they rather, whose ranks are broken
As they fly to southward on their doubtful journey.
So days and months went by; Spring came again,*

And for a little while

Here dwelt they on the shore of Suma

At Ichi-no-tani....

Dan also joined Kazuko and one or two others—Kenji included, to Dan’s amazement, though he had to drop out at one or two points where his memory failed him—in the final chorus, while Gerald danced. By established family custom, they substituted their own names for the priest Kumagai’s Buddhist name Renzei:

So Atsumori fell and was slain, but now the Wheel of Fate

Has turned and brought him back.

“There is my enemy,” he cries, and would strike.

But the other is grown gentle

And calling on Buddha’s name

Has obtained salvation for his foe;

So that they shall be reborn together

On one lotus-seat.

“No, Kumagai is not my enemy.

Pray for me again, oh pray for me again.”

The haunting lines always cast their spell, and had become a traditional signal that a party was ending. Dan made no protest when Kazuko and her daughter-in-law pressed on him the majority of the leftover Japanese delicacies from the banquet and the after-party. They knew, mainly because Dan continually reminded them, that it took an hours-long drive to Chicago among deathly flat cornfields to find even a half-decent Japanese restaurant. Trips back to Hawai‘i always meant gorging on proper Japanese food. Kenji drove him back to the hotel, and they chatted about inconsequential matters. But before he got out, Dan commended Kenji for learning the lines from *Atsumori* and was glad to discover that Kenji had once seen a video of the Kabuki version as well. As they sat in the dark car, Dan recited a passage in Greek from the *Iliad*, describing Achilles mourning for Patroclus, and then recited Dryden’s translation.

Now, composing his e-mail to Ann, he felt somehow shy of describing his conversation with Kenji. Instead he wrote about the food.

IT WAS the next morning when Kumagai opened Kenji's envelope, only to discover that he should have done so the night before. There was more than just a card in it. Taking seriously the new start expected at sixty, Kenji had arranged, and paid for, an unlikely gift—a daylong private surfing lesson. Dan had slept in and now saw he had only about half an hour before he was scheduled to meet the instructor. Kenji had been thoughtful enough, at least, to specify that Dan would do so on the terrace by the Banyan Court, overlooking the beach where the lesson was to take place. The instructor would have his sandwich-board sign with him so he could be identified, and Kenji apparently knew the man, to whom he had given what the note described as “a detailed and thorough” description of his great-uncle.

Much as Dan liked Kenji and appreciated his thoughtfulness, this was awkward. He vaguely remembered a conversation last visit in which Kenji, who had been an avid surfer for years, was appalled to discover that Dan had never surfed. In fact, this was a half truth at best; Sid, who as a Waikiki boy had surfed as soon as he could walk, had tried hard to teach him. But Dan had even then been so out of touch with his body that he had never been able to get the knack, and Sid had given up once he saw it was more like torture than friendship to continue. Dan could swim, of course, and was perfectly at home in the water. He swam every noon in the college pool and regularly longed for a proper beach with proper warm salt water to swim in. But surfing had been beyond him.

Kenji's note was persuasive, though. The boy would make a fine lawyer, Dan thought idly as he read his grandnephew's argument for learning something new. He knew Kenji would be checking up to make sure the lesson took place. Well, a day in the water would do him no harm, and he consoled himself by composing a little speech on his way down to the Banyan Court in which he would warn the poor instructor that he probably had a hopeless pupil on his hands. No doubt the young man would have his doubts about teaching a sixty-year-old anyway. He would do his best to diminish how distasteful it would be for the instructor. Kenji described him as experienced and good at his job—probably Kumagai wasn't the first dotty old man whose age-inappropriate behavior he'd had to deal with.

His beard saved him shaving time, which he used to decide how to dress for the lesson. Dan knew better than to ruin the scenery all the tourists had paid good money to see by exposing his bearish old body, so he chose one of his usual XXL T-shirts, so loose that the sleeves came halfway down his forearms and the shirt covered his overlarge butt. At

least the board shorts he usually swam in concealed how hairy that butt was. He didn't have any reason to be ashamed of his legs, at least—any errands at home that took him farther around town than walking distance he usually did by bicycle. And there was nothing to be done about his bear paws.

Kumagai realized he was hungry and decided he would offer the instructor breakfast at the Banyan Court, assuming he wasn't too scruffy or salt-encrusted. It would kill some time and let him warn the poor guy—Hank Ross, according to Kenji's note—what he was in for. Fortunately “all day” was general enough to permit both sides to end the disaster gracefully without hurting Kenji's feelings.

Then Dan Kumagai got his first look at Hank Ross.

The instructor was older than he expected, not Kenji's age at all, more likely at least thirty. He was in one of Kenji's classes, but of course not all students at UH were young. Nor was he the usual longhaired “dude” of questionable personal hygiene the fastidious professor had somehow expected. He was staring out at the surf, his back to Kumagai and backlit by the late-morning light. It showed off broad shoulders and a sharp taper to a narrow, lithe waist. He was muscular, but in the lean style of a greyhound. His flawless skin was the color of honey, and his short-cropped hair only slightly darker. The contrapposto of his stance gave prominence to strong round glutes.

Kumagai took all this in, but that wasn't what stopped him in his tracks. Hank was leaning with his palm against the bark of the banyan, right where Sid and he had so long ago. Dan found he couldn't breathe. He nearly fled, but the man's beauty was too powerful a force to let him.

He was saved from making a fool of himself by the waitress asking him where he would like to sit. Dan cleared his throat. “Next to the tree, please.” A couple—he recognized the newlyweds from the first evening—were just vacating the table nearest the banyan, a few steps this side of where Hank was standing, and Dan took the opportunity offered by waiting for the table to be reset to gaze on the surfing instructor. The exchange with the waitress, and a cheery greeting from the honeymooners as they walked by, brought him back to some degree of reality. He strode over to the instructor and, standing by the table as the busboy cleared it, cleared his throat again, and asked, “Hank Ross?”

He caught the tail end of a pensive look as the latter turned to him, holding out his hand and saying with a cordial smile, “Mr. Kumagai?” Dan could only nod and smile back. He was glad of the handshake, both for the way it filled in a few moments before he could find his voice and

his composure, and because of the unaffected good manners it showed. Hank's face was even handsomer than his body. A welcoming smile just barely disclosed perfect teeth, but the eyes seemed old, somehow. The step he took to meet Kumagai's outstretched hand showed off powerful lean thighs and calves and long-toed, high-arched bare feet. Hank's grip was strong, his palm somewhat calloused but not rough. This was no overaged teenager putting off adult life, as Kumagai had unconsciously expected. He was relieved. Hank Ross might not regard him as decrepit after all.

Hank accepted a coffee and half a grapefruit but declined more, saying he had eaten already. He seemed not at all bothered by Dan's lateness or the time spent over breakfast—it turned out he wanted to find out more about his client's expectations and experience anyway. This seemed to be his usual procedure, and it put Dan a bit more at ease, although he found himself losing the thread of the talk when those knowing hazel eyes were turned on him. He felt ungainly, clumsy even, in this man's company. He concentrated on every movement he made, even on his table manners, as if he were trying to convince his parents they'd been right to let him eat at the grown-up table.

Dan played for time by taking a second cup of coffee after he finished his granola with yogurt and an English muffin—far less than he usually had, but then he was about to engage in some vigorous activity, he told himself—and asking, “So, how do you know my nephew?” He couldn't think how the “grand” had vanished.

“I'm taking a few classes at the university,” he said. “GI bill.” That explained the ancient eyes. “One of them has to do with the history of land tenure in the kingdom, then the territory and state. Kenji's in the same class. I'm interested in history.”

Kumagai felt, for the first time, as if he might survive this day. “I'm a classics professor,” he returned. “I know less about Hawaiian history than I should, except what they taught us in school. But ask me about the battle of Thermopylae or the Peloponnesian War and I can bore you for days. My real specialty is performance practice in the Attic theatre, though, and its antecedents in choral song and dance.” He could hear the pedantic tone creep into his voice and decided to quit while he was ahead. “So you were in the military?” he asked, to deflect the subject from himself.

“Marines. Iraq, mostly.” Hank didn't elaborate, and Dan didn't dare pursue the matter. Sid had been a Marine. After a pause, not quite long enough to be awkward, Hank continued, “So you may need to tell

me more about the Peloponnesian War sometime. I've read my Thucydides, though."

"I'd better stick to the Trojan War, then," Dan replied. "I haven't taught Thucydides in almost ten years." His grin brought forth an answering chuckle from Hank, and Dan's heart skipped a beat. "I should warn you I'm not as good a pupil as I am a teacher. I can swim at least, but I have my doubts about surfing."

"And you call yourself a Hawaiian," teased Hank.

"I'm one hundred percent Japanese-American, a *sansei*," countered Dan. "My father was a lawyer, and his father was a pineapple worker. Neither had much time for hanging out on the beach. I only came to Waikiki for my calligraphy lessons."

"Kenji's an excellent surfer," Hank said. "I'm sure you'll do fine."

"You've only survived IEDs and suicide bombers, what do you know about difficult jobs?"

Dan had no idea how he had dared ask that—the privilege of age?—but to his relief, Hank laughed and said, "Touché!" Then he said, serious again, "We really ought to get started, though, while the waves are right for beginners. If you're finished with your coffee, that is."

Dan signaled for the check, signed it, and followed Hank out to the beach. Another sandwich board like the one he had used for identification guarded a small array of surfboards of different sizes jammed upright in the sand. He waved to a young woman at a shave-ice stand a few yards away, signaling he was back and her sentry duty was over. He didn't touch any of the boards, but lay down in the sand on his flat, lean belly and motioned Dan to do the same. The lesson had begun.

There was no banter for the next few hours. Hank wasn't a harsh instructor, but his concentration was fierce and it was plain he expected the same from his pupil. Dan's professional judgment approved. He knew this meant Hank respected him and wasn't belittling a fat old polar bear's abilities. Instead, Hank looked past the surface to find the teachable points. He returned the compliment with his undivided attention. But when they were out in the lineup—safely away from the real surfers, he noticed—his best efforts weren't enough to get him upright on the board, much less to catch a wave. Hank never lost patience, but in the end he decreed it was time for a break. They paddled back onshore. Dan realized he was more tired than he had imagined.

They sat side by side between their upright boards, looking out to sea. Hank said nothing, but Dan could tell he was trying to figure out

what to say or do next. When it came, Dan was surprised at its irrelevance. “Why do you wear a shirt to swim in?” Hank asked.

Kumagai didn’t know what to say. He knew why, but he wasn’t about to tell Hank Ross. He felt as if he were the young one, and Hank the wise old man.

“I think I can guess,” Hank said. “I hope you don’t mind my asking, but is it because you’re ashamed of your body?” Kumagai dug his toes into the sand and said nothing. Hank nodded to himself, apparently taking silence for assent, and went back to staring at the ocean.

After a bit he stood, in a single fluid motion, and began to dance a traditional man’s hula, slowly at first, but with the strength of the warrior he was. It was nothing like the tourist shows, neither the soft hand gestures that most people think of as “hula,” nor a vigorous war dance. He seemed to be immeasurably older as he danced, moving with all the grace he had shown on his surfboard but within a much narrower range. He went on for about five minutes, responding to some internal chant that from time to time escaped him in a low murmur, then sat down, still without a word.

Kumagai suddenly was reminded of the final dance of *Atsumori* that his brother had sketched the night before. It had the same solemnity, the same inner stillness that almost made “dance” seem the wrong word. Gerald wasn’t a dancer, of course—his attention was on the singing. Hank *was* a dancer, and a very good one. When he spoke, it was nothing to do with surfing. Or so Kumagai thought at first.

“My Auntie was a well-known *kumu hula* in Kailua. I live in the house she left me in Kāne‘ohe. She was my great-aunt, really, but I never knew her sister—my grandmother—and hardly knew my mother. Auntie really raised me. My father was a Marine too, and was gone a lot—don’t get me wrong, he was a great father when he was home—and my mother left when I was so young I barely remember her. Auntie took her place. So I danced from an early age. I still do, in fact, from time to time. I may look like a haole, and I guess I mainly am, but Auntie and my grandmother were half Hawaiian. That’s why I’m taking the course where I met Kenji.” He paused. “Have you ever been to the International Marketplace?” he asked.

The memory of his hours and days spent there with Sid rushed back in on Dan, and for a moment he couldn’t breathe. “Yes,” he said, and the questioning look on Hank’s face told him he had freighted the short syllable with more than he meant to.

Hank looked as if he were going to pursue the opening, but he apparently thought better of it. He went on, "I sometimes dance there for extra cash. The Samoans who mostly perform call me when somebody needs a night off. They tease me about being blond, but they know I was in combat and that's good enough for them." Another pause. "Well, I guess that's all over now. You know they're closing it and tearing it down?"

Dan cried, "No!" It was impossible. It had been there forever. To many it was a tawdry tourist trap and eyesore, to others, land wasted in low-rises. To Dan, who still saw it through the eyes of childhood, through memories of Sid especially, it seemed impossible it could go. "I used to spend a lot of time there in my early teens," he said, "hanging out with—with my best friend." Hank looked at him hard and nodded, as if he somehow intuited that by "best friend" Dan really meant something more.

One revelation deserves another. Hank had let him in to his life, in a small way. Dan decided he owed as much back. "You actually reminded me of him for a minute this morning, under the banyan tree. He used to stand that way, touching the tree with a kind of... tenderness." He couldn't go on. He had said too much already.

Hank left a space to honor the confidence, but when he spoke again, he returned to his theme. "Do you dance?" he asked.

"Not really," Dan said. "Not for years. And never well."

"But you know about dance? Kenji says you're a fan of Noh and Kabuki. I actually know something about Kabuki, but not much about Noh."

Dan wondered how Kenji even knew this, other than the family tradition. "I know a lot more about Western opera and ballet."

Hank nodded, paused a moment, considered, and made a decision. He said, "I think the reason you had trouble this morning is that you aren't in touch with your body. You're at home in the water—I can tell that—but you just don't *like* your body, and that means you can't feel what it's like to be *in* it, the way a dancer or a surfer does. Am I right? I'm not criticizing, just asking," he added, after Dan didn't answer. Another pause. "Take that shirt off," he said, in a quiet voice. Dan did as he was told.

Hank looked him up and down, then reached out and touched Dan's chest and ran his fingers lightly down to his belly, where he ruffled the hair, then twined his fingers in it. "I envy you that hair," he

said, stroking his own sleek belly with his other hand. “Silver. It shimmers like a mithril coat.”

Dan was stunned, by the touch and by the simile. He stood, unable to think of anything to say as Hank continued to stare at him, not taking his hand away. Its touch grew hot against Dan’s skin.

Kumagai had no idea how much time passed before Hank stepped back again and broke eye contact. “If you’re not doing anything tomorrow, I’d like to try again. On me.” When Kumagai didn’t reply, he said, now with a grin, “I hate to fail. I’ve never yet had a pupil who didn’t surf like Kelly Slater when I was done.” More silence. “Or the next day, if that’s better.”

“Tomorrow is... fine.”

“I’ll come get you. Earlier than today, though. We have to go to my place. I know a cove where it will just be the two of us, nobody watching to make you self-conscious. Nine o’clock, okay?”

“Eight if you want breakfast here,” Dan said, looking at the banyan tree. “On me.”

“Deal.” And Hank strode away, leaving Kumagai gaping after him. When Hank was out of sight, he turned to go back in. Before he left, he reached out and touched the banyan lightly. For luck.

THE LITTLE bungalow in Kāne‘ohe was a few blocks from the beach, in a modest neighborhood of small lots. There was a carport with hardly enough room left in it for Hank to park his battered Sidekick. The rest was taken up with surfing paraphernalia and a small but exquisite war canoe, with its outrigger detached and hanging from the ceiling. It only had room for two or three people, Dan guessed. “I take tourists for rides, sometimes, when the waves aren’t good enough to surf.” He led Dan past the side door and onto a small lanai in back of the bungalow. A few bananas marked off the property line on two sides, and the whole area was shaded by a noble old mango. “We need to talk,” said Hank as he hooked a garden chair with one handsome bare foot in Dan’s direction and sat in another. He crossed that same foot over his knee and played idly with his long toes while he thought about where to start. Dan couldn’t stop looking. He nearly stopped breathing when Hank grasped his own big toe in one fist—Dan knew this to be a coded erotic sign in a Kabuki context, the equivalent of grabbing his cock. Surely Hank could not know what he had just “said,” much less what Dan “heard”? Dan

forced himself to breathe normally. Every inch of this man was beautiful. But he was half Dan's age. He shifted his gaze to Hank's eyes.

"How did the Greeks dance? Teach me," he said.

"We don't really know," Kumagai said. "There's no evidence except on vases and they're stationary and two-dimensional."

"Show me."

Dan struck an awkward pose. "It's really not easy to imagine," he said lamely.

"How about Noh? It's mainly dance, right? Show me what that's like."

"Well, you have to study forever to learn it." Seeing that this would not get him off the hook, he added, "I can only give you a general idea." Hank waited.

Dan thought back to the deceptively simple-looking movements that had accompanied Gerald's chanting two nights before, trying to remember how they went. He stared off into space as he tried to recall the shape of the dance. Suddenly he was back in the classroom, a teacher again, determined to awaken his students to the beauty of performance, how the emotion of a story lies in the dance and music. His voice slid unconsciously into teaching mode as he explained. "It's part of a play, a story," he said, "so you need to know what's going on. This is the very end of the play. My brother is the one who really knows it, but I've watched him often. So has Kenji, actually. Gerald performs it a lot, in an amateur way of course, because the main character is called Kumagai, only in the play he now has a Buddhist name because he has given up fighting to follow the way of compassion and expiate his sins. He was forced to kill a beautiful young man, Atsumori, in battle—it's a civil war, back in the 1100s—and just as he's about to do it, he realizes that this enemy was the person playing an exquisite melody on his flute on the eve of battle. Kumagai could hear it from the opposing camp. So now he is back at the scene of the battle, many years later, and meets an old man who turns out to be the ghost, or the reincarnation—in Noh plays it's all sort of the same thing—of Atsumori, who begs Kumagai to pray for his salvation, which he does. It ends with Atsumori singing and dancing." And Dan chanted the lines first, translating them as he went, then combined them with what he remembered of the dance, clumsily, ineptly, possibly mistaking the simple steps, but absorbed in the story, almost a love story between two men, filled with the beauty of reconciliation and reunion in the next world. As he danced, he thought of Sid.

When he was done, he stood still, then without thinking turned to exit the stage that he had built in his mind, using the banana trees as if they were the three pines that mark the entry and exit ramp of a Noh theater. At the end of the backyard, he stood for a long time with his head bowed. When he came to himself and turned to Hank, he saw tears on the handsome cheeks.

“I know how both of them felt,” Hank said at last. “I know.” And he put his head in his hands and wept. Dan, who remained true enough to his training as a Japanese man to suppress displays of emotion, was shocked. Then, almost immediately, a wave of warmth and tenderness broke over his shock, sweeping it away with the memory of his losses and missed chances. Feeling his own cheeks wet at thoughts of Sid, Dan crossed to Hank and put his arms around those broad shoulders, timidly at first. He had already begun telling the story before he realized he was speaking aloud—how they had cut their initials in the banyan at the International Marketplace, and then, years later, how they had met one last time before Dan went off to college and Sid, also a Marine, to Vietnam. As he spoke, his arms tightened around Hank’s shoulders.

“We ate supper at the Banyan Court, where you and I met. We avoided what was on both our minds, the chance—it suddenly seemed more like a certainty—that Sid would not come home except in a body bag, that this would be our last meeting in this life. Saying it aloud would have made it come true, I guess, but we should have said more than we did. It came true anyway, and we wasted our last chance. Before we said good-bye, after we had finished eating and were on our way out, we both touched the bark of the banyan tree one more time. It seemed as if the idea came to both of us at the same time, spontaneously. Our little fingers just touched, no more, because now we were too old to hold hands any more. Or thought we were.”

Dan could feel through Hank’s body that he was still crying. Dan stood waiting for a long time, until Hank lifted his face, streaked with tears, and gazed at Dan. “You are a beautiful man,” Hank said. “You don’t know it, but you are. Even more so when you dance. If you can dance like that, you can surf. But you don’t need to.”

Dan leaned down and slowly, gently, bit by bit, rubbed away Hank’s tears with his thumb. Hank turned his head, then grasped Dan’s wrist in his strong hand and pulled it away. He looked at it, murmured to himself, “So soft,” and spread his own larger, harder hand over it. “So small.” He left his hand resting on Dan’s but said nothing more.

Dan felt the blood rush to his face. He was mortified. He was ashamed of the soft hands of a scholar who never used a harsher tool than chalk, and he hated his short-fingered bear paws. He hated them. Surely Hank must be despising their softness, their uselessness, and him. Fat, disgusting old bear of a man, how had he been stupid enough to let his guard down before this young Alexander?

But he knew Hank was in pain too, from memories Dan dared not probe, so although he dreaded continuing the physical contact, he didn't move. After a time filled only with the distant sound of surf breaking, Hank let go, wiped his eyes, and made as if to stand. "I'm sorry," he said, and leaned forward. Dan felt a sudden desire to kiss Hank. No sooner did he recognize the desire than he knew following it through would ruin everything. Panic choked him. He turned and fled.

Dan stared out the window of the bus that took him back toward Waikiki. He saw nothing. Nor did he hear himself muttering, "You're sixty, your chances are all past now. Time you get used to being single." He felt foolish. Why on earth would he have assumed Hank was leaning forward to kiss him? He, at least twice Hank's age, and so physically inept he couldn't even learn to surf, despite a handsome and attentive teacher. Hank reminded himself, coldly and methodically, of all the times he had mistaken kindness or generosity for love, of all the times he had let himself believe in the impossible, and of all the times he had fallen in love with wildly inappropriate, out-of-his-league men. If sixty was the age to start over, that should be his birthday resolution.

He realized, as he walked back to his hotel from the bus stop, that he was talking to himself. *Hank is not in love with you.* However many ways he phrased it, however many times he tried to make it mean something else, that was what he was saying.

He realized all this about the time he woke up to the fact that his feet had taken him to the International Marketplace and brought him to stand before the banyan tree there, the one he and Sid had carved his initials into. *You have these memories. You had Sid, and nobody else ever did. Can't you be satisfied with that?*

Thinking of Sid, and of his calligraphy lessons with Sid's punctilious, old-school father, brought him sharply to the realization of how rude he had been in simply running out. He owed Hank an apology at least. Stroking the bark of the banyan one last time, he turned resolutely away and crossed Kalakaua to the hotel, went to his room, and found Hank's business card on the nightstand, tucked into Kenji's

birthday card. Taking a few minutes to frame his apology, determined that he would at least make it up to Hank by inviting him to dinner the next night, he picked up the bedside phone and dialed.

In the end, they talked for over an hour. Dan's apology and his awkward attempts at explaining himself, half excuse, half evasion, only took up the first ten or fifteen minutes of the time. Hank was gracious, more so than Dan felt he deserved. Even more, Dan could almost believe Hank was glad to hear from him, although as usual he cautioned himself silently against once again yielding to wishful thinking. Somehow Hank turned the conversation to the dance from *Atsumori*, telling Dan of a legend his auntie had told him that resembled it, and of the long hula she had worked on him to choreograph to tell it.

Dan could hardly recall a conversation that had been so easy, at least not with another man, although of course he and Ann and Jillian could talk this way for hours. He found himself holding up his end much better than he had with Hank earlier that day, let alone the day before. Hank had a way of drawing him out, almost as if he wanted to hear Dan's voice. Hank's questions were intelligent, and his reactions as they discussed storytelling in dance were respectful but not at all as if he were humoring the older man.

Dan enjoyed the conversation so much that he nearly forgot the purpose of his call, to invite Hank to dinner. When he did, Hank's reaction was sweet beyond his best hopes. "I was hoping to see you again," Hank said, "but I hardly dared hope for it." This started Dan on another round of apologies, which Hank cut off by asking about time and place. When these details were settled, he said again, simply, "I'm so glad." Filled with a rush of gratitude, Dan found himself, completely on the spur of the moment, saying, "I think I'll stay another week. There's no rush to get back to the mainland, after all. I've come all this way, so why not? That is, if you aren't too busy. I want to spend it with you, as much as we can." A moment's renewed panic seized Dan. Had he pushed too far again? But before he could take it back or jolly it over, Hank's voice, rich and low, came back. "I'd like that. Very much."

HANK CAME to the Moana Hotel for dinner the next night, looking dashing in a seersucker blazer and open silk shirt that showed off just a tantalizing glance of his pectoral muscles. Dan was wearing a bright new aloha shirt, for once not in a subdued or solid color. He had gone to the International Marketplace to make one last visit to his doomed childhood

patch of heaven, and had yielded to an impulse to buy a shirt that would show Hank he wasn't afraid to be noticed anymore.

Avoiding the Banyan Court, Dan had made reservations at a sushi place nearby—not one of the grand ones along Kalakaua, but a quieter one on Kuhio, where most of the customers were either tourists from Japan or locals. Kazuko always brought him here to eat when he was in town, and he had invited Kenji to meet them there. He explained as they walked to the restaurant. “It’s too expensive for a college student, and if it hadn’t been for Kenji I wouldn’t have met you,” Dan said. Dan wondered if he was implying too much, but Hank didn’t object.

Kenji was waiting when they arrived, and knowing Dan’s habits, had bagged them a quiet tatami corner where they’d have a little privacy. Hank seemed to have no trouble sitting on the floor, to Dan’s relief. Dan thanked Kenji for the surfing lesson, hinting that it had turned into something more, although he still didn’t know how to surf. Kenji seemed to know all about it in advance. “You little *nakōdo*, you!” Dan scolded, not very seriously, secretly hoping Hank didn’t know the Japanese word. Kenji laughed. “Not all go-betweens are little old ladies or company bosses,” he retorted.

They spoke of this and that during the meal, eventually turning to hula. Kenji seemed to want to know all about Auntie and her *hālau*. “Is it still going?” he asked.

“Her cousin has it now,” Hank said. “He’s a lot more into Hawaiian independence than she was, but he still says most of what he knows he learned from her.”

“Would they take a Japanese?” Kenji asked.

“Never hurts to ask,” Hank returned. “I may be able to pull some strings. Speaking of dancing, I’m filling in at the International Marketplace tomorrow night. Probably my last gig there. You want to come watch?” Dan explained to Kenji, who, to the others’ disgust, turned out never to have gone to the International Marketplace.

“I thought that was just some crummy tourist trap,” he protested, to which Hank and Dan exclaimed simultaneously, “Bite your tongue!” then to each other, “No respect for tradition!” Dan narrated his and Sid’s history with the place, discreetly omitting the carved initials. That seemed a bit cheesy for today’s youth. Hank noticed the omission, and with a wink at Dan, spilled the beans.

“No way!” Kenji said. Oddly, it seemed to add to his respect for his great-uncle.

But Dan, for some reason, felt something he had offered to Hank alone had been passed on too lightly. He liked Kenji, but he wasn't sure he wanted Kenji to know everything about him, certainly not before he had decided himself to tell it.

The silence that fell lasted a few beats too long, until it was broken by the waiter bringing refills of green tea. When they were replenished, Kenji began to scramble with the messenger bag he always carried, saying, "I almost forgot!" He pulled out his iPad Mini and said, "This is the dance I was telling you about, that goes with Dad's party piece," he explained to Hank, as he booted the thing up and swung it around in Hank's direction. It proved to be a video of *Atsumori*, cued up for the dialogue between the priest Renzei and the Reaper in the second part, just before the revelation. "Baa-chan showed me where to look," he explained, leaving Dan to interpret for Hank.

"Kazuko, my big sister, Kenji's grandmother."

"We'll skip the first two-thirds for now. I'll send you the link later. You remember the story? That I told you on the phone?"

Kumagai was startled. *Kenji and Hank had been talking? Without him knowing? When?* Some vague unease nagged at Kumagai's gut. *Calm down*, he told himself. *They knew each other before you met Hank—after all, it was Kenji who brought you together.* He wasn't soothed. He had tried to dance this for Hank the day before. Now he was learning Hank had gone behind his back to Kenji to find out what it really looked like. Obviously he, Dan Kumagai, was so clumsy and ugly that Hank had, despite his protestations, gotten no impression of the dance from so feeble a sketch of it. Dan knew now he should never have even tried.

Kenji started the clip. A few of the other patrons looked around at the sound, but since it was clearly some kind of Japanese music, they seemed to think it wasn't out of place. Kenji put his head near Hank's as they watched the video, leaving Dan to look over their shoulders. Kenji occasionally murmured a paraphrase of the text for Hank's benefit. Dan couldn't help thinking how different these *yonsei*, fourth-generation kids, were from his generation, how much more attuned to their Japanese-ness. Feeling excluded from Kenji and Hank's close perusal, his thoughts drifted back to Hank's question about dance in Greek tragedy.

Kenji was saying, "Notice how first they alternate speeches, and then as the action builds they gradually take up each other's lines and finish them." Kumagai's mind immediately supplied the Greek term for the same technique, *stichomythia*. That set his mind veering off into a

consideration of an article on classical Japanese and classical Athenian dramatic construction.

“The final dance begins here,” Kenji was telling Hank in a low voice, who noted the time on the back of his hand. Kumagai noticed that he was now out of their thoughts altogether. The chanting ceased and the flute dominated, while the masked dancer opened his fan and began to circle and cross the polished wooden floor, seeming to feel his way by his toes. *Makes sense*, Kumagai thought. *He probably can't see much, and the Greek tragic actors would have had the same difficulty.* The dance looked easy, but Kumagai knew enough to guess how many years of training it took to make it look so, controlled and yet unfolding as if spontaneously. Twice it rose to a climax, then relaxed twice as the actor stood motionless and stamped before resuming, each time at a higher level of tension. Back and forth, turning in place and rising on his toes, several times raising his arms like a raptor about to take wing, his fan opening and closing—and then the actor began to chant again, in the third person now, relating the final moments of his earthly existence, how the departing boats had left the young warrior alone on shore with no way to escape. The chorus spelled him as his dance covered more and more of the stage. Then he chanted again, telling how Kumagai spurred his horse to follow him into the waves. The chorus narrated how they exchanged sword strokes, and the dancer demonstrated with his closed fan. They fought in the surf, but the boy was bested—the dancer went down on one knee, then both, then dropped his fan as Atsumori gave up his life. But this was a Buddhist play; it was not the end of his soul's existence, as we already knew by now, so it was not the end of the dance. Overwhelmed by long-past emotions not yet purged, the dancer drew his sword, crossing the stage toward the man who had killed him and who now prayed for him. Running into that wall of prayer, he dropped the sword with a clatter and the chorus concluded the play: “They shall be reborn together/ On one lotus-seat.”

In spite of himself, Dan Kumagai was moved. Kenji and Hank were silent, motionless, heads nearly together. A sudden hot rush of shame broke over Dan as he saw clearly that the bond between his nephew and this soldier to whom Dan was so powerfully, if unexpectedly, drawn was far deeper than he had any right to wish for himself. He was old, he was fat and ugly, he couldn't even learn to surf—*And you call yourself a Hawaiian*, Hank's remark leapt from his memory—much less hold the attention of such a splendid, handsome, talented young man as Hank. As the pair watched the silent departure of actors and musicians from the stage and the video cut off, Dan silently

rose, paid the cashier, left extra for a tip and any desserts the two lovebirds might still want, and then left the restaurant. They hadn't even seen him leave the table.

A few hours later, on the midnight plane that took him, a week early, back home to the Midwest, Dan Kumagai gave himself over to jealousy. He had checked out of the Moana and changed his flight without telling anybody. For all he knew, Hank and Kenji were still talking over the Noh play. He would call Kazuko when he got home and make some excuse.

He could never sleep on the red-eye. In fact, he had long since given up taking it. But this time he couldn't stay an extra minute, much less wait till morning. As he sat, wide awake, Kumagai scolded himself, as he had so often before, for letting himself be lured into thinking any other man would find him attractive. He cursed himself for a Pantalone, and thought bitterly of one of his favorite comic operas. *You'd make a perfect Don Pasquale, if only you could sing.* Hank would not miss him. He had only been a pupil, after all, and a spectacularly unsuccessful one at that. He still had colleagues and friends, like Ann Burleson. He knew he would find a way to tell the story so that it would be funny instead of sad, and that would cure him. He could turn it into a scene from Plautus, perhaps. Besides, he had a good idea for a new research project, something he had been looking for to keep him busy over the summer. He pulled a couple of Kazuko's homemade *okaka musubi* from his carry-on, gently tilted his seat back, and idly ate as he began to map out his research plan.

KUMAGAI WAS still working on the article, starting to sketch his thesis in rough outline, during the long winter break the following January. Kazuko, after a frosty exchange or two, had forgiven him for leaving without saying good-bye, as she always forgave her incorrigible brother. Kenji was applying to law schools, she reported. Ann's book would come out in June or July. They still met every other day over lunch or coffee, and traded off hosting dinners for their department colleagues, or Sunday afternoon "teas"—not that tea was the beverage served—for students. The fall semester had gone well. Their new colleague, the Roman religion specialist, was working his way into the department culture, occasionally threatening to upset venerable applegarts, but then that was what they had brought him in to do. Academic life was moving along in its quiet way, all the quieter today because it had been snowing

since yesterday afternoon, bringing the silence that a slow but heavy snowfall always does. Dan was enjoying the quiet.

He worked in his office, preferring to keep his house free for other things than work, although he lived only a couple short blocks from campus. Not long after returning he had pinned Hank's business card to the corkboard over his desk. He had found it in his pocket and could neither throw it away nor think of anything else to do with it. At least here it was not a constant reminder. The corkboard was so crammed with items that he could ignore it, and when he couldn't, he would pin something new over it, for a few days. At some point he had pinned up Kenji's birthday card next to it, with its description, for easy identification, of Hank. It was scanty, but Dan had no photo of Hank and wasn't sure if he would have posted it where he could see it if he had. Twice Hank had tried to call, in the first weeks after Dan's return, but Dan had kept his end of the conversation frosty, brief, and uninformative—as much from shame as anything else. His attempt to discourage Hank had apparently succeeded. Fine.

Kumagai was checking a reference for the article when he heard a quiet knock on the frame of his open door. A few seniors were always around during the break, if they lived off campus or had friends who did, getting a head start on their senior projects. The knock was so faint at first he thought it was on Ann's door instead of his own, but when it was repeated he grunted a vague invitation to enter.

"*Nani shi ni yume nite arubeki zo?*" came a quavering voice chanting in Noh style.

Kumagai looked up, startled, exclaiming as he did, "Gerald?" Who else would greet him with the familiar line from *Atsumori*?

"It is to clear the karma of my waking life that I am come here in visible form before you," continued the voice. But it was not Gerald, who in any case hated snow and never came to the mainland in winter.

Kumagai just stared at the blond man standing in the doorway. Neither spoke.

"May I come in?" Hank finally asked, in an almost timid voice. Dan could only gesture vaguely, then realizing, stood up and moved a heap of papers and books from the only other chair, looking about for an empty spot on the floor to park them.

Hank sat. Neither spoke. Hank looked around the cluttered room with its tall windows, high ceilings, and woodwork under generations of varnish. Through the window behind Dan's head, snow accumulated on

the boughs of a huge pine. Hank stared at it as if he'd never seen snow before.

Dan realized he had not even greeted his visitor. He rose and plugged in the electric kettle perched precariously on a small, book-laden table at his elbow, desperately trying to figure out how Hank had gotten here, and what to say to him.

He heard how feeble his attempt was as soon as it was out of his mouth. "Ski trip? Snowboarding, maybe? It can't be surfing, around here."

Hank smiled as if the remark had been more amusing than it was. "No banyan trees on campus either, I suppose."

The sound of water beginning to boil pointed up the renewed silence. Dan hoped he had some tea bags left, then realized he had only one cup. That gave him another thing to say.

"I don't need anything," Hank replied. "Nothing to drink, that is." He fell silent again. Finally he said, in a lower voice, "You never even said good-bye."

Dan turned away, lifted a random pile of papers as if hoping to find a second cup underneath, and said nothing.

"You told me you were staying an extra week," Hank went on, hesitantly, as if fearful it would sound like an accusation. After a pause, he added, more quietly still, "You said it was to be with me."

That gave Dan the straw he needed to clutch. He cleared his throat. "I realized it was Kenji you wanted to spend time with, not me."

Now it was Hank's turn to look surprised. He said nothing but turned his head to look out the office window at the snow. Dan had never forgotten Hank's pensive look—brows drawn together, lips pursed. Dan quietly unplugged the electric kettle, useless if there was no way to offer tea. Hank started for the door. Dan said to the tapering back that had haunted his dreams for months, "I don't blame you, you know. You have interests and activities in common, dancing, and surfing. You don't live three thousand miles apart, and you've known each other longer, and of course there's the age problem. One afternoon of trying to help a clumsy old man feel better about himself doesn't..." He stopped when Hank whipped around, still with his unflinching grace, and stared at him openmouthed. He seemed about to say something, but plainly thought better of it.

To break this latest awkward silence, Dan apologized for not being able to offer him something hot. "I don't live far from here, less than five

minutes' walk. Oh, and I didn't think to ask—do you have a place to stay?"

Hank named a local bed and breakfast only a block from Dan's house, and said he knew the way back to it. "But maybe you could walk with me back there? I won't keep you, but I did want to show you something."

It was the least Kumagai could do, and in any case it would only prolong the suffering of seeing Hank for another five or six minutes, ten at the most. He struggled into his snow things, which made him look even more bearish, put his computer to sleep, pressed the old-fashioned button switch for the lights, and locked his door. The empty stone-floored corridors and stairwells echoed in a silence made deeper by the two men's separate thoughts.

He tried to leave Hank at the door of the B and B, indicating his own house visible a block away. But Hank insisted he come inside, into the parlor of the Victorian pile, lovingly restored and famous for its breakfasts. They stomped their feet outside the heavy door with its oval window of beveled glass and its ornate brass knob, and left their coats, hats, and other impedimenta on the coat tree inside. Someone had laid out newspapers inside the door for wet footgear. They both pulled off their wet boots and left them there. Dan could not help noticing once again how beautiful Hank's body was, how delicate yet powerful his feet were through his socks, too thin for a Midwestern snowstorm. He glided on them into the parlor, across a polished floor studded with small rugs.

There was a large thermos of hot spiced cider ready for guests, just inside the double pocket doors of the parlor, with a tray of cut glass cups beside it. Without asking, Hank drew a cup for Dan, placed it firmly in his hand, and all but shoved him to a large wing chair upholstered in russet, itchy-looking horsehair.

When Hank next started moving aside the throw rugs and a couple of ornate tea tables, Dan couldn't imagine what was going on. Had he prepared some kind of speech? What could he possibly have to say? Dan had forgiven him, truly he had—and really, they had known each other for only three days, met only three times, and Dan had never expected to see or hear from him again.

Instead, with a quiet, high-pitched humming, Hank took up a place at the far left corner of the parlor from where he had installed Dan. He stood, beautiful, generating a stillness that was beyond mere lack of motion. Then he began to glide across the floor, holding a folding fan he had picked up off one of the tables, and less than a minute later Dan

recognized the final dance of Atsumori, interspersed with bits of the chant—not complete, but enough to remind the dancer where he was. Dan seemed to hear the drumbeats and punctuating cries of the musicians, and the shrilling of the flute to build tension. It was so vivid he scarcely knew the sounds weren't in the air of the parlor. For twenty minutes Hank danced, perfectly controlled, defying time, showing no strain, his face as distant as the mask of the Noh actor, until he knelt, dropped his fan with a clatter that made Kumagai start, drew an imaginary sword, and began to chant, louder now, and in English, “No, Kumagai is not my enemy. / Pray for me again, oh pray for me again.” Opening his hand, he made Dan see the sword drop. He could almost hear the noise of it, and then, once again all stillness, Hank glided into the far corner, where he stood with his back to Kumagai, head bowed.

Dan Kumagai could barely breathe. He sat still, feeling as if he could weep, but dry of eye. Finally, how much later he could not say, Hank stood, turned, and looked him in the eye.

“I learned that,” he said, “so I could dance it at our wedding. Yours and mine.” Then, turning his face away, he made as if to leave the room. No longer erect, no longer certain of himself, he seemed defeated and weary. He stopped when Dan stood and blocked his way, causing the chair legs to grate across the beautiful floor. Hank stood half-turned to one side.

Dan took Hank by the shoulders and turned him so they were face to face. As he did, whatever he had meant to say went out of his head. He hesitated and then repeated, “Yours? And ... *mine*?” When he saw the almost imperceptible nod, as well as the effort it cost Hank's pride to offer it, he pulled the handsome head down to his level and kissed him.

Hank yielded, but only briefly. He pulled back and looked at Dan, as if waiting for an explanation. It took Dan a few minutes—they seemed like hours—to frame his words. To his horror, they came out in his lecturing voice, dooming them to ring hollow.

“I have never been handsome, like you, or graceful, like Kenji. I grub around in the past, the past of my scholarship and the past of my youth. I didn't only carve my initials on the banyan tree with Sid's—I seem to have carved his into my own ridiculous flesh. But there is no Sid, has been none for decades. I have had to learn to push any hope of being loved into the dark corners of my dreams, although I could never manage to do the same with the idea of loving. Then I saw you in the Banyan Court. Your hand was resting exactly where ours had rested before he left me to die. It was as if finally he, or rather an adult, more

beautiful, more deeply feeling version of him, had reappeared. And I made a mess of it. So when I saw you and Kenji together, well.” He shrugged his shoulders.

After yet another silence, but somehow a less awkward one, Hank replied, “You made a mess of what? I don’t understand. I love you. From the moment you told me the story of Atsumori and Kumagai, I loved you. No, sooner. From the moment you were brave enough to give me the gift of taking off your shirt—which I know cost you beyond anything else you could have done—I knew I loved you. First, I knew you trusted me, which hardly anybody ever has since I left the Marines. I’ve missed that closeness with men, more even than I knew until you showed me... till you gave it back to me. No, let me finish,” Hank held up a hand to silence Dan, who had opened his mouth to speak. “I won’t let you make some crack about your ‘ugly body.’ I like your bear body. It’s what I’m attracted to, that fullness, so different from my body. Maybe that’s the Polynesian side of me,” he said to himself, and a grin fluttered over his features and was gone again. “And more important even than that was what you gave me with Atsumori and Kumagai, and telling me about you and Sid. It opened a secret place, full of grief, that I’ve known since Iraq, but could never dare to open. Grief of war, and its loss, its cost not only in the comrades you love and see killed beside you, leaving you to survive, but in the fighting men you have to kill yourself, knowing it’s your duty, but knowing nothing of what you have robbed or who you have robbed them from. Kumagai survived the battle. He knew how awful it can be to survive. He knew also what he had robbed from the world, though he had no choice—he had heard the flute, and it changed his life.” Hank seemed to recede into himself for a while; Dan didn’t know how long. “And you changed mine.”

He stopped speaking then, and looked at his sock feet.

Dan dropped into the chair, hugged his knees to himself, and began rocking and moaning. Hank looked up, surprised to see the tears on Dan’s face. “What?” he asked.

“And now I’ve ruined it,” was all Dan could get out.

“Ruined it? I don’t understand,” Hank replied.

“And I’m so old, too old,” Dan said, not realizing he spoke aloud.

Hank moved to kneel in front of the overstuffed wing chair. He reached out and with a thumb wiped away the tears on Dan’s face.

“I’m the one who has been to war,” Hank said slowly, as to a child. “You may have had more birthdays, but you cannot be older than I. Do

you think I am Atsumori, here? No. I'm Kumagai. I'm not even Renzei, yet. Just Kumagai, the old warrior, trying to get free."

Dan was as ashamed of his tears as he had ever been of his body. He sat still, accepting Hank's touch, and accepting the growing silence, until he was ready to speak.

"Then you'd better have the name too," he said.

"Is that... yes?" Hank asked.

HANK ROSS Kumagai did not dance the final scene from *Atsumori* at the wedding. That was Gerald's, and he would not steal it. Instead, he danced a hula his Auntie had taught him, an ancient courting dance. The ceremony, at the Moana Surfriider's Banyan Court—for where else would they wed?—was a hybrid affair all around, making it thoroughly Hawaiian.

They had waited a year, which had meant plenty of time for negotiations among the relations on both sides. Dan suspected Hank had agreed to the delay to allow plenty of time for Dan to run away if he panicked again. They had needed the time to be at home with one another, anyway. Kazuko insisted on the ninefold exchange of sake cups, not that she had to insist very hard. Dan Ross Kumagai wore formal kimono robes and *hakama* trousers with white *tabi* socks and *zōri* sandals, for the first time since he was eight or so, while Hank wore the formal *tapa* cloth he had been vested in by his auntie as an *'olapa*. He had, as tradition demanded, made and painted it himself. He had also used the long engagement to make and paint the new *tapa* that his uncle, Auntie's successor, put over his and Dan's shoulders after the ritual sake was drunk, chanting as he did so a long *mele* of blessing. The uncle had made the leis and wristlets for all the wedding party, which included Ann Burleson as Dan's attendant.

To start things off, the couple advanced to the banyan tree under the swords of some of Hank's Marine buddies. They placed their hands, fingers interwoven, on the warm bark, and left them there a moment, honoring the past, calling up the future. The blast of a conch shell opened the formalities, but before they turned away from the tree, Hank murmured in Dan's ear, "I'll teach you to surf yet. I never give up on a pupil." Dan grinned and shook his head. He felt no panic any more. They had a lifetime for it.

Kenji, as he deserved, having been the *nakōdo* or go-between, was the master of ceremonies. Interspersed among the speeches required by Japanese etiquette, members of Auntie's *hālau* danced, followed by the Samoans from the now-shuttered International Marketplace. The climax was the hula Hank had made on his auntie's story, the *kumu hula*. He had taught it specially to his uncle, who danced it beautifully as Hank murmured a quiet narration into Dan's ear. For the less formal part of the evening, more of Hank's comrades, surfer buddies this time, were the band.

But as the evening wound down, under the fairy lights on the banyan tree, Gerald, with Kenji, his pupil now, shadowing his steps and chanting Kumagai's lines as his newlywed great-uncle chanted Atsumori's and the chorus's, danced once again the family dance. The *hālau hula* members watched in attentive silence. Kenji, who was studying with them now too, had taken care to teach them the vital last lines of the play, however, and when the time came they joined the Japanese in chanting together,

They shall be reborn together

On one lotus-seat.

SAMUEL SCOTT PRESTON is the pseudonym of a technical writer currently located in the Eastern Caribbean. The name does honor to three of the author's most admired gay male writers: Samuel Steward (1909-1993), Scott O'Hara (1961-1998), and John Preston (1945-1994). S.S. Preston has worked in a variety of jobs in his sixty-odd years: Federal civil servant, soup kitchen volunteer, editor and proofreader, educator and activist on LGBT issues, civil disobedience trainer, teacher of English as a second language, and Japanese-to-English translator. He has published a book of gay male theology under his own name and is an ordained priest in the Eastern Christian tradition. He lived off and on for some nine years in Japan and has a Master's degree in Advanced Japanese Studies from Sheffield University in the U.K. This is his first published fiction as S.S. Preston.