

## From *Shark Girls*:

Here is where we begin, what you need to understand. Random things happen, and these are the things that change everything else. When I was a child, just a mile away from our Kailua, Hawai'i neighborhood, a twin-engine plane fell out of the sky before daybreak on top of two houses, a roar and a growl then nothing, a startled moment of absolute silence. The neighbor across the street heard it and called the Kailua police. This was of course many years before planes would be used as missiles against the World Trade Center, back when this sort of thing really was a tragic accident. Back when, perhaps, there was this sort of innocence, naiveté, presumed, assumed, not questioned. It was the nineteen fifties.

The occupants of the first house were killed immediately, sleeping in their beds. The occupants of the second were blessedly somewhere else. On vacation? Who could remember this detail? The people who lived in the house would, of course, for the rest of their lives. Like the where were you when President Kennedy was shot? question. Where were you when you could have been killed? Random chance, one moment sleeping sweet in your home, the next dying under its charred and smoking remains. One of the kids we carpooled from school with knew one of the kids that was killed. This kid, who played jacks, hula hoops, Nancy Ann dolls, jump rope, water balloon fights with Nalani in our carpool, never expected a plane to fall out of the blue onto her roof.

I was the storyteller in our carpool, ghost stories, obake tales as they are referred to in Hawai'i; get plenty chicken skin! It is a fact that water flows downhill, yet truth is that in the lush green seat of the Ko'olau Mountains we drove through every afternoon, when the wind rose from the valley wailing against those rigid peaks, you would get the upside down waterfalls, rush of water blowing up, up-running from the ghosts maybe, the night marchers we all knew inhabited this valley, spirits of the warriors Kamehameha I pushed off the Pali, uniting the islands under his rule. If you try to drive over the Pali at midnight with pork in your car-say a pork sandwich or leftover luau-your car will rattle and shake so furiously you'd think a hurricane hit. The spirits don't like you to hele with pork. Most of us don't know why this is kapu, just is.

What about the story of a jeweler named Maung Chit Chine who in 1927 hid under some tree during a rain storm and afterwards his friends could only find his hat and shoes. When they killed the gorged python nearby, they found the rest of Chine's body swallowed feet first and whole inside the snake. In 1993 a fifteen year old mainland boy weighing ninety-five pounds was attacked by the family's python, which killed the boy, though made no attempt to eat him. For sport, perhaps? The way a house cat sated on kibble plays the mouse to death? The way the hunter blasts the bear? What about the way a poacher slaughters the elephant only for his tusks? There are no snakes in Hawai'i. We have mongoose, mean little razor-toothed weasel types who do kill snakes but were imported from Jamaica in 1883 to annihilate the rats in the sugarcane. The problem: mongoose sleep at night. Rats don't.

In 1952 there were Congressional hearings, the House Investigation on the sanctity of showing cleavage on America's new plaything, the television. Here is what else happened in 1952: Ike Eisenhower was elected President of the United States; Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the throne of England; the volcano goddess Pele of the fiery hair and raging temper caused a volcanic eruption in her own home, Halema'uma'u on the big island of Hawai'i; and in Queens Hospital, O'ahu, a child was born. Peevish and selfish as any child, this one would come to be revered as a saint.