

DEATH OF A SHAVE ICE

In the late summer of that year it was hot. It was really, really hot. And it was dry too. Really, really dry. It was so hot and dry that down by the ocean, at low tide, people scooped boiled fish from the tide pools. For Derek Hayashi, it was so hot and dry that by the time he pinned all his laundry on the line, it was already time to take it down again. When he did, the clothes had dried so fast they were hard and stiff, and they crackled when he stuffed them back inside his laundry bag. He didn't fold his laundry, he said, because he didn't know how. He didn't know how to dust, vacuum, or wash dishes either, and neither did his roommates.

The three of them were from Maui, fresh off the plane to pursue their college educations at UH Mānoa, and just two weeks into the semester they were evicted from their dorm. They hadn't been evicted because their parents' checks bounced or because they were especially

bad or dangerous people. They were evicted because this was their first taste of freedom, and they quickly became underage drinkers, excessive noisemakers, and repeat offenders. The final complaint—a typed, three-page screed written by Clyde Bastille, their dorm RA and president of the Mānoa Young Republicans—had the word *malfeasance* in it. They might have filed an appeal, but it took longer for Derek and his roommates to read the complaint, and to miss the part about the appeal, than it did for them to find a new place to live. They found it on *craigslist.org*, and it was a one-bedroom apartment in a two-story walk-up in Kailua that was scheduled to be demolished in six months. Six months was a lifetime away, and the apartment was cheap, the building almost deserted, and here they could be underage drinkers, excessive noisemakers, and nobody cared. The only problem—besides living under a long, dark cloud of fear that at any moment their families might find out—was that it was hot. It was really, really hot.

When Derek walked back into the apartment with his laundry, he found one of his roommates, his cousin Braden Shimizu, standing in front of the open freezer. “Hey, good idea,” Derek said. He dropped his laundry on the floor by an empty pizza box, short-stepped his way through a minefield of Keystone beer cans, and, with a little slide through a mysterious green powder, he shouldered himself into a spot beside Braden at the freezer. Inside the freezer a dead roach was developing an icy glaze. This offended Derek. In fact, all three of them were deeply offended, and shocked even, by the increas-

ing filth they lived in. But they were more horrified, and frightened even, by the idea of having to clean it up.

The third roommate, Braden's twin brother, Traeden, was in the bedroom playing Wii baseball on a sixteen-inch Korean HDTV. Derek could see him because there was a big hole in the wall. He was sweating like a real athlete.

"This heat is killing me," Braden said.

"It's *malfeasance*, that's what it is," Traeden said. He swung his Wii controller, sending a spray of sweat and hair gel onto the sixteen inch Korean HDTV.

"Batter out," the Wii announcer said cheerfully. The other two made room for Traeden in front of the freezer.

"Maybe if we put the fan in here, we get AC," Derek suggested. He was an engineering major, and he felt a little rush of pride. It only lasted a few seconds, though, because just as he realized that they didn't own a fan anymore, the freezer, and the refrigerator along with it, started clanging, clacking, and finally smelling of burnt rubber before it died with a long, expiring hiss.

"No frikkin way," Braden said. "That did *not* just happen."

Traeden chipped at the melting ice with his finger. "You know what we need?" he asked.

"Cold beer," Derek said dreamily. "And a new ice chest too, yeah?"

They needed a new ice chest because they had sold the old one on *craigslist*. That's where the fan went too. In fact, that's where just about everything went, includ-

ing Derek's laptop, the table and couch that came with the apartment, and even some concrete tiles that had once made a path to their door—but never the Wii, the Xbox 360, the sixteen-inch Korean HDTV, their internet-enabled cell phones, or their iPods. Those they would take to their graves.

“Shoots,” Traeden said, and he gave Derek a high five. “But that’s not what I’m talking about. I’m talking shave ice, and it’s gotta be Matsumoto’s. *Ho*, I can see mines now: mango, cherry, and pinacolada with ice-cream and azuki beans.” He let out a little cheer.

“*Ahhright*—let’s roll,” Braden said. He grabbed a rusty screwdriver off the top of the dead refrigerator and headed out the door. On the way he recited his own flavor combination: “Strawberry, pineapple, and coconut, condensed milk all over.”

Traeden followed, nodding his approval.

Derek thought about his own shave ice too, but Matsumoto’s? He didn’t know why people got so worked up about the place. “Eh, why you guys wanna go all the way North Shore for shave ice?” he asked. “They get um right here, at the shopping center.”

Braden and Traeden stopped on the dirt path that used to be full of concrete tiles. Together, in that eery way that twins do, they looked back at Derek. “Oh my God,” Traeden said. “You can’t be serious.”

Derek threw up his hands. “It’s just shave ice. I don’t care what people say about that place, and that frikken line—so stupid!”

Braden groaned with disgust. "You never had one, did you?" he asked.

"No, so what?"

"So *what*? When that first taste hits your tongue," Traeden said, "in that one second, that's when you going find out so *what*. Now let's roll." He looked around. "Hey, where's the Land Shark?"

The Land Shark was their 1975 Datsun B-210. Over the decades, various layers of rust, mold, and other organic material had sprouted from the dented landscape of the body, and it now blended in perfectly with the natural environment. They had bought it together on *craigslist* for \$87.53.

Derek laughed and pointed into the overgrown lot behind the apartment building. "Stay lurking under the mango tree," he said. "But wait, don't we get class or something?"

"Was this morning, Biology 101, I think."

"Oh yeah," Derek said. He tried to remember his schedule, but he couldn't. He tried to remember where his classes were, but he couldn't do that either. College was getting hard, he decided, and he needed a break. Maybe a trip to the North Shore was just the thing he needed. He followed the twins over to the Land Shark. "But what about gas?" he asked.

"No problem," Braden said. "I sold that palm tree that used to be over by the fence. Now hurry up and get in." He held up the front seat, which was a beach chair, so Derek could climb into another beach chair in the back.

Overnight, a little pod of mushrooms had sprouted in what was left of the carpet. They were blue.

“Kay, push um,” Braden yelled, and he shoved the screwdriver into a jagged hole where the ignition used to be.

Traeden pushed from behind, grunting, his slippers slapping against his heels. Springs squeaked. Struts rattled. Something snapped. Another something popped. When sparks flew from beneath the steering wheel, Braden released the clutch, and the Land Shark sputtered to life in a giant cloud of blue-black smoke. Traeden ran alongside, then jumped in where the passenger window used to be. He fell into the right-front beach chair just as the Land Shark bounced onto Kailua Road.

“Okay, I know it’s supposed to be all that,” Derek said. “But really, can you tell me just one thing about Matsumoto’s that makes it any different?” He watched Kailua Road going by through the rusty holes between his feet. The heat coming up made his feet sweat.

“Start with the beans,” Braden told his brother.

“Kay,” Traeden said. He looked over his beach chair at Derek. “They’re good luck.”

“What, azuki beans?” Derek asked. “Like that’s what Gramma says, but it’s only at New Years when she make us eat her mochi soup.”

“Just listen,” Traeden said. “These are Mastumoto azuki beans, grown by a Shinto priest in Japan, and they’re good luck all year long. Try ask Uncle Herbert.”

“Last time I went I found three dollars,” Braden said. “And a quarter.”

“Oh yeah?” Derek liked the idea of finding money. It helped to scare away the idea that someday he might have to find a job.

“Yeah. You never know what good luck might happen. I bet this time we meet some rich surfer chicks from Australia, go back and party all night in their beach house.”

“I’m all over the blonde one,” Traeden said.

“Come on, they all blonde—you know that,” Braden said. “And you know why they come over here? For local studs like us, ‘cause da Australian guys get too drunk, no can oof.” He licked his fingers and gave the black spikes of his hair a little tune-up.

“Oh yeah,” Traeden said.

Derek liked the idea of meeting Australian surfer chicks even more than the idea of finding money. He imagined one in a bikini, her breasts as full and round and as colorful as shave ice tops. The image short-circuited his brain just enough to make him believe in magical good luck azuki beans.

But beans, as Derek was soon to hear, were just one part of the small miracle that was a Matsumoto’s shave ice. As the Land Shark jerked and farted its way around the island, the twins explained it, just as it was explained to them by their Uncle Herbert, and his Uncle Herbert before him: how the ice that Matsumoto’s spun and shaved was from an ancient underground glacier from the Hawaiian Ice Age; how Matsumoto’s syrups came from exotic flower gardens in Kyoto, collected from the hives of special Matsumoto’s honey bees; how Matsumoto’s ice shavers were specially designed to recreate

snow just as you would find it on top of Mount Fuji; how the ice cream was fresh and hand made, with milk from sugarcane-fed Kahuku cows that were hand-milked by virgins. These and many more delicious secrets turned Derek into a drooling, slobbering mess.

“Better stand behind him when he takes that first bite,” Braden said. “It’s an 83.6% chance that first-timers always pass out.”

The trio stopped just twice along the way. The first time was just outside of Lā‘ie, when Braden spotted a HECO truck parked under some power lines. One man was up in the bucket, working on the lines, and another was sitting in the cab. “Might be Uncle Stanley,” Braden said. “If he sees us, it’ll get to Aunty Jane and she’ll call Aunty Nancy and she’ll call Gramma and then our phones gonna ring all the same time, from Maui, before we ever get to Matsumoto’s.” They crept closer on foot, shuttling from tree to tree, peering around each one with their heads one on top of the other. The worker up in the bucket, they finally saw, wasn’t Uncle Stanley. The man in the cab looked like Uncle Stanley, but it wouldn’t have mattered if he was, because he was fast asleep. Their collective sigh of relief turned into a desperate gasp, however, when a second later they were forced to dive headlong into a ditch that ran parallel to the road. That was because there was a Board of Water Supply truck coming around the bend, and with it the possibility of another uncle, their Uncle Gerald. But they never risked looking up to see if it was really him as the truck rumbled past.