

way, color seeping from his unfamiliar face.

She is crying, and she can't stop smiling.

We have a — .

STORY OF MEN

The day we put the dryer out on the street was the day the Menehune showed its face. Leimomi had purchased it used at a neighborhood tūtū's estate sale, but it was George who decreed the dryer nothing more than a piece of junk, its lint catcher dewy with mold, its knobs axles of rust. Most importantly, the drum was far too small to accommodate the linens of two parents and six keiki. No ordinary dryer would do; a kānaka 'ohana demanded a kānaka dryer.

But Leimomi resented the waste of money. She was old-school Hawaiian, which meant anything with a fingerprint on the 'āina was still salvageable. Including this hunk-of-junk appliance. She would prove it to George, ever the skeptic; restore the thing to its vintage gleam.

She foraged through the untilled yard and the cluttered carport, and when she went to retrieve the dryer from the sidewalk she saw

the door had been opened and, inside, a baby.

No, not a baby. Something else.

Lying fetal in the corner of the drum, the thing stirred. Its dark eyes narrow as papaya seeds, its lips full and smeared in blood. No, not blood — she examined it closer and saw the burnished currant was simply its native shade. The rest of it, naked and richly tanned. The realization lashed at her that this thing with its smooth, mature face bore the body of a newborn, and how could something so monstrous also appeal to her as beautiful?

She reached into the dryer. The thing did not flinch when she folded her fingers around its bare belly. Didn't parry her arms away or make to cry. She brought it to the light and only then did it object, its adult face cinching into a tight grimace, so she hurried to the carport, where she could catch some shade. She felt the thing repose in her arms.

Girl One and Two whapped at the screen door, their rubber slippers *slap-slapping* the hot asphalt under their feet.

Leimomi hushed them.

We need to be thoughtful. We need to let it sleep.

But the girls pulled and tugged at her

forearms, pressing, crying, so much so they attracted the attention of their brothers, Boys One and Three and Four, and their pawing fingernails left deep scrawls spoked into Leimomi's skin and how she cried out, for they were hurting her! Only upon sensing Leimomi's pain did the thing let out a cry that reached into her own throat and recovered a wool of her singular, curious suffering.

The keiki muffled their ears with their hands.

It was a cry that tore caws from the feral roosters' jowls, a cry that reached even Boy Two, the troubled child, below the Nimitz bridge, where he smoked pakalolo and set several strange fires with his buddies. Cars shuttled above him, tires screaming and engines sputtering, and still he could hear that cry in a way that might've tugged him home, had he not been strung out and too proud like his pops. No matter, because eventually the thing stopped crying, and Girl Two sprinted away from their huddle just as Boy Four pawed at Leimomi's curled arms, asked with his soft eyes if he could hold the baby, and she had to correct him then — *this is not a baby* — and he questioned — *then what is it?* — and before she could answer, Girl Two returned with a

quilted pillowcase, emerald monstera leaves embossed in the stitching, and she explained — *for the baby* — and then Leimomi sighed, seized by a rote sadness and desperate longing for George to help her as she repeated — *this is not a baby* — and Girl Two asked — *then what is it?* — and Leimomi replied — *it's a Menehune*.

Everything she knew about Menehune she had gleaned from her tūtū, dead now. Would you believe there is no widely accepted understanding of these magical beings? Some wield the legend as a cautionary tale for their kolohe keiki — *You act up li'dat and the Menehune go'n turn you to stone*. Others print cartoonish caricatures of Menehune malo-garbed and lei'd as company mascots; treat them like cuddly elves bearing beach tans and good cheer. The Menehune of her tūtū, however, were of a different class entirely. These were Hawai'i's master builders, the skilled engineers who crafted entire loko i'a, stone heiau overnight and out of nothing. Laborers of the 'āina. Only in oral legend were they said to be tiny, though now with Men in the house, Leimomi had come to realize such narratives might in fact be built on something solid.

Men was not the name we assigned her

but the name she gave herself. Men lived on fingers of poi and apple bananas and required total darkness to sleep. She padded through the house barefoot and naked while none of us bothered to drape her in our contemporary modesty. We left her alone. She took supreme care in examining every messy room, every trench of space in our too-tiny hale before settling back in the dryer, now pitched under the carport between the washer and a rusted sink we never used. Slept there the first night and left the door open, and the next morning, when Leimomi went to inspect the work required to restore the appliance, she found the dryer revived in its second life! Haloed in light and standing on brand-new spokes. She peered inside the drum. There was Men, supine, asleep.

More was restored, after that. We went off to school and faked at paying attention to our kumu, and when we came home our busted shower door was refastened to its hinges. In the kitchen, the drawer that was always acting up had been washed clean of the syrupy gunk ladling its runners, now opening and closing without even a groan or sigh. Outside, the unwoven clothesline spun back into itself, slung across the yard stable and taut. Even the finicky light

suspended in the hall closet now blinked anew. We didn't understand it. We toed around Men and knew from the recognition punching down our spines she was working overtime on the hale as the rest of the house slept.

Of our entire 'ohana, George was Men's favorite.

But of course, Leimomi needed her more. She couldn't comprehend Men's affection toward George — that quiet, curmudgeonly soul who hadn't even found her! — and why Lei's own attempts at tenderness were met only with Men's blank stares. Lei, she did the best she could. Pampered the dryer's empty drum with quilts and sheets and pillows puffed by her own fists and even left daily a hand of apple bananas plucked from our tree for Men to snack on as she pleased. Men pleased not. Early morning, and Leimomi found the linens tossed haplessly on the asphalt of the carport, laked in motor oil. Men, elsewhere. She searched and searched the yard, calling her name. When she found Men indoors, ensconced in the top drawer of George's dresser, cradled in the elastic band of his boxer briefs, snoring softly, she pressed her fingers to Men's temples and pretended her own heart wasn't quaking in her chest.

Because of the rarity of Men's existence, George contemplated calling reporters. Because she exercised more than half her brain, Leimomi insisted on his silence. Men must be protected.

You're welcome to stay as long as you like, but Men grew and grew. Soon she could no longer fit inside the dryer's barrel, and George took to building her a private oasis where our outhouse once sat. For the master builder, he built her walls of thatched bamboo, a ceiling of palm fronds stitched together by twine. He carved a little cutout for a window, salvaged a mattress from the street and positioned it so that neither Men's head nor Men's feet addressed the window or the door. He foraged Boy Two's bedroom — who knew whether or when the son might make his return? — from which he pilfered downy pillows, a ceramic bowl once filled with pakalolo leaves, a framed photograph of Lē'ahi rising its vertiginous emerald heads into the sky. Poor Leimomi. How many years of meticulous care she'd extended into his hovel, the shrine of Boy Two that still nursed her grief, where she prayed he might one day soon return! How the ache must've pushed down her throat like a brick.

Leimomi needed to care for someone. Her

keiki were all either too needy or too independent, while George, in his old age, was evolving into another person entirely. Loose-limbed and weary, George snarled easy at the kids and even more easily at his wife, his patience a string tuned tight to snapping. Yes, age had weathered his body and his mind, but it had also weathered his composure, leaving him a fiction of the man who'd once wooed her. And while he never lifted a hand to his 'ohana, those scowling bursts of dissent pushed his presence in the house toward intolerable. With Men, Leimomi was given a second chance, a chance to live her life for someone else and to finally do it right.

You're welcome to stay for a while, but tell me, where did you come from?

For weeks, men didn't speak. This is how we entered a soft season of watching Men eat fistfuls of dirt from the backyard, where George had made her home.

In the beginning, Leimomi did her best to put an end to things. Panic knuckled down her spine at that first sighting, and so Lei leapt into solutions mode, delivering Men bowls of mango wedges, papaya peeled and seeded for quick consumption. Two-finger poi, Men's preferred consistency. She

brought Men liters of water with glacial ice cubes and a carton of Passion Orange Guava she stored in a disposable foam cooler, the only one we could afford. Everything left melted, dejected and untouched, under the slatted ceiling of palm fronds. Lei ventured outside two, three times a day, peering through the bamboo thatching. Clots of dirt caught around Men's mouth, the mud bleeding into her own brown tan.

Most of us had lost interest in Men at that point. Only Girl Two persisted, fascination boiling in both thumbs. Because she also happened to be George's favorite, Girl Two was in a relatively privileged position to befriend Men. Men, for all her dirt and twig consumption, had also persisted with her master building. Every morning, we woke to the relentless pitch of the roosters and some new home fixture upended and repaired. The curling linoleum in the living room now ironed flat; the garbage disposal unjammed; cracked grout unfractured; gate latch repaired. All the while she was consuming mud, heaps and heaps pulled from the earth. Men built solutions into the floorboards of our home. Girl Two watched.

Leimomi worried. She didn't know how to reach the girl — and could she even call her a girl? Him, them, it? Or was Leimomi

now contending with someone, something, possibly unhuman? And still, how many times her tūtū had to remind her — Menehune were the original Hawaiian people! People. So why did Men insist on eating bowls of dirt?

George cared. Didn't know any better than his wife, but of course he assumed he did. Great Big Man with a capital M. Men was softening all his corners. One day, after a particularly heated outburst had jumped from his wife's throat, George paid a visit to Men's new home. Standing outside the bamboo walls, he admired his creation. Inside, Men slept. George didn't dare enter without permission, but something must've rustled under his feet, then, perhaps a notch of twigs, for well before he could even entertain the idea of knocking, the door opened. He passed through. Men sat cross-legged on a square of Leimomi's hand-stitched quilt, regarding him.

Girl Two huddled behind the mango tree, eavesdropping.

You want to know why I'm here, while your wife wants to know how long I intend to stay. These were the first words proffered by Men; her tone simmered, her cadence compressed into a tight fist.

You're welcome to stay —

But she cut him off. *The truth is, I'm not welcomed to stay anywhere. Have you asked yourself the simple questions your wife is asking? Where did I come from? Why your house, your old, abandoned dryer? Have you wondered after the rest of us?*

The rest of you? Really he wondered about not much but what he stared at were her breasts, hung slackened and uncaged like the feral chickens rooting around their yard. No shoot of lust pushed through him. Call it curiosity, or admiration. Like Leimomi, he aimed to protect her.

The Menehune generations. We have been here, we belong here. For centuries before the arrival of man, Menehune made a community on the foothills of Waimea Valley. You locals think we're only little people, dwarfs, elves from the pictures. You've made us into a joke. Our story is one you will never know, because the rest of us, the ones who stayed, we're forbidden from sharing.

Girl Two leaned in closer, pushing the boundaries of the mango trunk.

You can tell me, said George. Is it true you turn men to stone? I want to know everything about you. You can tell me. I'm a trustworthy person.

You may think that, but what about me? You men, always thinking of yourselves and never

how you might flip a question around. The truth is, I am not someone worthy of your trust. Will you trust me anyway? Most likely. I could tell you about my father, a king among Menehune and the first man to gut a wild boar with a spear built by his own hands. I could tell you about my mother, a Hawaiian woman. I could tell you the dozens of ways the Menehune council made it impossible for such crossbreeding to persist and what exactly happened to my mother, what grisly fate she bore. I could shock you with language of the macabre — do you wince at the words slit slice strangle carve claw cut butcher bury rape ravage bleed? Should I go on?

Shards of human voice splintered down the side of the house then, and George stirred. Elsewhere, Girl Two stumbled. Hooked her leg around a jutting root of the mango tree then fell flat on her face.

Should I go on?

So ended the soft season, the dirt eating, the not speaking.

YOU'RE WELCOME TO stay, but please, do not hurt us.

And although Men wouldn't dare hurt us, things shifted around the house all the same. What she'd repaired during the weeks

of her stay, Men reversed overnight. The shower door, unhinged; the clothesline unwoven and dragged to the gravel like unspun hair. Our lightbulbs burst at odd and irreverent times. What pooled grief into Leimomi's heart, though, was the dryer: newly eclipsed in a familiar rust, the dryer stopped working. The lint catcher showing seasons of dust.

She even dismantled the hale George had built for her.

It was Girl Two who found her for the last time. We watched her watching Men's comings and goings from her square of window in the bedroom Girls One and Two shared with Boy Four. She pinched between her tiny fingers the barrels of the used binoculars, also foraged from tūtū's estate sale, and peeled the landscape for any motion of Men. Men's short, angular limbs. There. Rooted to the soil like a captain surveying her wreckage, Men sat among stacks of sifted bamboo, bundles of twine, fractured petioles of palm fronds. Folds of skin pushed together near her middle like the pleats of an accordion. She lifted her face to the sun. She didn't move. Girl Two, neither. She watched Men breathe air into her lungs (did she have lungs?) and stir something solid in her heart (did she have a heart?),

and some invisible pressure pressed into Girl Two's side and it told her the truth: *Time's up.*

So still Men sat, Girl Two could've sworn Men found a way to turn herself to stone.

Men left. we blamed ourselves; we blamed each other.

George's fault for forcing Men into speech, and Leimomi's fault for not saying enough. Girl One's fault for showing no interest. Boy Two's fault for always being elsewhere, leaving us lonely and in a lurch. Boy Four's fault, and Girl Two's. The truth is, we were all at fault, for either loving too much or not loving quite enough.

Would you believe it if we told you Girl Two never recovered? So many years later, and still none of us can say with confidence what made her most susceptible to Men, or what Men wanted from her. Regardless, she wanted too much. And Girl Two, too, how she drowned in an awful longing! What use would she make of those binoculars now? For so long, Men was hers to watch and wait for. Now Men is gone, and Girl Two colonizes that freighted patch of land with her knees hugged to her chest, her shirt stripped off in Men's likeness, and what would the neighbors say? We watched Girl

Two. She sat there for what felt like hours, days, feeling around for her immense loss then feeling nothing, not moving, immobile, ground down, rooted, stone.

But Men, she hasn't stopped moving.

Can you see her now, traveling on foot to another 'ohana in another house? Can you see her gentle footfalls? The way she holds her breasts with callous resolve? Do you see her curl inside cupboards, stairwells, wall crawls, rapacious for cover, privacy, space? The 'ohana she visits change with the seasons; Men never does. Do you see how it is now?

Do you look her straight in the eyes? Work tirelessly to contain her?

Are you afraid yet?

Have you stilled to stone?