

HULA HEART

A one-act dramedy by
Velina Hasu Houston

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

KALĀ, 11, multiethnic (Japanese, Black, Kaw, Puerto Rican, Hawaiian, German, Scottish).

MALIA, late 30s, Kalā's mother, multiethnic (Japanese, Black, Kaw).

KAIMI, 11, Kalā's friend, a Honolulu hālau member, Black American.

LEILANI, 11, multiethnic (Korean, Ethiopian, Cuban, Chinese), Kalā's California schoolmate.

JULIAN, 11, Kalā's California schoolmate, White (German American).

LAKĀ, ageless, Goddess of Hula, a brown-skinned deity that inspires and energizes hula.

AUNTIE ANDREA, 50, a Kumu Hula (master teacher in the art of hula and a keeper of the culture).

SETTING

Late August, 2000. Honolulu, Hawai'i and Manhattan Beach, California.

NOTES

This play is the result of several years of first-person research of boys, girls, men and women of all ages who were members of a hula hālau, an experience that included competition in the Merrie Monarch festival. The play was commissioned by Honolulu Theatre for Youth and received its world premiere at that theatre in 1996. The play was revised in 2021, but is set in 2000 to preserve a particular era of bygone boyhood of color.

DEDICATION

For Kiyoshi and Leilani for insights into their hālau experiences.

With thanks to Kumu Keali`i Ceballos and the members of Hālau Keali`i O Nalani.

PROLOGUE

(Numerous rainbows illuminate the stage as projections with traditional Hawaiian music as underscoring [such as "Hi'ilawe" by Gabby Pahinui].)

SCENE 1

(Lights fade up on MALIA and KALĀ over an old kitchen table strewn with lu'au and ti leaves.)

KALĀ: I wanna be really good at making lau lau! Teach me!

MALIA: Okay, so inside is pork and buttahfish, 'cept you no eat da pork so—

KALĀ: Pig.

MALIA: Pork broke da mout, but I put chicken in fo you, yeah.

KALĀ: Mom, why do you talk ōlelo pa'i 'ai at home, but all nice when we're out with the haoles? Local people smart all the time.

MALIA: Oh, now you talk all good 'cause you got scholarship to haole private school.

KALĀ: Just gotta go with the flow, Mom!

MALIA: I know how stupid da haoles tink we are if we don't speak King's English. And— and...

KALĀ: And what?

MALIA: *(Something is on her mind, but she's suppressing it:)* I tryin' fo tink!

KALĀ: We have two languages.

MALIA: Mo dan dat. Japanese I got, Black English, Spanish: Aloha Awakea, Aloha Auinalā. Kon'nichiwa. Wassup? Buenas tardes.

KALĀ: Guten tag! So we know six! We got nothing to prove! *And* we got hula, a whole 'nother language!

MALIA: We bettah finish lau lau before Kaimi come ovah and tink we stingy.

KALĀ: Yeah, so chicken and butterfish inside.

MALIA: *Salted* buttahfish, not wit haole salt, but Hawaiian salt. Lu'au leaf inside. Break da mout 'cause flavah from chicken fat. Ti leaf outside like Christmas paypa.

KALĀ: Once I saw a haole try to eat it!

MALIA: *(Makes a face in response:)* Da wrapper?

(Laughs.)

Den tie it up wit string, den when you wanna eat, take off string and eat buttahfish and lu'au leaf and poh – *(About to say pork, then corrects herself:)* – CHICKEN. So I teach you, you make lau lau from now on.

KALĀ: I'll take it to hula with me every week! Kaimi's not gonna believe this! She makes it so good but – vegan.

MALIA: *(Makes a face:)* Vegan lau lau? Well, vegetable good for body! You like da girl, you bettah eat it.

KALĀ: No, she's just my hula buddy.

MALIA: Since you was four. Long time.

KALĀ: Any day's a good day with you, lau lau, Kaimi and hula. If Grandma and Papa were here, it'd be perfect. Grandma used to give me all that good Japanese stuff to eat! Ummm, yohkan!

MALIA: I'll get some soon. Cost a lot.

(A knock is heard at the door. KAIMI enters.)

KAIMI: Hi, Auntie Malia.

MALIA: Hello, Kaimi.

KAIMI: Ooh, I can smell lau lau!

MALIA: Oh yeah, Kalā helped big. Now, he be doin' all lau lau in dis — *this* — house!

(She winks at Kalā.)

(Malia laughs, striving to show nothing but cheer, but something is on her mind.)

KALĀ: You okay, Mom?

MALIA: Yeah, yeah. You pack up lau lau for hālau. I'm going shi-shi. See you after practice.

(Malia exits.)

KAIMI: I brought some vegan lau lau, too. I made them all by myself.

KALĀ: *(Thinking about what Malia said:)* Sounds...good. Save some for me.

KAIMI: Already saved three for you!

KALĀ: Lucky me!

(They start to pack up. Malia re-enters. Now it's harder to hide her true feelings.)

Thanks for the lau lau, Mom.

MALIA: I know you're going to make good lau lau no matter where we go.

KALĀ: Go? What're you talkin' about?

KAIMI: Where you guys going?

KALĀ: Nowhere, right, Mom? She always says that since Papa and Grandma left.

KAIMI: ...I'm sorry they died.

(Feeling things are getting just a little bit too friendly, Kalā moves away from Kaimi.)

KALĀ: People die, yeah.

(Lights fade to a waning sunset, later that same evening.)

(Malia appears and gazes at the fading sunset. Shortly, Kalā enters carrying a bag filled with hula instruments.)

Hey, Mom.

MALIA: Hi, son.

(She pats for him to sit beside her.)

How was hula?

KALĀ: Real good.

MALIA: Kamehanaokalā.

KALĀ: Just Kalā, Mom.

MALIA: Your name big, you be big, too; bigger than just Hawai'i. What do you see, Warmth of the Sun?

KALĀ: The sunset here's like magic! The rays shoot out like stars.

MALIA: Maybe two of those rays are Papa and Grandma.

KALĀ: *(Waving:)* Hi, Papa! Hi, Grandma!

MALIA: Kalā?

KALĀ: Yes, Mom?

MALIA: Friends important. In your life, many good ones, I hope.

KALĀ: Like Kaimi!

MALIA: Yeah. ... Kalā? You know my sister in California?

KALĀ: Auntie Makani! She talks so good! Just like haole!

MALIA: *(Reflecting upon this, trying to use the King's English:)* Yes. Well, I've been thinking since our people gone, maybe we start a new life.

KALĀ: You don't want to work at the hospital no more?

MALIA: My sistah's friend in California make mo bettah money workin' at mainland hospital. And tings cheapah, too. Here we barely scrapin' by; there gas, milk, lottah tings cheapah. We have bettah life. Mo tings foh you to do, too. (*A pause, then:*) I tryna tink...maybe we move... To very big island.

KALĀ: Hawai'i, the Big Island?

MALIA: No, Kalā. To the huge island we call Mainland.

KALĀ: Where katonks live?

MALIA: When you hit Auntie Makina's head, does it go katonk like she got no culture left?

KALĀ: I never hit Auntie Makina!

MALIA: Don't call Mainland pipo katonks! Wherever we go, we gotta keep culture inside. That's what Auntie Makina does! It's not costume you put on outside.

KALĀ: But if we leave Hawai'i, I'll never see Kaimi again!

MALIA: She can visit.

KALĀ: What about hula?

MALIA: Maybe learn something new.

KALĀ: I don't want to leave Hawai'i.

MALIA: We visit.

KALĀ: It won't be the same.

MALIA: Could be bettah!

KALĀ: Do I have to go?

MALIA: School end June, new one start in August, so maybe two months. Okay?

KALĀ: Maybe I could stay here with Kaimi's family?

MALIA: Maybe you stay with your own family – me.

(Lights cross-fade to a spotlight on Kalā. It's later that night. Stars twinkle.)

KALĀ: The Mainland? Will they have spam musubi and loco moco and mochi? Will they even understand me? Will everybody ask me what island I'm from and all they know is Maui or Kauai because they go there for vacations? I've never lived anyplace but Hawai'i. I don't know how to live anywhere else. This is so unfair!

(The twinkling of stars grows more intense, then lights fade...)

SCENE 2

(Three months later. Lights fade up on the schoolyard of a Manhattan Beach middle school. Projections show many American children milling about. Kalā runs in with his backpack and looks around in confusion. A dark shadow looms over him, and he looks up uncomfortably.)

KALĀ: I'm not loitering, ma'am. You never seen me before 'cause I just started here. Yes ma'am, I know where I am. Manhattan Beach Middle School. Uh, ID? Let me see what I got!

(He shows a tag on his backpack. The shadow vanishes and Kalā relaxes.)

Gee, I guess here people who look like me get asked a lot of questions! I hope she's not my teacher! Kalā, you're definitely not in Hawai'i anymore!

(Enter LEILANI toting a kawaii backpack.)

LEILANI: Hi. Are you lost?

KALĀ: I'm fine, yeah.

LEILANI: You look lost.

KALĀ: *(He is:)* Well, I'm not. Mind your own business!

LEILANI: Suit yourself. I was just trying to be nice!

(JULIAN appears, causing Leilani to leave with an apparent distaste for Julian.)

KALĀ: *(To the departing girl:)* Hey, where's Miss Cook's classroom?

JULIAN: Don't ask her. She's stuck-up. Find out for yourself anyway.

KALĀ: That's what I'm trying to do, yeah!

JULIAN: What do you mean "yeah"?

KALĀ: Don't give me a hard time, yeah?

JULIAN: Stop that "yeah" stuff!

KALĀ: What're you talking about? I never say yeah!

JULIAN: Ookay. I got Miss Cook, too. It's that way. But there's still some time before lunch ends.

KALĀ: Oh good. I can practice.

JULIAN: You read my mind!

(Kalā sits down and starts rearranging the items in his backpack. He pulls out a pu'ili, which Julian studies with disapproving interest as he takes out his basketball.)

What the heck's that?

KALĀ: A pu'ili.

JULIAN: A pooh-lee?

KALĀ: It's for hula.

(He takes out a second pu'ili and hits himself on the shoulder with one.)

You use 'em like that.

(He crosses both in front of him and strikes them together.)

Or like that. And a lot of other ways, too.

JULIAN: Wait a minute! I wasn't talking about that kinda practice! Pooh-lee, hula! That's girls' stuff!

KALĀ: No it isn't!

(Julian grabs the pu'ili and whips them through the air like swords.)

JULIAN: Hey, we could do 'em like this! Swords for fighting evil aliens!

(He holds them up to his mouth as if they were upper teeth.)

Or make 'em monster teeth!

(He holds them at a ninety-degree angle from top of his head.)

Or antenna to search for more aliens! Come in, space station! Red alert! Alien sighting!

(Kalā snatches back his pu'ili and takes beginning position for a hula. In the background, boys' laughter is heard; it fades out. It makes Julian a wary critic.)

What are you doing? That's not ballet, is it?!

KALĀ: It's called hula.

JULIAN: Hula? Where's your grass skirt? My dad's got one of those hula-hula girls on his dashboard. She's got a coconut bikini top! She shakes like this whenever he hits a bump!

(Seen upstage is the projection of a car's dashboard with a brown-skinned hula dancer bobblehead doll bouncing up and down from the motion of the moving car; she is the epitome of the Western sexualized stereotype of the hula dancer. Julian shakes ridiculously. Kalā ignores him, closes his eyes and chants a mele. As he chants, a projection of a calming sea is seen.)

KALĀ: NANI WALE NA HALA `EA `EA [Beautiful indeed]
`O NAUE I KE KAI `EA `EA [at Naue by the sea]

(The projection fades. Again, in the background, boys' snickering fades in and out, sending a charge through Julian.)

JULIAN: Dude! Stop! You're like total coconut girl! Don't do that stuff around here, okay? Somebody could see us!

KALĀ: Hula's a sacred ritual!

JULIAN: Sacred! Let me guess: You're the new kid from Huh-why, right?

KALĀ: Hawai'i, not Huh-why. The real word's got an okina between the two i's.

JULIAN: I'll say it whatever way I like! You're the one who needs to learn to talk like we do; we say Huh-why! You from Kuh-why?

KALĀ: You mean Kauai'? Is that the only island katonks—I mean Mainlanders—know? I'm from O'ahu. From Kaimuki. My best friend Kaimi lives there.

JULIAN: Kuh-mooky? You wanna get beat up or what? Talk right! And lose those loud shirts, too. You got Huh-why written all over you!

KALĀ: This is an aloha shirt!

JULIAN: It's a girl's shirt! Big, loud flowers and—

KALĀ: It's a dress shirt! My mom said wear it for the first day of school!

JULIAN: Don't be saying "mom this" and "mom that"! You got Miss Cook, so you're in sixth like me. This is middle school! We're not babies anymore!

(A scrutinizing pause.)

You know, you don't look Hawaiian to me. You look like one of us.

KALĀ: (*Proudly, the list rolling off his tongue:*) I'm total local boy: Japanese, Black, Kaw, Puerto Rican, Hawaiian, German, Scottish.

JULIAN: But nobody'd know if you don't spell it out. Just keep quiet and everybody'll think you're like me.

KALĀ: I'm not haole! Lots of us got plenty kinda races, the more the better.

JULIAN: What's a how-lee?

KALĀ: People who aren't Native Hawaiian or Polynesian! Since white people were the only ones like that at first, it just means white people.

JULIAN: Doesn't sound like a nice word!

KALĀ: It's just what we say. Then there's local boys like me. All mixed up, bra.

JULIAN: Bra?! That's something girls wear!

KALĀ: (*Seemingly to himself, but toward the audience:*) Geez, he doesn't understand English! (*To Julian:*) I'm Kamehanaokalā. You can call me Kalā, though.

JULIAN: Coo-lah? Like an ice cooler?

KALĀ: (*Pronouncing it slowly so Julian will get it:*) Kalā.

JULIAN: I'm just gonna call you HB—Hawaiian Bud.

KALĀ: HB? But—

JULIAN: And get with it or we can't hang out.

KALĀ: In Honolulu, I belonged to a hālau. A hula school. After school, I—

JULIAN: Do yourself a favor and don't tell anybody.

KALĀ: Why not?

JULIAN: 'Cause like I told you! Hula's for girls! I can't be hangin' out with you if you do girl stuff.

KALĀ: You wanna hang out with me?

JULIAN: Maybe.

KALĀ: It'll be okay with your other friends?

JULIAN: Uh...I'm a loner.

KALĀ: Julian, you know, hula's for everybody! Girls and boys! You could do it, too.

JULIAN: What? Are you outta your mind? You better cool it. Comin' from another country, you oughta—

KALĀ: Hawaii's part of America! Fiftieth state!

JULIAN: I know that!

KALĀ: Not that we wanted to be! You guys forced that stuff on us.

JULIAN: No we didn't!

KALĀ: Yes you did!

JULIAN: There's nothing about that in my history books!

KALĀ: Then you better get some new history books!

(A school bell rings. Kalā walks away fast as lights cross-fade and into a spotlight.)

I can't breathe here! They call it smog, but I think I like vog better—fog and volcano smoke. More natural, yeah. More bettah for my insides. Why can't I wear my same clothes? Why I gotta be called HB? Why can't I talk about hula without being called a girl? I want Julian to like me, but I wanna be myself, too. When the plane landed at the airport, I got a sick feeling in my stomach. It's not gettin' any better, and I've already been here a week! First day of school feels like first day of jail!

(Lights fade.)

SCENE 3

(The next day. Lights fade up on a small apartment full of light. In the distance, the sound of the ocean can be heard. Kalā appears with his backpack. He looks in the pantry and grabs something.)

KALĀ: Cookies, yeah. Need some of those. Juice boxes, applesauce, ooh, yohkan. Yes!

(He shoves it all into his backpack. He sees his pu'ili. He picks them up and then, in a "why not" mode, stuffs them into his backpack. He takes a long look around the apartment.)

(To himself:) Sorry, Mom, gotta go. Can't go back to that school. They think hula's for girls!

(He starts to head out, but the light brightens until it dazzles and nearly blinds him. He stumbles. LAKĀ, dressed in elegant white mu'umu'u and hakulei, emerges from the dazzling light and encircles him. She lifts her arms upwards, and the motion magically helps Kalā to stand.)

LAKĀ: *(Singing his name melodiously:)* Kamehanaokalā!
Kamehanaokalā!

KALĀ: *(Startled, shaken:)* Chicken skin! This is what I get for trying to run away!

LAKĀ: Kamehanaokalā, where are you going?

KALĀ: T-to Kaimuki, I guess.

LAKĀ: But how will you cross the ocean?

KALĀ: Who are you?

LAKĀ: I am Lakā.

KALĀ: Are you a ghost?

LAKĀ: No, I am a goddess.

KALĀ: That kinda sounds like a ghost.

LAKĀ: I inspire people to dance hula and pass on stories.

KALĀ: You better leave before my mom comes home, 'cause she says I can't talk to strangers.

LAKĀ: Your ancestors —

KALĀ: Papa and Grandma?

LAKĀ: Yes! They want you to talk to me. Because California does not know our traditions, your hula heart is growing faint.

KALĀ: My hula heart? What's that?

LAKĀ: It's like right after the sun sets and the air gets cold. We need the warmth of the sun, Kamehanaokalā.

KALĀ: No warmth here in this town! Seems like you gotta work really hard just to be liked. I don't like that.

LAKĀ: I know you've danced hula since you were four, yet since you came to the Mainland, you have not danced.

KALĀ: Nowhere to do it without looking stupid. Maybe it is...stupid. Maybe all it is now is dancing for tourists at hotels in Waikiki...

LAKĀ: It's more than that, much more. And so are you, young man. If you want to be.

(Kalā takes out one of his pu'ili and studies it.)

KALĀ: What am I going to do with this in Manhattan Beach, probably the whitest town since mayonnaise?

(Kalā breaks the pu'ili, shocking the goddess.)

LAKĀ: Oh my goodness! Why did you do that? That's not a nice way to share about our history!

KALĀ: I gotta figure out my own story!

LAKĀ: What if it's part of your story?

KALĀ: What if it's not anymore? What if I'm just like everybody else?

LAKĀ: Are you? Do you want to be?

KALĀ: It's not fair! Why did this happen to me? What's Kaimi doing without me? I'd even eat vegan lau lau if my life could just be what it used to be!

(Lakā smiles and begins to chant a mele as projections of a forest at sunset are seen in the background.)

LAKĀ: A KE KUAHIWI, I KE KUALONO [In the forests, on the ridges]

KU AN O LAKĀ I KA MAUNA [Stands Lakā on the mountains]

NOHO ANA O LAKĀ I KA PO`O O KA OHU [Dwelling in the source of the mists]

O LAKĀ KUMU HULA [Lakā, Mistress of the Hula]

NANA I A`E KA WAOKELE [Watching over the forests]

I sense you are dreaming of making lau lau with your mother and Kaimi back in your old house. Good! That's progress!

(Motions to him with welcoming arms:)

Dance with me, Kamehanaokalā. The stories of everything you remember will be in every movement you make, and that will help you find your own story.

(She begins a powerful hula, "Ke Ha'a La Puna I Ka Makani," as the forest projections give way to those of hala groves. Kalā tries to resist the dance, but then can't help himself and is drawn into it.)

KE HA`A LA PUNA I KA MAKANI [Puna's a dance in the breeze]

HA`A KA ULU HALA I KEAAU [The hala groves of Keaau shaken:]

HA`A HAENA ME HOPOE [The thighs of the dancing nymph]

HA`A KA WAHINE

AMI I KAI O NANAHUKI E [Quiver and sway down at Nanahuki]

(The projections fade.)

A long time ago on a mountain on Moloka'i, I gave hula to the Hawaiian people. Please trust your heart and uphold the richness of hula – uphold your cultural legacy!

KALĀ: But hula's not a thing here!

LAKĀ: Make it "a thing."

KALĀ: That's like saying make a hamburger vegan!

LAKĀ: But I've heard you, I've seen you dance. I think you have enough heart for all of Southern California. I'll be watching you! I believe in you!

(She is about to exit as he scrutinizes her.)

KALĀ: Hey, Goddess! Anybody ever say you kinda look like my grandma?

(As she exits with a smile, the lights revert to the blushed glow of dusk.)

(Gazing at the sunset and sighing:) Grandma? Papa? You hear me? Could you both shine your warm rays a little bit harder on me? Part of me's in Kaimuki, part of me's trying to be here. The "here" part's really tiny right now. I feel like I gotta be both, but I don't know if I can.

(Malia comes home in a nurse's uniform. She looks at Kalā's stuffed backpack and then at him.)

California nurse's uniform looks good on you, Mom.

MALIA: The job feels good on me 'cause it pays more and people tell it like it is, none of this savin' face and beatin' around the bush. Speakin' of straightforward, you got somethin' to tell me? Let's see. It's not three o'clock yet and you're home. Guess you didn't start your second week of school today, did you?

(She nudges his backpack.)

Going somewhere?

(He shakes his head.)

You sure?

(He thinks for a moment and nods.)

I'm sorry. It'll get easier.

KALĀ: Mom, what if I never see Kaimi again?

MALIA: Let's invite Kaimi to visit. Anyway, if we went back, it wouldn't be the same to you.

KALĀ: Yes, it would! Loco moco and lau lau and Kaimi!

MALIA: No—everything changes, Kalā. We remember it one way, and then we go back and it doesn't feel quite the same. Because we change, and things about the place change, too.

KALĀ: So we're really staying in California? Forever?

MALIA: I don't know if it's forever, but it's a chance to start our lives new.

(She takes the cookies and juice boxes out of his backpack.)

You were going to live off cookies and juice boxes?

(He shrugs as the lights fade.)

SCENE 4

(The next day. Lights fade up on a basketball court. Julian passes the ball challengingly to Kalā, who tries to rise to the occasion but

stumbles. Julian laughs as Kalā quickly recovers and tries to look cool.)

JULIAN: Hey, HB, why weren't you in school yesterday?

KALĀ: ...I was sick.

JULIAN: You better not be anymore 'cause I don't need your germs.

KALĀ: I'm fine.

JULIAN: Good! So, HB, I'm gonna teach you something really secret. You can't show nobody, okay?

(Julian teaches Kalā a special handshake. The two bond as they practice it.)

KALĀ: Wow, that's so cool! Where'd you learn it?

JULIAN: *(A moment of sadness:)* From my dad.

KALĀ: *(Catching the wave of sadness:)* Oh. What happened?

JULIAN: He left.

KALĀ: ...My papa died, too...

JULIAN: Mine didn't die. He just left, married somebody he worked with. I hate her! She stole my dad!

KALĀ: Sounds like he just kinda left, yeah.

JULIAN: Yeah. Thanks. Nobody in our class has divorced parents.

KALĀ: So they kinda don't understand. Sorry.

JULIAN: They look at me like I did something wrong.

KALĀ: That's how I felt when my papa died.

JULIAN: *(Looking at Kalā in a new light:)* Hey, you wanna shoot some hoops?

KALĀ: You and me?

JULIAN: Sure.

KALĀ: Okay, yeah, let's do it!

JULIAN: I'm warnin' you; I'm really good.

KALĀ: I can learn from you.

JULIAN: Okay, so we'll play after school like every day. Hey, you should come over for Halloween on Saturday. My mom makes a killer cake.

KALĀ: Your house?! Sure!

JULIAN: Watch this.

(Julian shoots a long shot. The swoosh of it going into an offstage basket is heard.)

KALĀ: Wow! You *are* good!

(Julian retrieves the ball and throws it to Kalā, who is knocked down by the thrust, causing Julian to laugh. Kalā recovers the ball.)

JULIAN: Okay, your turn.

(Kalā shoots, and the ball is heard bouncing away.)

KALĀ: Oops.

JULIAN: You missed.

KALĀ: Yeah, told you I'm not so good at basketball.

JULIAN: What are you good at, HB?

KALĀ: *(Thinking about this:)* I used to be good at something, really good.

(Lights fade.)

SCENE 5

(That weekend. Lights fade up on Kalā and Malia's apartment. Kaimi sits at the kitchen table preparing lau lau with Malia. Kalā

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holds a basketball and practices trying to make it spin, with little success.)

KALĀ: (*Looking at Kaimi:*) So weird having you in Cali. (*Then:*) Mom, I decided I'm gonna play basketball. I wanna be really good at it.

MALIA: Basketball? Is that what the boys at school like?

KALĀ: Everybody likes basketball!

MALIA: Not me.

KAIMI: Me either.

KALĀ: Guess it's a guy thing.

KAIMI: Do you know there's a national women's basketball league?

KALĀ: Nice. Whatcha making?

MALIA: Your nose broke? You know the smell of steamed lu'au leaves, salted buttahfish and fatty chicken! Kaimi even made that vegan kind and brought poi from home. Lucky her uncle give her da airline miles. Here, Kalā. Lau lau for you –

KALĀ: I don't eat that stuff anymore.

MALIA: Since when? It's your favorite!

KALĀ: I like hamburgers better.

KAIMI: Once, I ordered a hamburger, hold the meat!

MALIA: That's funny!

KALĀ: That's weird.

KAIMI: Since when is it weird? Before, you would have laughed, too.

KALĀ: Nobody here eats lau lau!

KAIMI: Kalā, we should go trick-or-treating since it's Halloween!

KALĀ: That's for kids.

KAIMI: But we used to go trick-or-treating in Kaimuki.

MALIA: And you *are* kids!

KALĀ: Tomorrow, I'm going to my best friend's house.

KAIMI: You already have a best friend here?

MALIA: I didn't know that! You never mentioned anyone. Who?

KALĀ: Julian. He plays basketball and wears sneakers like you see on TV.

MALIA: So that's why this new interest in basketball.

KAIMI: I'll go over to his house with you.

KALĀ: Uh, I think you gotta be invited.

MALIA: Maybe you can take lau lau to Julian's.

KALĀ: He doesn't eat it.

MALIA: How you know?

KAIMI: Has he ever had it?

KALĀ: He doesn't like it! I oughta know; he's my best friend!

(The phone rings. Kalā answers it.)

MALIA: Don't forget to say —

KALĀ: *(Gesturing to her: He's got this:)* Hello. Hauptmann residence.

(Malia smiles at him for his polite manner, but he quickly slumps into what he thinks is cool behavior. Kaimi observes with surprise.)

Hey, Julian! How's it, man? I'm just hanging out playing a video game.

(Malia and Kaimi share a bewildered look.)

MALIA: Video game? I thought we were making lau —

KALĀ: Tonight, too? Uh, sure. Just a minute.

KALĀ: *(Covering the phone:)* Mom, can I hang out with Julian tonight?

MALIA: You — *(Indicating Kalā and Kaimi:)* — both can hang out with Julian tonight. Ten o'clock curfew.

KALĀ: *(With chagrin:)* Ten o'clock?

KAIMI: *(With welcome surprise and gladness:)* Ten o'clock!

KALĀ: And I gotta bring Kaimi?

KAIMI: "Gotta"?

MALIA: She's our guest!

KALĀ: *(Back into the phone:)* I can come, but there's this girl visiting us and I gotta bring her with me. And 'cause-a her I gotta be home by ten.

MALIA: Wow. He should be president the way he revises a story!

KALĀ: Okay. See ya.

(Kalā hangs up the phone.)

He's in the neighborhood with his mom, so he's going to pick me —

KAIMI: Us.

KALĀ: — up.

(There's a heavy knocking at the door. Malia goes to open it, and in strides Julian dressed from head to toe in a sexualized,

stereotypical "hula-hula girl" Halloween costume, replete with half coconuts on his chest, a long black wig, a hakulei and exaggerated makeup. He is barefoot and shakes his hips in a poor imitation of what he thinks hula looks like. Malia and Kaimi are aghast, but Kalā decides to laugh.)

JULIAN: (*Terrible accent:*) You like-a what-a you-a see-a? Numbah one-a Halloween-a costume-a!

(Malia and Kaimi are sickened by his accent, but try to appear polite.)

KAIMI: What are you supposed to be?

JULIAN: (*Pointing at Kalā:*) Him! Or what he used to be when he did that girl-stuff hula!

(He cracks up.)

MALIA: Julian, a hula dancer's clothes are not exactly like that, and it's not a costume either. Kalā, I can't believe you find this funny!

JULIAN: Come on! Of course it's funny!

KALĀ: (*Now he isn't so sure it is:*) Uh, Mom, Kaimi, this is Julian.

JULIAN: Hey, wassup! You got anything to eat? I'm hungry.

KALĀ: Let's go. We can pick up hamburgers on the way.

JULIAN: You can't trick-or-treat eating hamburgers.

KAIMI: But I thought trick-or-treating wasn't—

KALĀ: Not real trick-or-treating.

JULIAN: Heck yeah! We're not going to miss a single house!

KALĀ: Okay, let's go!

JULIAN: I need something to eat!

KALĀ: We don't have anything, Julian.

(This remark perplexes Malia and Kaimi as they consider the food on the table. Julian walks over and surveys it.)

JULIAN: Why don't we take some of... *(As he fails to recognize what it is:)* some of – what the heck is this?

KAIMI: Lau lau.

JULIAN: My neighbor's dog is called La La! Is this made of dog meat?

MALIA: We don't eat dog! Lau lau's made from fish and chicken and steamed... *(On a look from her son:)* ...spinach.

JULIAN: I hate fish.

KALĀ: Me too! Let's go!

KAIMI: I'm vegan, so I made vegan ones, too.

JULIAN: Vegetarian? Yuck! I hate vegetarian even more!

MALIA: I said *vegan*; that means no dairy or meat. Vegetarian means dairy is okay.

JULIAN: Hey, *I like meat*, okay?! Come on, let's go, HB!

KALĀ: Let's take some vegan ones so Kaimi can eat 'em later.

JULIAN: Kaw-mee? You guys really got some weird names. Kaw-mee can't come with us.

(The realization of the situation sets in, and Malia gives Julian her sunniest smile.)

MALIA: Well, Julian, I'm afraid Kalā isn't going to be able to go with you tonight either.

KALĀ: What?

JULIAN: *(To Kalā:)* But you said –

KAIMI: Let him go, Auntie. It's so important to him.

MALIA: No, Kaimi, you came a long way to see us, and we promised to watch the new dance you learned, and that's exactly what we're going to do—all of us, Kalā.

JULIAN: Dance? What kinda dance, Kaw-mee?

KAIMI: Hula. And my name is *Kaimi*.

JULIAN: I can do hula!

(He stupidly shakes his hips again.)

MALIA: *(Another scarily sunny smile:)* True hula, Julian.

JULIAN: *(To Kalā:)* You can't trick-or-treat without a costume anyway, so next time.

KALĀ: You don't have a costume either.

JULIAN: I'm a hula-hula dancer!

KAIMI: No, you're not.

JULIAN: Yes, I am!

KALĀ: *No, you're not.*

JULIAN: I'm not?

KALĀ: Look, Julian, hula isn't a costume; it's the natural clothes of a people, my people. Just like kimono for Japanese or hanbok for Koreans. How would you feel if I told you my Halloween costume was going to be to dress like an American? Can you imagine if Halloween stores sold American costumes?

JULIAN: Do they dress up as Americans in Hawaii? Maybe I'll just put on my regular clothes, and when someone says, "What are you going as?" I'll say, "An American!"

(This makes him laugh uproariously, and the others can't help smiling at the nonsensicality of it all.)

Come on, let's go!

(Julian exits. Malia and Kaimi look at each other and then at Kalā, who shrugs it off like Julian did.)

MALIA: Well, that was...interesting.

KAIMI: Scary!

MALIA: But it looks like we all learned something. And you know what? It's interesting because you taught your friend something about hula, but you also were straightforward like the people at work. Nice balance, son.

KAIMI: But, Kalā, were you gonna go without me?

KALĀ: Look, you get to go home on Sunday. I gotta live here! Gimme a break!

(Kalā rushes off.)

(Later that night. Lights shift to the street. Kalā enters and gazes at the sky. Stars twinkle, but much less brightly than they did in Hawai'i.)

Grandma! Papa! I'm so mad! I went out with Julian, and his mom said she didn't know I wasn't one of them. I thought she meant 'cause we don't have as much money or 'cause they were both wearing what they thought were costumes—he was in his tourist-hotel hula stuff and she was in a kimono with tape on her eyes!—but she meant I wasn't white! Can you believe it? What does it matter?! I'm human! I just wanna go home where people don't say mean stuff like that! Not even a gazillion Manoa rainbows can make me feel better! I can't be hula anymore, and I'm not basketball yet. What's my story?! I get to have one, don't I?

(The lights grow dazzlingly bright again, and Lakā emerges, once more startling Kalā.)

Goddess Lakā!

(Projections of glowing, warming fires are seen in the background.)

LAKĀ: *(Smiling at him and chanting:)*

KU'I KE AHI, KA HEKILI [Fire tongues that search and spread;]

NEI KE OLA'I [Fire shafts that smite and crash]

OLAPA KA UILA [Let earthquake groan and lightning flash,]

LOHE O KANE-HEKILI; [Kane the god of lightning shall hear]

IKIIKI KA MALAMA IA KA-ULUA [And warm this frigid mouth Ulua.]

LAKĀ: Where is your heart, Kamehanaokalā, your hula heart?

KALĀ: Kamehanaokalā's not my name anymore; I'm HB.

LAKĀ: You could be both.

KALĀ: No, I can't!

LAKĀ: You can if you believe with all your heart.

(Magically, she reveals a broken pu'ili.)

KALĀ: They're broken, and they can't be fixed.

LAKĀ: How do you know when you do not even truly know what hula is? Catch!

(She tosses him the pieces. He catches them and studies them. Lakā begins a mele as she takes the pieces of his pu'ili and encircles him.)

KALĀ: Hey, what are you doing?

LAKĀ: Come, Kamehanaokalā. Grow! Radiate!

(She beckons him to dance with her. Eyes shut tightly, he joins in, his love for hula experiencing rebirth inside of him despite himself. Lakā's ritualistic movements include tapestry [maybe a pareo] or large leaves in which she conceals pieces of broken pu'ili as she

dances slow, graceful hula around Kalā. The fire projections give way to projections of seedlings sprouting from the earth.)

LAKĀ & KALĀ: I KUPU KE A`A I KE KUMU [Sprout forth the root from the stem]

I LAU A PUKA KA MU`O [That the young shoot may push forth a leaf]

KA LIKO KA AO I LUNA [Pushing up the fresh enfolded bud]

KUPU KA LALA, HUA MA KA HIKINA [Sprout forth and bud toward the East]

(At hula's end, Lakā magically produces two whole, unbroken pu'ili. The projections fade.)

KALĀ: Wow! How'd you do that?

LAKĀ: You did it, Kamehanaokalā!

KALĀ: I did?!

LAKĀ: You let the hula back into your heart. Perhaps it never truly left. Perhaps your ancestors kept the warmth alive.

(Lakā vanishes as the dazzling light fades and lights revert to normal. Kaimi enters.)

KAIMI: You missed curfew! Your mom's mad, but she'll be okay. I waited up for you to tell you I'm leaving tomorrow.

KALĀ: What? Why?

KAIMI: Why not? It's like you not only moved away from Hawai'i, but away from yourself, too.

KALĀ: ...Maybe 'cause I've been living between two places.

KAIMI: I kinda get it. Seems like life is better here. Your apartment's nice, and your mom says her job's better. It's only that...I thought I was your best friend.

KALĀ: It's just that Julian's been nice to me and makes me feel like I belong.

KAIMI: But is it worth it to belong if you can't be yourself?

KALĀ: I *am* myself!

KAIMI: Oh really? Hula and lau lau turned into basketball and hamburgers in less than two weeks!

KALĀ: You try living in a new place and going to a new school!

KAIMI: Kalā, my cousin lives around here and she belongs to a hālau. You should go.

KALĀ: I don't have time. After school, me and Julian—

KAIMI: You better make time! It's 9-1-1 for you, Kalā! You need hula, and you need it bad!

KALĀ: I don't dance hula anymore!

KAIMI: It's probably best. Her hālau's a pretty dedicated group. It'd probably be too hard for you.

KALĀ: Are you kidding? I'm a great hula dancer.

KAIMI: You mean you *were*. She met you before anyway, and she says you got no aloha.

KALĀ: I never met her! Must've been someone else.

KAIMI: Maybe your friend who thinks Hawaii's a Halloween costume? I'm going home. I can't stand to watch you turn into a potato.

KALĀ: A potato?

KAIMI: Brown on the outside, white on the inside.

KALĀ: I'm not a potato!

KAIMI: Prove it.

(She walks away and exits as lights fade.)

SCENE 6

(The following Monday. Lights fade up on the schoolyard. Kalā's hula instruments are sticking out of his backpack. As Leilani enters, he quickly tries to conceal them. Leilani sits, removes her pu'ili from her kawaii backpack and displays them to make a point.)

LEILANI: Hi.

KALĀ: Hi.

LEILANI: I remember you – the boy with no aloha.

KALĀ: Wait a minute – are you Leilani?

LEILANI: All the time.

(Happy to meet her, Kalā pulls out his pu'ili as weapons and play-fights with her. She tries to ignore him at first, then finally jumps in energetically. She's winning as they "electrocute" each other with their weapons. Each dies a dramatic "death," and both burst into laughter, but she quickly sobers.)

Kaimi says you're a potato.

KALĀ: Just tryin' to make my life work!

LEILANI: Lotsa ways to do that besides being a potato.

KALĀ: *(Uncomfortable, wanting to change the subject:)* So you're in a hālau here, huh? Lotsa local people in it?

LEILANI: We don't say "local people" here; we say mixed race. Like you. You're more than one thing, I'm guessing.

KALĀ: Let me break it down for you: I'm Kalā in Hawai'i and HB in California.

LEILANI: HB? What's that? Hairy Beast?

KALĀ: Ha ha. Funny. So you got keiki kane in your hālau, too, yeah?

LEILANI: Only four boys. Boys here are so stupid. They're embarrassed to do hula because haoles think it's only for girls. My Kumu's Auntie Andrea; she's amazing.

KALĀ: Don't kids at school give you a hard time for being in hula?

LEILANI: Everybody's got their thing. I'd rather dance hula than be popular like most girls wanna be. Wanna join my hālau? We're the same age, so you can be in my group, but beginners go in the back.

KALĀ: I'm not a beginner! But I don't want to join your hālau anyway!

LEILANI: *(A pause as she scrutinizes him:)* Practice is close to school, the gray house at the end of the block, so we can walk there. The hālau meets every Monday and Friday.

KALĀ: I have basketball practice every day after school.

LEILANI: Kaimi said you *need* to join the hālau. Like 9-1-1 need.

KALĀ: What's she know?

LEILANI: She knows *you*, or at least who you used to be. Meet me here after school. Decide who you want to be.

(She exits as lights fade.)

SCENE 7

(Lights fade up on the hālau practice space. Kalā and Leilani run, taking turns chasing each other, using pu'ili in different comic ways.)

LEILANI: Don't be nervous. This is gonna be fun! We'll dance together in the fall concert!

KALĀ: I'm just visiting, okay?

LEILANI: All I know is, you waited for me after school, so you're not as much of a potato as Kaimi thought. The fall concert's right before Thanksgiving. We work hard all year long. All kinda people come.

KALĀ: I said I'm just visiting!

LEILANI: Follow me.

(Contemporary Hawaiian music plays softly in the background. Kalā and Leilani survey hula instruments of the hālau with respect: pu'ili, 'ili'ili, uili, 'uili, ipu, 'ulī'ulī, puniu and ka and pa'hu.)

KALĀ: *(Enjoying looking at the instruments:)* Wow! I feel like I'm back home! So what hula are you working on now?

LEILANI: Lots. My favorite is when the keiki kane dance "Hole Waimea."

(Leilani shows Kalā a small segment of the hula "Hole Waimea.")

LEILANI: Do you know that one? My brother taught me.

KALĀ: I kinda remember the words.

LEILANI: Good. You know with hula it's not just dance—it's the stories: you gotta live them. That's what Kumu always says.

(She motions for him to draw near, privately.)

You wanna learn secret hula stuff? Watch, okay? But I gotta use mine 'cause Kumu's are sacred. Don't ever mess with her stuff!

(Leilani, looking around to make sure no one's watching, holds her 'ulili over her head, and Kalā copies her. They giggle.)

KALĀ & LEILANI: *(With fake regal accents:)* Ancient Hawaiian headdress!

(Kalā covers his nostrils with Leilani's 'ili'ili.)

KALĀ: *(Continuing his fake regal accent:)* Ancient Hawaiian nose covers made of dried pig poo!

(Leilani mimics pig behavior just as AUNTIE ANDREA enters. She screams, jaw agape, and then appears to comically faint at their behavior. Mortified, Kalā and Leilani immediately set down the instruments.)

LEILANI: Auntie Andrea! So sorry! We're just playing around.

AUNTIE ANDREA: Please tell me I do not see my keiki disgracing the sacred instruments of hula! And, Kamehanaokalā, what behavior for someone I just met!

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