

Cenotaph

Out past the breakers, paddlers are forming a circle. Safe, where the swell won't force them onto the rocks either end of this narrow cove. Limited beach sand to soften the edges; a shoreline typically strewn with black volcanic boulders.

The sky is grey again with Vog* even this early in the afternoon.

No one moves toward a sensual wave that promises a ride tinged with danger, its curve enough to send a rider tumbling over the small reef towards ominous dark fringes of stones ready to pummel and crush. They have all felt variant degrees of limb to rock collisions.

As if by some kind of signal, stillness settles. Crashing shore waves dim into a background hum. The seemingly ceaseless breeze pauses.

These riders do not need to paddle. They are all straddling boards as if the crafts that keep them afloat were extensions of limbs. Islander heritage decrees they are born on some sort of sea vessel.

Troy begins a prayer; others bow heads, eyes half closed to capture whatever image of their passed friend that is most special.

From a red tub on his board Robbie throws flowers. Plumeria, broad petal frangipani in pink, yellow and cream, star shaped island Gardenia, Marigolds, all scattered high into the air. They settle within the circle confetti like. Then he empties the box of ashes. These make a grey net on the surface; someone from the beach crowd blows a long somber note on a conch shell, sounding four times, for each direction. Board riders scoop handfuls of ocean and sprinkle this like holy water. But this does not seem to disturb the cradle of grey and flower dapples that wait for one last thing. Beginning with Joey everyone dived from their boards washing themselves in his ghost, surfacing within the last few tangible elements that once was their friend

From under the surface they can each feel how he would have touched – a kiss for her; a poke in the ribs to him; a reassuring hand on the shoulder there. Unwilling to break away from the dead one they keep within the circle treading water.

Even without leg ropes the boards do not stray but remain in formation as if reverence for departed is deeper than even tide, currents and drift.

As is inevitable, break away they must, but not for the shore. Each takes a wave in his honor. Something pushes the riders even though many waves are taken through a mist of tears.

Robbie remains the longest, well after dusk has settled into real dark, riding on, one last wave, one more time for him.

*Volcanic fog that settles like cloud cover blowing northward from Kilauea's plume.