

Toddy M.

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The first time I saw Toddy M. he was naked.

The ride down had been rough, the four-wheel-drive Pajero fording streams and bouncing over badly divoted, washed-out dirt road. At the beginning, near the airstrip, there had been ranches: large, sprawling, barren holdings that seemed to peter out into jungle or swamp, the lazy, ragged cattle wandering over the road and slowing our already sluggish progress, dumb eyes gazing back at us, too stupid or too surprised to move. My driver leaned on his horn, shouted in Bahasa and finally opened the door, hopped down into the dirt and ran toward the

indifferent beasts, swatting their asses with a broken-off windshield wiper he kept for this purpose.

After a while it was only jungle, closely spaced trunks hung with vines and strangler tree branches, the canopy closing above us for stretches so that you couldn't see where one tree's foliage ended and another's began. We slowed to a crawl, first-gear grinding over the deep holes, the entire vehicle descending more than once into brooks and streams that rose nearly to the windows and left the floor of the car soaked with brown water. Upon emerging from one of these crossings, I found a beautiful little emerald-green frog with purple eyes and a bright red neck submerged in these centimeters of catchment, desperately pistoning its legs, trying to gain purchase on the plastic interior. I opened the door and was about to gather him up with my hand when the driver, noticing what I was doing, shouted at me to stop.

He pointed to his own neck, then the frog. "Poison."

He reached behind and came up with a halved detergent jug with the capped side down and proffered it. I carefully scooped up the frog with a few ounces of water and poured him onto the road.

We emerged from the dense flora, came around a bend as the road grew smoother, swung downhill toward the Indian Ocean and saw this naked foreign man surfing the inside of a perfect right-hand point break. He was moving left to right in front of me, gliding down the face of a powerful, beautifully formed cylinder of water. He stood more upright on the yellow surfboard than I would have imagined possible, his stance surprisingly sturdy-looking in spite of, or perhaps because of, his nudity. As the wave began to break behind him—at first in a smooth white curtain drawing closed in his wake and then in sections starting to collapse as he approached the shore—he crouched a little bit, vanished into a sheet of white water and then emerged out the other side of the tube before carving up and out of the wave and falling back into the water for an instant. It was a dazzling show, and I looked at my driver, expecting him to be as impressed as I was, but he stayed focused on the road.

Toddy had apparently seen us making our way down from the headlands, and by the time the road had straightened to run parallel to the ocean, he was out of the water. But he was nowhere to be seen when we pulled up to a white concrete house built in a narrow, flat-bottomed gully between

the ocean and a spit where some shallow cliffs protruded from the jungled hills.

I was out of the car and had opened the tailgate of the Pajero when I saw Toddy come around the side of the house, still nude. He had brown hair, just beginning to thin as it receded around a prominent widow's peak, gray-blue eyes, a narrow, long nose and thin lips, which he tended to tuck in so that they were hidden, as if he was contemplative. Now I could see that he had several tattoos on arms and chest: a wave, a yin-and-yang sign, a backward swastika and a Hawaiian hang-loose thumb and pinky. His chest and upper arms were powerful from paddling and surfing, and his stomach was flat and hard, not in the overly defined and contoured manner of someone who spends hours doing sit-ups but from regular and steady exertion. His pubic hair was ginger colored, and his penis was long and pale. He was circumcised.

"Welcome," he said and shook my hand .

The driver was apparently embarrassed at this display. He didn't approach Toddy to bow but kept his distance by the back of the vehicle.

Behind Toddy was an unevenly poured concrete floor that rose about six inches above the mud and a wooden staircase leading up, presumably into the house. A sarong in a brown-and-orange batik pattern was laid over one of the banisters, and Toddy took that and wrapped it around himself.

"Let me take you up higher," he said and led the way.

It had been surprising to discover an e-mail from Toddy M. inviting me to his property in Lombok. When I was a boy, photos of Toddy M. had regularly appeared in surfing magazines, and his sequences in surf films were usually among the most surprising and impressive. He had won a few major contests but had never been among the highest point scorers on the Men's World Tour. Yet his legend had grown: he was seen as an outlaw, one who followed waves instead of contest schedules. He had also been one of my boyhood heroes, in part because in an era when South Africans and Australians had dominated surfing, Toddy M. was a local boy, or close to it, hailing from a beach town a few miles south of my own. He even had a sponsorship deal with Natural Progression, a local surfboard company. But really, all I knew about him were those fleeting images in films and those pictures of him surfing giant waves at Pipeline or Bell's Beach, riding down the faces of monsters—with that same powerful stance I had just seen as we drove down the hill toward his house.

I was thirty-three now, which meant that Toddy M. had to be at least forty-five. I hadn't surfed in years. I had left Southern California to attend college back East, where I had the dumb luck to be an environmental science major (I ended up in that department because it had been the easiest to gain admission to). I'd then gone to work for a few years for a company that specialized in ionization processes for swimming pools, and we soon expanded into photovoltaic technology, solar panels for heating and electricity. My job was on the marketing side, which meant I spent a great deal of time on site with our customers, selling them various technology solutions that would allow them to both save money and be more in line with sustainable practices. It was a dull career, my colleagues and customers the predictable liberal and environmental enthusiasts one would expect. Our fortunes seemed to rise and fall with the various tax breaks and subsidies that Congress or state governments would periodically lavish on our customers or us.

I was living with my longtime girlfriend, Robin, a pretty woman with large, oval eyes and blond hair that she pulled back into a tight bun; she reminded me of an ostrich—a very pretty one, but there it was. She was the head of quality control for a firm that did restoration work, repointing the masonry on old churches, remounting the moldings on historical buildings. Handy around the house, she had often already changed into her denim overalls by the time I came home, already at work on some small domestic project or other. She would take a break, and I would cook some sensible dinner—white-meat chicken or fish—and we'd share a bottle of wine in our eat-in kitchen.

Our prospects changed, of course, with the global warming scare. Corporations and hotels that hadn't worried about the environment previously were now seeking a little "greenwashing," as we called it: some sustainable technology so they could tell shareholders and the media that they cared about the planet. Our business thrived, and by virtue of being one of the oldest and most reputable of the so-called green-technology companies, we were sought after by developers, governments and corporations from Iceland to India who were considering photovoltaic or eolic power generation and ultraviolet filtration systems. I spent weeks on the road, often living on site with our clients as we sketched out a sustainable energy plan, subcontracting out those pieces of it—composting, landscaping, horticulture, biogas kitchens—that we couldn't provide ourselves. Business in my field was booming, and with Robin's encouragement I soon left the firm

and struck out on my own as a sustainable-development consultant, picking up a large percentage of my old firm's clients and continuing to do steady business with the old shop.

Toddy M. had sought me out in this capacity. His e-mail mentioned a property he was developing into a surfing eco-resort—"Cha-ching!" he wrote after laying out his idea—and he wanted to hire me as a consultant to help him "squizzly the whole thing out." I wrote back, asking for some more information about the project and letting him know in the message that he had been my favorite surfer as a boy. I also laid out my fees, which I figured might be the end of it.

I was surprised when a very modest retainer check arrived by DHL from Toddy's surfwear sponsor. It turned out that Natural Progression had launched a line of trunks, hoodies and sandals for the older board rider called Silver Edition Surfer; Toddy M. was their first sponsored athlete. I had a client in Hong Kong who wanted me to do an ionization project on his hotel's rooftop pool and see about solar panel installation along one side of his building—in smoggy Hong Kong I doubted he would offset much of his energy use with this plan, but this was a big hotel chain and could potentially lead to even bigger contracts. So the flight down to Jakarta and then over to Lombok was just a few hours.

But I had other reasons for making this trip. Robin and I were getting married. A date had been set, distant but looming, and she had selected a restored colonial church in New England as the site. The rapidity of the arrangements had taken me by surprise, and I now found myself wondering at how quickly it was coming too true. I felt still a boy, or at least a young man. Was this really it? The beautiful, aquiline Robin and our steadily improving home? Were my boyhood dreams and aspirations really just the father of my adult compromises? As I reviewed the nuptial diagrams, I concluded that I wasn't looking forward to looking back with regret. If it hadn't been Toddy M., if it had just been another hotelier with another project, I don't think I would have come. But I suddenly needed to go somewhere, and here was one of my heroes asking me to visit.

I paid the driver and followed Toddy upstairs. The living room was open on three sides, with badly ripped screens instead of windows. Sticking out the front toward the sea was a bowed porch sagging between support posts, the wood damp and creaking. There was slightly moldy rattan furniture gathered around a coffee table made from a split, varnished hardwood log

of some kind, strewn with water-logged *Surfer* magazines and a few catalogs I recognized, one from my old company. That Toddy didn't live alone was evident: sandals clearly too small for his feet were spread around, and in a hammock I could see a discarded bikini top.

He offered me a beer, which I declined, asking instead for water. I noticed that he had a small refrigerator, and I wondered how it was powered. I could vaguely discern from somewhere a faint clicking noise; perhaps that was a small generator's chug. The house was wired, and he had running water—though no hot water, apparently, as I saw him open a spigot connected to a PVC pipe that ran up the back wall a few feet and then elbowed into a hole drilled there. I assumed that Toddy had built this place himself.

"So," Toddy said, handing me the glass of water, "you surf?"

"Did."

"We'll get you wet." He smiled.

I looked at the water, unsure of its provenance.

"Don't worry about it," Toddy told me. He gestured for me to follow him, and we went back behind the rear wall to what I saw was a sort of mechanical room. There was a small two-stroke generator there, which was currently clicking away and emitting a faint smell of diesel. PVC pipes crisscrossed the room, some at head height so you had to duck to make your way through, and there were power cables descending from the ceiling; I assumed he had some sort of solar panel up there. There was a square hatch in the floor, like an attic door, which Toddy bent down and swung open. For a moment I was confused by the sloshing sound and darkness. It was a cistern, I then realized.

We stood gazing down at the reflective black sheet of water, which was churning and rippling in the dim light. Was this potable water? I wondered.

A pale, fleshy form came lunging from the water, shooting up and out so that I jumped back and fell into a PVC pipe, then an electrical cable of some kind, making the plastic snap and rip as I stumbled. I felt the pounding of my heart in my ears, a thumping noise.

I heard Toddy M. cackling.

A woman, I saw when I caught my breath. She was stark naked, had wide feet, thin but muscular legs with blond hair visible on the calves, bushy blond pubic hair still dripping, flat stomach, small but heavy-looking breasts and facial features that were like Toddy M.'s but somehow shaved and planed into a beautiful girl.

She was young.

“My daughter, Liddy,” Toddy said, still laughing but now picking up a scrap of pipe to see how badly I had smashed it.

“Hey, there.” Liddy had grabbed a small towel that hung from a nail and was drying herself. She had hairy armpits.

She liked to swim in the pitch dark, it turned out, by herself down there in the cinder-block-walled pool beneath the house. Toddy M. had rigged it so that the rivulets and streams that dripped down from the headlands gathered, and the fresh water was stored here, in the foundation of his house. Liddy liked to jump in, close the door behind her and swim through the sweet, murky darkness.

She turned around and walked into the kitchen, her ass making a circular motion as she walked. I would soon discover that she was always naked around the house, this fifteen-year-old, and I would never get used to it.

Toddy M.’s Swedish wife—Liddy’s mom—Ursula, was a doula who had returned to Sweden for work and remitted regularly. Toddy and Liddy kept the house going, climbing the ladder to the roof every hour to turn the satellite-dish-shaped photovoltaic panel so that it caught enough sun to power the generator and keep the water pump and refrigerator running. We used candles in the evening, and he cooked with gas canisters that he brought back every other week from the village.

That first night we ate some kind of bony fish, yams and rice, washing it down with beer, first cold ones from the fridge and then, when those ran out, bottles from a string basket that Toddy kept down in the cistern. Toddy explained how he came to buy this place, the only house facing one of the best right-handers in the world, two kilometers of white beach with coral and rocky banks just offshore, a surfer’s paradise. He had heard about the south-facing shore of this island from his years on the tour. He and a few friends had once come up from Australia, back when a separatist movement had kept the island off-limits for any but the most foolhardy tourists. So Toddy had gotten here early and kept his mouth shut. In his prime he had made a few dollars, back when property like this was still a bargain. It had since been made illegal for foreigners to buy beachfront property, but Toddy had bought his place before that and was grandfathered.

He wasn’t wealthy, though. He hadn’t had the good luck to launch his own surfwear brand or line of boards; they were barely getting by, and Toddy had come up with the surfer eco-lodge idea, convinced he could

make a bundle and even renovate his little house. He also recounted stories of other surfers he knew who had opened similar ventures, in Costa Rica or Brazil. His conversation often digressed to stories of these fellows, of trips they had taken together, of their dealings and the life of blissful boyhood a pro surfer can continue into his forties and beyond. As he spoke—his Southern California rasp was mixed with a little Aussie lilt but was still evident—I felt transported back to my early adolescence, when older surfers would regale us kids with tales of trips to Mexico or Northern California. Toddy spun those same yarns, only his encompassed the globe. He was an enthralling speaker, used to being listened to, with a raconteur's gift for mimicry and impersonation. I had to admire him as he stood to demonstrate his reaction to a shark taking a bite out of his surfboard or to show how he had gnawed through his leash to free himself when his board lodged in bottom rocks and the Velcro attachment had slid up his calf beneath his wetsuit, beyond where he could find it on just one lungful of oxygen. He was an adult unlike other adults, the kind of grown-up I guess I had once dreamed of becoming myself.

Liddy sat with us, wearing a sarong during dinner, eager to listen to our conversation. Visitors were rare—so rare, I realized, that Toddy and his daughter didn't understand the power she now held over men. They both obviously still viewed her as a girl, though physically she was hardly that, and a few days later I would notice a tampon string hanging down from her labia.

Toddy eventually rolled a few spliffs of rather weak-smelling marijuana, which he shared with Liddy. I didn't smoke, a fact that seemed to surprise Toddy.

Later he showed me to my cot, in a hot little room screened off from the porch but from which I could see Liddy lying on her side, nude again, reading a copy of *White Fang*.

By the time I woke up the next morning, both Toddy and Liddy were gone, and when I made my way onto the porch I could see their two figures, naked, bobbing in between sets. The barreling waves were even more perfect than those I had seen yesterday, and Liddy rode with a similar proficiency to her father's, the same muscular, straight-calved crouch, statuesque as she rode down the face of the wave.

I was eager to get my project started. Toddy had indicated that the resort would be up the hill, set into the jungle. He had bought the land complete with abandoned ruins—crucial in that he didn't need a permit to build out here because, technically, he would be reconstructing rather than constructing. When Toddy and Liddy came in from their morning surf, they both dumped buckets of fresh water over their heads and we set off up the hill, following a narrow trail alongside an intermittent barbed-wire fence overgrown with a white flowering vine. Toddy and Liddy wore sarongs and flip-flops, and I felt overdressed in my hiking boots, shorts, button-up shirt and brimmed sun hat. We could hear monkeys in the trees, and at one point we were overwhelmed by a cloud of blue butterflies that landed en masse in a patch of mud. They scattered again as we approached.

Based on what I had seen, and from speaking with Toddy, I had my doubts about how realistic his plans were. In the light of day his engaging stories and expansive vision were less persuasive. The jungle drew close around us, and the trail vanished for stretches, forcing us to snake between trees and bend down under the canopy. We shared this makeshift path with columns of cutter ants, and after a while I realized that it was actually the ants that had made this path, slicing through the vegetation to bring the prized leaves back to their nests. I found myself slowing down a little as the heat, which near the ocean was tempered by the breeze, was here more oppressive. I began to wonder at the wisdom, or even the practicality, of building anything this far into the bush.

Then we picked up a new trail, some sort of animal track, and walked up the spine of a ridge until we came to a set of wooden stairs—freshly hewn, from the look of the ax marks still visible in the planks.

“We put these in ourselves,” Toddy told me as we started ascending.

We marched up sixty-five stairs—I counted them—and I was thinking about the two of them, father and daughter, out here chopping hardwood, digging, setting. I had never worked that hard in my entire life. Soon we came to the remains of a macadam road, already encroached upon from both sides by vine and brush, and followed that for a few meters until we reached Toddy's ruins, a series of cabanas, now badly overgrown, roofs partially collapsed, rattan walls caved in: some previous would-be hotelier's busted vision. The place had been abandoned during the *krismon*, Toddy explained, and the jungle had all but reclaimed the land. Wooden stairs already rotted through made their erratic way up the hillside. At one point they must have connected the half-dozen visible bungalows.

Toddy pointed out to me the south-facing location, the abundant fresh water that ran in several rivulets down the hill, the proximity of a few peaks upon which wind generators could be situated. He had gotten way ahead of himself here, and as he expounded on his vision—most of his ideas suggesting hypertrophied versions of his jerry-rigged home—I hesitated to interrupt and drop some harsh reality on him. Way before my work could even start, he needed a contractor, an architect, a landscaper, a horticulturist, a lawyer and about ten million dollars.

Liddy was standing alongside him, having picked up a walking stick from which she was peeling bark. I understood that she had been listening to her father's grand plans for some time now and that the two of them together inhabited this fantasy of an eco-paradise where they could surf and eat compost-grown sweet potatoes and walk around naked forever. This was the story they told each other to live.

I followed Toddy around his would-be Eden, listening to his ideas. His unrealistic plans weren't without charm, and I found myself, despite the clear truth, throwing in little suggestions. He could, I pointed out, scale his ultraviolet filtration system so that he could sell potable water to the surrounding locals. When I lost track of where we were and suggested porcine gas to power the cooking stoves, Toddy gave me a look like I was crazy.

"They're Muslims here," he reminded me.

But I kept on making suggestions, throwing out brand names of various eolic generators and suggestions for how he might irrigate the vegetable gardens with a mixture of night soil and earthworm urine. Toddy and Liddy had obviously been talking about "their" lodge for a while, and as we slowly made our way up the rotting stairs and peered into the bungalows, I saw them nodding to each other as if to say, "See, this is really going to work."

But it was never going to happen. I followed them down the hill, through the maze of trails and brush and switchbacks, and wondered at how I might break it to them. They both seemed in a good mood on the way down, and Toddy announced suddenly that now was a good time for me to start surfing again.

In the face of what I would soon have to tell them, I wasn't going to argue. I hadn't surfed in decades, and while Toddy set me up with one of his signature model NP boards—he had over a dozen arrayed in a wooden rack built onto the side of his house—he kept disregarding this fact, ignoring my requests for a longer, more stable board and handing me a bright yellow tri-fin with that triangle-of-arrows recycling symbol stenciled below the logo.

We carried our boards down the worn path to the beach and strapped on leashes. It was Saturday, so there were a few fishermen wading between the shore break and the reef, submerged to their shoulders and throwing nets, which they quickly drew in. Women in *abayas* sat on the shore, the fabric hiked up so that their calves and thighs were bare yet their heads were covered. Toddy, Liddy and I stayed down the beach from them, and we wore swimsuits out of respect for the locals, who acted as if we didn't exist.

Toddy and Liddy paddled out effortlessly; my arms hadn't worked this hard in years. There was a steady inshore current, choppy than it had appeared from shore. And the foam of broken waves hit me with a soft but surprisingly jarring thud that pushed me back and left me floundering in shrouds of mist. After twenty seconds paddling I felt I was swinging my arms through jelly. I paused once, letting the current wash me in, but then I was embarrassed that Toddy and Liddy would see my weakness and I recommenced my sloppy strokes. I was awed by the sheer, almost animal muscularity of the waves, even these little waves that Toddy or Liddy wouldn't deem worthy of riding. This was a more powerful ocean than I had ever ridden as a boy, and these waves seemed made of a completely different substance than the soft saltwater I remembered from my youth. There was aggression in this sea: anger, menace. Even as I was making my way out, the notion that I would injure myself, might drown, was already creeping into my mind.

I made it outside about ten minutes after Toddy and Liddy; the two of them were seated with knees spread and arms akimbo. Liddy, in the water, from behind, could almost be taken as a miniature version of her dad, with the same dirty-blond hair, broad shoulders, sturdy back. I was exhausted and for a few minutes lay my head down on my board, catching my breath as Toddy and Liddy pretended not to notice my fatigue. I could hear the ocean lapping around me and felt myself being lifted up and down by the sets.

Finally I felt strong enough to sit up. This feeling—of straddling the bobbing board, saltwater on my lips, squinting out at incoming sets—this at least felt reassuringly familiar, though any comfort was immediately overpowered by my anxiety about what was to come next. These waves, perfectly formed yet with a heaving mass that you couldn't sense when watching from the shore, were beastly and terrifying, their vast tonnage passing under as we bobbed, monsters storming the beach. I knew that I needed a smaller wave. But these walls of perfectly formed water were all we had. I hadn't

stood up on a surfboard since I was in college. And here I was, at sea with one of the best surfers in the world.

Toddy paddled into the pocket of what seemed to me an enormous wall of water; my impulse was to paddle for my life over the top of it for safety. As Toddy stood, arced off the bottom and found his line, I turned and watched his head, his handsome features, sturdy nose at the prow, glide away over the glassy back of the wave. It was beautiful to behold, a lovely communion of man and nature. Liddy caught a wave and was likewise gone.

And I was out here, alone, the shore a half-mile away, a few pelicans making their crisply angled dives into the water a dozen yards ahead of me. I couldn't paddle back in without looking a coward, and I was too cowardly to turn myself to get into position to ride these swells. The large waves were stacked up to the horizon like an unspooled bolt of ugly, evenly wrinkled silver-gray fabric. I was uncomfortably adrift.

How the fuck did I get myself here?

I took a deep breath and swung my board into the face of what I estimated to be the smallest wave I had yet seen. I lay down and started paddling furiously but quickly felt the wave propel me with such power that my stroking was superfluous. I felt the gathering of energy and momentum, the carrying, the lifting, the accelerating, the raising up of my board and myself as I balanced on all fours and then was standing in my regular foot stance for a moment, the water hissing behind me and beneath me, the surge surprising and exciting me. I was doing it! I was fucking doing it!

I instinctively aimed for the shore and safety. And for a moment, I actually felt like I was going to make it, ride this raging force all the way in—tame it, even. But then I heard some ominous airy gurgling, like giant sea shells had been placed against both my ears. This was the wave breaking, I realized, collapsing and going to shit all around me. I was too far back, up on the lip. I tried to angle down, too late. Then I was toppling, falling forward over the front of my surfboard, the fiberglass rail flipping up and somehow smacking against my face, and for an instant I tasted my own blood, warm and sweet, before torrents of cold, salty water seemed to enter through every orifice I had. I was submerged. From somewhere, there was a tug on my ankle, and then it was black.

I came to with Liddy's lips against mine, her wet hair falling into my face. She broke away from resuscitating me and studied me for an instant as I turned and coughed up a stream of pink, salty mucus. I was breathing

heavily, but I felt jarring waves of nausea, and I spit up more saltwater and mucus. But even while I was throwing up and fighting for air, I could detect Liddy's scent, through the odor of saltwater and fruity surf wax, a sweet-smelling sweat.

"You're alive," she said, smiling. "You ragdolled pretty bad."

I tried to talk but could only cough. I reached up and felt my forehead; my hand came away covered in blood.

She turned to look out to sea; Toddy had just noticed us and caught a wave in. Liddy had watched me fall into the trough of the breaker, over my board, into the submerged rock formations. She had dived in, through the thick whitewater, and found my leg, yanking me back up. My face had been smashed by the surfboard. Somehow I had missed the rocks; otherwise I would have been more badly mangled. She had held me around the chest and towed me to the beach and then immediately begun the attempt to resuscitate me. I had no idea how much time had elapsed between my standing up on my board and waking up here.

I sat up and coughed up more water.

"Stay on your back," Liddy advised me, pushing me back down. "You're bleeding." She held a T-shirt to my forehead.

The Muslim fishermen didn't seem to have noticed my fall. They were still casting their nets.

Toddy's shadow darkened me. "Whoa, dude, your face."

Liddy told me to keep applying pressure with the T-shirt.

She and Toddy pulled me to my feet and, their arms linked around mine, carried me back to the house. I told them to let me walk for a few steps across the sand, just to see if everything was working, and I was pleased to discover that despite some stings and soreness, nothing seemed broken. My back ached terribly, and my neck had been jammed, and a persistent dizziness caused me to lean into Toddy or Liddy as we walked, but I eventually made it upstairs and into the hammock, where Liddy, now naked again, covered me with a batik sarong and I fell asleep.

I was delirious and perhaps fell into a state of delayed shock. But I could hear the conversation around me, even though I had nothing to add to it. Liddy suggested that I would need stitches and that she could do it if necessary. Her mother had taught her the basics of first aid, a necessary skill set to have if your father is a fearless big-wave surfer. Toddy came over and gazed down at my forehead and grunted. Head wounds bleed profusely, he reminded Liddy, and tend to look worse than they are. The two of them

went back and forth about it until finally Liddy said she would sew up my wound herself, taking thread, needle, peroxide and handing me three codeine tablets and a few slugs of bitter arak.

Toddy looked even more nervous than I was at the prospect of these stitches, but he had been persuaded by Liddy, who leaned over me with a wrinkled brow, her face looking suddenly almost matronly as she tended to my wound, swabbing it with peroxide, cleaning the dried blood away. Then, with a series of delicate flicks of her wrist, she made pricks in my forehead that felt like she was administering little vaccinations. Carefully she sewed the wound shut, and then Toddy handed me a big spliff and I surprised myself by taking a hit.

My forehead felt tight, and I reached up and felt the threads and suture, a neat seam above my right eye.

During the procedure Toddy's attention had wandered, and I could hear him talking to Liddy about the eco-lodge again, about how they should build six more bungalows after they opened with a dozen. Build a swimming pool, maybe—use an ionization system for the water and then use the pool water to irrigate the fruit trees he was going to plant. I could hear snatches of this, the conversation going on just a few feet from where I lay in my wound- and drug-induced stupor. At one point I heard Liddy say she was diving into the cistern. Toddy was flipping open his magazines and catalogs, pointing to various ionization and solar systems that might work, and I was thinking, *That stuff costs a fortune*. I had by now figured out of course that Toddy didn't even have enough money to pay me the rest of my retainer.

I slept for most of the next day, waking up for stretches, listening to the monkeys in the trees, the occasional birdcall, the crashing of a coconut falling through branches to the jungle floor. Finally my appetite returned and I got up, found some cold rice and spicy pickles in the fridge. Liddy was reading out on the porch, and when she saw that I was up and about, she came in and joined me, offering me a cup of tea, which I sweetened with condensed milk. Toddy was surfing. Liddy was wearing a sarong and bikini top.

She had already called the airstrip for a car for me. It would be here shortly. There was a plane this afternoon. She said I was well enough to travel. I nodded and thanked her.

She stood behind the little bamboo counter, still beautiful but her features now clouded by some concern.

"My father's plans, this whole hotel thing, it's a crazy idea, right?" She said.

I kept my tea in my mouth for an instant so I could think what to say. I nodded.

"It's never going to happen?" she asked.

"No," I told her.

"I thought so." She exhaled.

We could both see Toddy out at sea, naked again, waiting for the next set.

"Do me a favor?"

"What?" I asked.

"Don't tell my dad," she said. "Don't tell him this is all a crazy idea. Let him believe it."

I studied her carefully. "I'm a consultant. I'm hired to help people figure out how to do this kind of thing. And whether they can."

"Whatever," she cut me off. "Let him believe."

We heard the Pajero's low-gear approach to the house, and I gathered my bags and went downstairs. The driver smiled. He seemed relieved that everyone was fully clothed. Liddy smiled at me as we pulled out and then flipped her blond hair. She would be leaving soon herself, too beautiful and too smart to stay here much longer.

When I returned home I told Robin I didn't want the big ceremony in the restored church. I wanted a civil ceremony. A small reception with just a few friends. She was disappointed; she loved old churches. What I didn't tell her was that I didn't know what I wanted; perhaps I had never known. I hadn't learned anything at Toddy's; instead, I had felt some submerged stirring. But when the day came I regained my focus, and Robin seemed pleased as we drove down to the filing annex of our city hall. It was done.

I sometimes see Liddy in surfing magazines. She is now a sponsored professional on the women's tour. She is gorgeous in those photographs, long and muscular, more like a model than an athlete. In one magazine, this one not a surfing magazine but one of those gossip titles, there was a story about Liddy marrying another surfer, a young god, the ceremony on the beach in front of her father's house. The story mentioned that Liddy's father had also

been a professional surfer who now lived on this private beach in Indonesia where, with his daughter's backing, he planned to open his own eco-lodge.

I see those pictures of Liddy, and I reach up and feel my scar, searching again for the familiar, dull ache.



Karl Taro Greenfeld

Karl Taro Greenfeld is the author of four books, including *Speed Tribes* and the recently published *Boy Alone: A Brother's Memoir*, about his autistic brother, Noah. He began writing short stories three years ago and has published, or has stories forthcoming, in the *Paris Review*, *American Short Fiction*, the *Sun*, the *New York Tyrant*, *Cream City Review* and *Best American Short Stories 2009*.



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