Humuhumunukunukuapua'a

by Charles Lennox

We do not say to the fish, “How do you pronounce your name?” For its name is long and colorful, like the rainbow. We can pound the kalo plant into sweetened poi before it answers. No. Instead we say, “What does your name mean?” And we can see the fish thinking about our question. It touches the side of its face with a fin and studies the lanai. Its lips remind us of a kiss. “Humuhumu,” we say, this time louder, “please tell us what your name means.” The fish sips its drink and says, “Nothing. There is no meaning.” We take new positions in our chairs. We say, “How can there be no meaning?” and we are quick to point out the one in our company whose name means: carpenter. We say, “Look. Hammer in his left hand. Saw in his right. Nails held between his teeth.” We go in a circle, counterclockwise. Among us there is scholar and judge, arrow maker and lover of nature. Our neighbor across the way is a digger and her body slowly disappears in the earth as she shovels the front yard. Another fine crater. The fish says, “Why must there be meaning?” We laugh and hold our stomachs. Then we quiet ourselves when we realize that the fish is being serious. “Why?” the fish says again, library voice. We uncross our legs and think about this word meaning and what it means and we decide that the best way to answer the question is to say, “Because.” Our friend the fish steps closer and says, “Because why?” and we are silent all afternoon. We begin to wonder if our neighbor across the way might be able to help us. That perhaps if we sit together in the gaping hole she is digging we will somehow find out what true meaning is. Maybe she'll ask us to follow her as she tunnels down, through coral and core, uncovering a world we've never known.

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