

# He Mele Aloha no ka Niu

By Brandy Nālani McDougall

I'm so tired of pretending  
each gesture is meaningless,  
  
that the clattering of niu leaves  
and the guttural call of birds  
  
overhead say nothing.  
There are reasons why  
  
the lichen and moss kākau  
the niu's bark, why  
  
this tree has worn  
an ahu of ua and lā  
  
since birth. Scars were carved  
into its trunk to record  
  
the mo'olelo of its being  
by the passage of insects  
  
becoming one to move  
the earth, speck by speck.  
  
Try to tell them to let go  
of the niu rings marking  
  
each passing year, to abandon  
their only home and move on.  
  
I can't pretend there is  
no memory held  
  
in the dried coconut hat,  
the star ornament, the midribs  
  
bent and dangling away  
from their roots, no thought

behind the kāwelewele  
that continues to hold us

steady. There was a time  
before they were bent

under their need to make  
an honest living, when

each frond was bound  
by its life to another

like a long, erect fin  
skimming the surface

of a sea of grass and sand.  
Eventually, it knew it would rise

higher, its flower would emerge  
gold, then darken in the sun,

that its fruit would fall, only  
to ripen before its brown fronds

bent naturally under the weight  
of such memory, back toward

the trunk to drop to the sand,  
back to its beginnings, again.

Let this be enough to feed us,  
to remember: ka wailewa

i loko, that our own bodies  
are buoyant when they bend

and fall, and that the ocean  
shall carry us and weave us

back into the sand's fabric,  
that the mo'opuna taste our sweet.

Notes:

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