

Selections from *Nafanua and the Afakasi Sister*

By Tiffany J Herron

A Commencement of Family

I was eating vowels.

Palusami, taro, breadfruit, poi. Altogether, they created a meal I have never eaten before. Although the flavors and textures remain foreign in my mind, at the same time, they were exactly as I had dreamed.

Palusami is a dish of taro leaves and coconut milk. The leaves of a taro plant can be larger than a person's head. Cooked, they taste similar to the earthy iron of spinach without its gritty bitterness, its flavor and texture is easy and smooth. The leaves are layered and formed into a bowl shape, filled with coconut milk, and wrapped closed. Each green pouch is traditionally cooked on an umu, an outside stove made of lava rocks and fueled by palm fronds.

The Responsibility of Rainbows

The Maori god of rainbows, Uenuku once was a man who fell in love with the morning mist-maiden, Tairi-a-kohu. They married but Tairi-a-kohu made Uenuku promise that he would not tell his people about her until their child had become an adult. Before the sun rose over the horizon, Tairi-a-kohu would leave their earthly home and ascend to the heavens. She would then return to Uenuku at night. Uenuku became impatient. He wanted to reveal his wife to his people so one morning, Uenuku bound the blinds where they slept so no sunlight could shine in, and he

tricked Tairi-a-kohu into staying with him until after dawn. When she discovered his deceit, she left him, taking their child with her. Heartbroken, Uenuku wandered the earth trying to find the mist-maiden, but with no success. Then one day Rangi, the Skyfather, took pity on Uenuky and changed him into a rainbow so that he could join his family in the sky.

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How does it make you feel to say your birthplace out loud? It has always felt special to say I was born in Hawai'i. When I tell people, their eyebrows raise. With question mark stares they wonder why I ever left, as if they think me ridiculously stupid for moving. I tell them I had no say in the matter. I was a toddler and my new adoptive family moved to the mainland.

I was groomed to believe in the islands' exotic attraction. The hula was sexy; surf boarders were strong. Hawai'i was paradise. Sunshine and blue waters, waterfalls and rainbows every day.

Maui is only fourth in *U.S. News and World Report's* "Best Places to Visit in the US." But the islands *are* special. So special in fact, Mark Zuckerberg has tried to swindle native Hawai'ians out of parcels of their land. The islands are so precious that governments of various nations are willing to fund the desecration of a sacred mountain to build telescopes.

I am now in my forties and visiting for the second time in my life. The third day on Oahu we were driving, and as my hungry eyes relished the terrain. The view is a complete contrast from the wooded mountains of where I live now. As I stared out the window, trying to memorize every detail, I saw a double rainbow. Not two rainbows going the same direction, one on top of the other, but one right after the other, left to right, forming a magnificent, rounded-topped letter M.