

“Say more,”
said Makua. It was
the first thing I’d heard him
say so far. “Who owns this
island? Do Separatists?
Or are they attacking
an outpost of Homeland?”
“Homeland does have a base
here,” Bashful said. “I think
that is not the safest
place for you. I’m taking
you all to real safety.
Come now. No more questions.”
He shook a small fruit tree
and dozens of green fruits
fell around them. “Eat these,”
he said. “Very juicy.”

A commercial came on,
one for a new device.
My wife got up to pee.
There was a little wine

left, I quickly drank it
right from the bottle.
The show started up again.
“What did I miss?” she said.

Bashful and the children
had emerged from the trees
near a rocky summit.
From the denuded mountain-
top rose tall, narrow limestone
spires that could have been
placed there, so evenly
were they set around
a deep black hole.
Bashful stepped to the edge
of the summit and looked
down. “Are they after us?”
Paishon asked.

“They are here,”
he said. The sounds of men
crashing through the jungle.
The kids sank to their knees.

Bashful pointed across
the sea, to an island
a few miles away. “There,”
he said, “you will be safe.”
“But how we gonna get there?”
one of the kids shouted.
“They’re coming,” Makua said,
trembling and crying.
“Stand up! Into the hole!”
said Bashful, pointing
into the blackness.
“Follow the path through there.
No more questions.”
Bashful shoved them forward
towards the dark opening.
They saw a lightly worn
path disappear below
the surface. They climbed down
out of sight. Maka looked
back, just peering over
the hole’s lip, but Bashful
had disappeared. Soldiers

swarmed the summit, pointing
their guns and calling out
in tones quite menacing,
but the children were gone,
already far underground
moving forward quickly
as they could in dim light.

After a few minutes
Paishon held up his hand
and everyone halted.

“What can you see, Nene?”

Now I knew one of them
was named Nene. Nene
(the taller one) stepped up
and peered into the dark.

“It continues down, steep.”

[Did they establish
his excellent vision,
before?] [Shhh!]

The children
were arguing. Nene
was squinting and peering

down into the darkness.
“Is there some kind of light?
How can we continue
in the dark? This surface
light is going to fade soon.”
Makua cleared his throat.
“I still have my device,”
he said. “It has a light.”
“Tree, grab it,” Paishon said
to the other kid,
but Makua stepped back,
defiant, staring at him.
“It’s his device,” Maka said,
“he can lead the way.”
“Hold on,” said Tree. “You think
this tunnel actually
goes under the ocean?
And goes to that island?
Are you crazy?
There’s no way that’s the case.”
“And even if it is,” Nene said,
“there’s no way that light

will last so long.”
“So what are you saying?”
said Maka. “Let’s go back
up to the Separatists
and just turn ourselves in?”
A small light, but a light,
flashed on, and Makua
said quietly, “Let’s go,”
pushing past them, down, down,
into the former dark.

Maka followed. Nene
looked at Paishon and Tree,
and, reluctantly, they
followed Makua and Maka.
The scene lasted almost
two minutes—a swaying
light moving deeper down.

Then the door-buzzer buzzed.

“Just ignore it.”

“Really?”

“They’ll go away.” Again
the buzzer buzzed. My wife
sighed and pressed the button
to listen. “Who is it?”

“It’s Pearson, from Porlock!”
Cheery sounding even
through the tiny speaker.

“Pearson. Ok. Let him
in,” I sighed, turning off
the TV show.

“Pearson,” we said. “Welcome
back.” He had some whiskey.

“Great, I’ll get some glasses.”

“Pearson,” my wife said, “why,
every time you show up,
do you announce yourself

‘Pearson from Porlock?’”

“Because I’m always interrupting
something, ruining it,
generally being
unwanted.”

“That’s not true!”

With one hand he pointed
to a spot near the top
of his other hand. “Here.”
“It sounds nice,” my wife said.
“It was awesome. We saw
so many stars! Crazy
stars. My nephew knows all
of the constellations.
And there was a little dock,
it was so dark out there.
The Milky Way, shooting
stars, we saw everything.”
“Sounds awesome.”
“But you guys!”
he shouted, suddenly
leaning forward. “You guys!
You’ll never fucking guess
what happened!”
“What happened?”
“This is going to sound crazy,
but Lady and I went—”
“Who’s Lady?”