

Oliwa's First Lesson at Black Rock

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Oliwa jetted across the ocean floor, then scrambled up the ancient a'a lava wall using all eight of her arms to pull at its crags and outcroppings. After finding a large hole, she slipped inside, hoping she'd outrun the he'e hunter that chased her. And there she waited. When no signs of him followed, she reached out only to slap an old crab in the kisser as it chomped on a sprig of limu.

"Auwee!" the crusty crustacean cursed. "What's the mattah with you? You got no mannahs?"

Oliwa retracted her arm and yelled from the crevice, "Sorry! But he's still out there!"

"Who's still out there?" he grumbled, clacking his claws in bewilderment.

"The he'e hunter!"

"What he'e hunter? They don't come to Black Rock, only us locals. You gotta be new round here or something."

"I am," Oliwa answered timidly.

"Then come on outtah there and lemme have a good look at you."

Oliwa inched her way forward until she popped from her hole like an untethered balloon bobbing in front of him. She watched as his left eye hooked right and his right drew left, then heard him screech, "Ack! An octopus!" at which she threw a sinewy tentacle over him so he couldn't scurry away.

"Don't eat me!" he shouted.

"Eat you? Why, I need you to look me over."

"What for? You obviously got no broken arms!"

“Because I might be hurt.”

“Says who?”

“My mama when she jumped between us and yelled, ‘Don’t hurt her’ and before we got separated... and before I...oh, what am I going to do now?”

“I don’t know but you can’t stay here ‘cause I’m not gonna be your suppah.”

“What? I’m all alone and have nowhere else to go,” Oliwa admitted. “If I promise not to eat you or anyone else, may I stay?”

“It’s a free world, sistah,” the crab grunted. “Now lemme go.”

Oliwa released him to a rocky shelf where his crunchy patch of limu grew, announcing, “My name’s Oliwa, what’s yours?”

“Kala, and I’m plenty hungry, so go away,” he answered.

“Me too,” she said, making Kala jump. “Not for you, I mean! I gave you my word. So will I see you tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow and the next day and the next. I live here, don’t I?”

And she did see Kala again, as well as many other neighbors, who joined them nightly during her inspection and offered helpful advice. First came Elika, the squiggly moray eel, who sympathized with Oliwa but reminded her that everyone feared someone in the ocean. Then came Lui, the big-eyed silver ulua, who suggested she avoid the hunter all together by going elsewhere to feed. And then there was Momi, the cone-shaped clam, who presented her with a coconut shell, saying all she needed was armor.

Many nights later, Oliwa heard Kala say, “tsk,” from under one of her arms and again from under the next. “Tsk” from behind her back and over her head. And then “tsk” to her face as a school of colorful triggerfish, known to them all as humuhumunukunukuapua’a, curiously followed him around in his duties.

Oliwa asked him why he felt so frustrated.

“Seems kinda lolo that you’re the only one whose evah seen this he’e hunter of yours,” he snapped.

“Perhaps it’s because he’s not after you,” she countered as the humu’s rallied,
“No, no!” “Not after you.” “You’re only a crab.” “A papa’i”

Kala rose up angrily and shouted, “Not aftah me? Why everybody’s aftah me!”

“Not us!” the humu’s said backing up. “No, sir!” “You’re too old!” “Too crabby!”

Oliwa giggled and suggested he join her to see the he’e hunter for himself.

“Okay then, I’ll go tomorrow,” he answered. “Anyone else?”

Elika, Lui, and Momi nodded excitedly as the humu’s shivered en mass with
delight. “Yes!” “Yes!” “Let’s!” “We love an adventure!”

So the next day, Oliwa led everyone to the area where she’d last parted from her
mother. It wasn’t far, just around the corner in fact, but nothing appeared out of order.
There were no traps laid, no signs of danger, and certainly no he’e hunter in sight. Even
the sun still shone, although it had now painted the heavens a mango-red blush.

Kala clacked as Lui flashed blue in the setting light. Above them, Elika spun in a
happy, slow twirl that set her teeth to clattering with delight. Oliwa, meanwhile, kept a
vigilant watch amongst the humu’s. The group “oohhed” and “ahhhed.” “How beautiful!”
“How lovely!” “And nowhere better than Maui!”

Then without warning, the he’e hunter arrived.

Sppppuuullllaaaash he came, his black hair trailing like a comet and his fingers
pointing like a dart. Oliwa was so frightened that all she could do was flatten herself over
Kala and pin him to the ocean floor. There she turned the color of its sand, hoping the
hunter wouldn’t recognize her. But, as always, he came at her.

On his approach, Elika and Lui zoomed out of sight, the humu’s screamed and
scattered, and Momi clamped herself shut.

Oliwa scurried to shore with Kala tucked deep into her underbelly where he
pinched her, causing much pain and forcing her three tiny hearts to beat out of rhythm.
They went therrump, barrump, katrump.

Once on land, she panted, “Ouch, Kala! That hurt!”

When he didn’t respond, she called, “Kala are you okay?”

And when he still didn’t speak, she flipped him over and blew into his face. Soon came a sputter.

“Ack! Ack!” he coughed, spewing black ink from his mouth. “Ack! Ack! Ack!!

“Oh, Kala, I’m so sorry to have squirted you but you pinched me.”

“On account you were smothering me and now this! Ack, ack, ack!”

“But the he’e hunter! He was there. Didn’t you see him?”

“Naw! All I saw was you.”

“Well I was trying to protect you. So forgive me because I didn’t mean to, Kala...it’s just...it’s just...” Her apologetic eyes turned upward to a group of people on the beach dressed in colorful pareos who were singing and dancing with their arms raised toward the setting sun. Looking higher still, she saw a row of torches burning bright along the ridgeline of Black Rock. Then she next saw, coming from out of the water, a proud, young lad who ran to join in the celebration.

Oliwa inched toward Kala only to be halted by his outstretched claw.

“Is that your he’e hunter?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered softly.

“I see.”

“You see what?” she whispered, keeping her eyes fixed on the group ahead.

“I see he’s no he’e hunter, Oliwa. He lights the torches.”

“He lights the torches?”

“Uhhuh. And aftah he lights them every night, he jumps into the sea.”

“Every night into the sea?” Oliwa asked, understanding as she blinked back tears that welled from the swishing sounds of the dancer’s swaying and the gentle music that floated back to her on the breeze. She looked tenderly at Kala and said, “Oh, Kala, everyone will think I’m such a fool.”

“How so? “

“I’m not sure.”

“Listen up, Oliwa, for days you been worrin’ about that he’e hunter of yours and turns out he’s no hunter at all.”

“That’s true,” Oliwa agreed.

“Bettah then true, and if it were me, I’d be jumpin’ over rainbows. So let this be your first lesson at Black Rock, okay?”

Oliwa nodded a “yes” and wiped her eyes.

Kala took hold of another of her arms and pulled her toward the water, suggesting, “Now, we’re gonna dry up out here, so how about we go back in?”

Waiting for them were Elika, Lui, Momi and the school of humu’s who asked all at once, “Are you okay?” “Are you hurt?” “Did you see him?” “Did you see him?”

Oliwa hung her head. “Yes, we saw him and, no, we’re not hurt. Turns out he’s no he’e hunter at all. He lights the torches, then afterwards jumps into the sea from the top of Black Rock.”

“Ohhhh!” they exclaimed, “We didn’t know that!” “We can’t go out there.”

“I’m so embarrassed.”

“Embarrassed? Why be embarrassed?” Elika asked. “Didn’t I tell you we’re all afraid of someone in the ocean? And now that your he’e hunter is no longer a threat, all you really need to worry about is...”

“We know!” “We know!” the humu’s interrupted nervously.

“Shush!” Kala commanded as he peered deeper into the ocean and Lui hid behind Elika, who wound her body around his.

“We’ll give you that lesson another time, Oliwa,” he said. “for now, maybe we bettah go home.”

At that, the sun's final spark lit upon their path to Black Rock where Kala's crunchy patch of limu grew and Oliwa would one day grow to learn much more.

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