



Taylor Garcia

Aphrodite's Island

Gary crams his bag into the overhead, feels the burn of other eyes. Do I really need clothes in eighteenth-century Tahiti? Does it exist?

Later, his pilotless ship lands like an egg dropped onto a down pillow. Outside, no one in sight. Only black sand beaches and a steaming jungle.

Why bring razors without mirrors anywhere? And no need for the *guayaberas* and Reyn Spooners. His skimpiest thing was the black boxer briefs from Lori.

He reads. *Lord of the Flies*. And waits. She'll arrive soon. That was the plan. Once she'd saved up, resigned, put her stuff in storage.

Night fell. Was there a village? Islanders? That Caucasian kid on his ship staring at him: Did he have family here? A history project, probably.

Still, no Lori. Surely it wouldn't take this long. Maybe she had second thoughts; just couldn't leave Ralph and the kids. Finally cooler now. Starving.

Morning. My God, this clear sky and air. Water like a bath. Freshen up. Find food. Preferably protein. Still avoiding carbs. Debating taking clothes off.

A little too quiet, and maybe not the best location to start over. Why not France in the 1920's? The Wild West? Or the future?

No. They couldn't go ahead. Only backward. It was the only way to make certain they would be together. Must eat something soon. Fish? Nuts?

It's quite possible her craft arrived on the other side of the island. It's time to look. He ventures into the jungle. Sees a native.

The young boy narrows his eyes on Gary. Gary gestures a flying machine. Wings for hands, hands that land. The boy frowns, then runs away.

Gary can't keep up the pace. Should have lost more weight, worked on a tan. Sweaty and sunburned is not fun. Alas, the boy's village.

The Caucasian kid on Gary's flight is there.

"Why are you here?" the kid asks.

"Why are you here?" Gary asks.

"I ran away." "Me, too," Gary says.

"Life is good here. They give you gifts."

"Did you see another craft arrive?" Gary says.

"Chief HitiHiti's children. They guard it. There, in the jungle."

"What's the matter?" the kid asks.

"Oh, God, she crashed," Gary says.

"You were meeting someone?"

"Which ones are HitiHiti's children? And how old are you, anyway?" "Thirteen."

Gary was way off. Lori's kids didn't look that young.

"Take me to them now. To the craft. Please."

"Talk to chief."

In HitiHiti's hut, Gary signs the craft again. Beggars. Prayer hands. HitiHiti points to a statue. A female figure. The goddess. She looks like Lori.

Gary worships her. Asks HitiHiti to go to her. He must see her. Now. Please. Gary hits his chest, his heart. HitiHiti shouts. Two come.

One boy, one girl, older than the runaway, older than Lori's kids. Chief's Mini-Me's. With torches, they go off into the darkening night. Gary follows.

At the top of a mound, thick with palms, sits the craft. Like Gary's, but a single pod. She wanted to travel in style. Alone.

Chief's kids genuflect, move forward on knees. Gary follows. Vines cover the rusted fuselage. Chief's kids light a single torch just inside, the door long gone.

In the dim light, a shrine to the goddess with offerings and flowers glows near the cockpit. Gary attempts to stand. Chief's kids hold him.

Moss and lichens grow on her sarcophagus. The profile is unmistakably Lori's. Gary's hips quake, and his breathing stops for a moment. Chief's kids point.

On the wall, their sacred text:

Gare,

I goofed! Set my temporal endpoint at 1666, not 1766. It's been grand. I die a queen!

Lor

Gary weeps. Alone on Aphrodite's Island. Kneeling in his Calvins, he feels ridiculous. Should have bought a round trip. Chief's kids kowtow. Pray to him.

Back at the village, HitiHiti crowns Gary in bougainvillea, and then leis him in kukui nuts and hibiscus. The villagers kneel. The prophecy has come to pass.

Many years later, Gary, bronzed sinew and dreaded locks, walking with two of his wives, falls to the jungle floor. A dart to the neck.

He breathes his last. Whispers, "Lori." His wives sob over him. The bushes rustle, and out steps pale-faced Ralph, conquistador in khaki. He drops his blowgun.

Gary's wives grasp at each other. The *other* prophecy has come to pass. So begins the wicked era, so ends the innocence.

Ralph steps forward, claims Gary's wives. They attempt to honor him, as they do all visitors, but none will be like Gary. Never like Lori.

Queen, born of an egg on the sea. Shining goddess from the foam. Benevolent in all her ways, sorrow behind her eyes. Modest and patient. Waiting. Always waiting.

Taylor Garcia lives in Southern California. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Chagrin River Review*, *Driftwood Press*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, and *Pearl Magazine*. His personal essays can be found at GoodMenProject.com.