

ILIMA TODD

"This island romance swept me away. A gorgeous tribute to the author's ancestors and their love story."

-Kathryn Purdie, #1 New York Times bestselling author of Burning Glass

s the second daughter of a royal chief, Maile will be permitted to marry for love. Her fiancé is the best navigator in Hawai'i, and he taught her everything he knows—how to feel the ocean, observe the winds, read the stars, and how to love.

But when sailors from a strange place called England arrive on her island, a misunderstanding ends in battle, and Maile is suddenly widowed before she is wed.

Finding herself in the middle of the battle and fearing for her life, Maile takes John Harbottle, the wounded man who killed her fiancé, prisoner, and though originally intending to let him die, she reluctantly heals him. And in the process, she discovers the man she thought was her enemy might be her ally instead.

John has been Captain James Cook's translator for three voyages across the Pacific. He is kind and clearly fascinated with her homeland and her people—and with Maile herself. But guilt continues to drive a wedge between them: John's guilt over the death he caused, and Maile's guilt over the truth about what triggered the deadly battle—a secret she's kept hidden from everyone on the island.

When Maile is tasked with teaching John how to navigate using the stars so he can sail back to England, they must also navigate the challenges of being from very different cultures. In doing so, they might also find the peace that comes when two hearts become one.

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A Song
for the tars

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For my children Emma Mililani, Parker Makana, Stirling Kaʻopuʻulani, and Hailey Haukealani. This is your story, too.

John Harbottle's Journal 4 February 1779

I fear we've overstayed our welcome.

My relief when the captain orders the ships ready to depart is palpable. Our duty is to search for the Northwest Passage, after all, not indulge ourselves in the pleasures of this paradise.

Yet what a paradise it has been.

Never on our previous two voyages have the natives been more accommodating, more praising, than here in this protected bay. Even the captain, whose demeanor has been despondent of late, has emerged a new man while ashore, as though the water here is a life-giving elixir. One must only drink to become transformed—translated into a more celestial state.

The natives revere the captain as divine, much to our advantage. Even as we make preparations to leave, we are inundated with such quantities of food and gifts that we haven't the room to hold it all. But perhaps the captain has seen what some of the sailors have as well—the natives grow impatient. Suspicious. What they expect us to do or say I know not, but after a month's recovery on the island, it is past time we take our leave.

After enjoying a gift of song and dance from the natives, their double-hulled canoes adorned with feathers and flora out upon the water, we cast our sails and veer from the bay. We head again in search of the elusive passage to the Atlantic. This is our purpose, the cause of our voyage.

Yet as I stare longingly at the Sandwich Isles shrinking on the horizon, I wonder if the other sailors feel as I do—a small sliver of regret that this may be the last time we see these shores. Our time here will be but a memory, a dream. One that, perhaps, I may one day question had ever been real at all.

'ekahi Chapter One

I sink lower into the hull of the canoe, pressing my back against the *koa* wood along the base. My eyes close, eclipsing the stars in the night sky above me. I relax and try to feel the rhythm of the sea. She rams against the side of the vessel like a stubborn child, sending a salty spray of water over my face, refusing to be ignored. A moment later, she cradles the canoe, wrapping her arms around it like a trusted friend, rocking it softly. She's erratic and fierce, soothing and mild. She is unpredictable. But there's a pattern here that longs to be understood. So that's what I do—attempt to comprehend what she's trying to tell me.

"What do you feel, Maile?" Ikaika asks. His voice is soft but carries easily in the crisp night air.

"I feel . . ." I pause, considering the question. "Distracted. Stop talking."

He laughs briefly then says nothing more.

I think of the first time Ikaika brought me out on a canoe like this. We were children, and I begged him to teach me the skill of wayfinding, the method of reading the clouds and stars and water

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to navigate on the ocean. He'd been training to become a navigator, and I was jealous of everything he was learning.

Girls aren't allowed to navigate. I'm the second daughter of Kalani the high chief, and I'm not even granted that privilege. But Ikaika was never one to pass up a chance to show off, and we paddled out into the bay on a small outrigger so he could teach me what he knew.

It was the first of many training sessions and the start of a lifelong friendship. My father tolerated our jaunts, mostly because he'd already arranged for Ikaika to be my husband one day and he hoped our time together would prove beneficial. Now I'm eighteen, and our wedding is only a month away. As the chief's prime navigator, Ikaika is an honorable choice for me. One I'm grateful for.

I focus on the ocean again, pressing my palms against the base of the canoe the way Ikaika taught me, spreading my fingers and trying to feel the water. She moves uneasily. The canoe drifts with the current, but it's hesitant. As though it's unfamiliar with this path and moves with trepidation.

I feel Ikaika's mouth against my neck, his warm breath tickling my skin.

"No distractions," I say, feigning annoyance.

"But I didn't say anything," he teases.

I open my eyes to see him grinning above me, kneeling at my side. I shake my head at him, knowing this training session is almost over.

He moves his mouth to my ear and whispers, "A navigator must be prepared for a variety of distractions while upon the water."

"Is that so?"

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He nods against the side of my face. "It's only appropriate that I provide such distractions. For training purposes, of course."

"Of course," I say, this time giving him a small laugh.

He presses his nose and forehead flush against mine, his hand cradling the back of my neck. We breathe in and out, exchanging our breath, our $h\bar{a}$. He moves his nose to the right of mine then shifts to the opposite side. It is our *honi*, our kiss, and it leaves me breathless.

"Maile," he says, pulling away slightly. "What do you feel?"

I can't tell if his question is meant to be romantic or part of our training, but it makes me think of what I felt a moment ago from the water, and I know I can't ignore it. I sit up and look at the ocean surrounding us as though I can find the source of my unease in the darkness.

"The storm is gone," I say, referencing the squall that pushed through our island a couple of days ago. "But something is still amiss. She doesn't feel right."

Ikaika sighs and leans against the side of the canoe. "You're not still thinking about those white sailors, are you? They've been gone for eight days."

"How could I not think about them?" I ask. "Their arrival changed everything."

Ikaika shrugs and fingers the iron dagger hanging on his belt cloth, one of the many metal weapons and tools our people traded the white men for. "You're letting it muddle your instincts. The sea is calm. Steady. It is you who is turbulent, not the water."

Maybe he's right. Maybe it's all in my head. There's no reason for me to question James Cook or his intentions for our people. His ships, the *Resolution* and *Discovery*, had been skating along the shore of our island for days before they entered our bay—Lono's sacred bay. We'd been honoring Lono during our yearly

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makahiki celebration when the ships arrived. Lono is our legendary white god, the god of peace, destined to return to our shore one day. James Cook came at just the right time to just the right place, and with his pale skin and head of white hair, it wasn't long before our priests declared him to be the god himself.

James Cook never denied it. He participated in the sacred ceremonies honoring him, frequented our *heiau*—our temples—and allowed our people to prostrate themselves before him whenever he walked by.

And of course, there was the iron. His sailors freely traded their abundance of metal for food, supplies, and women. I glance at Ikaika's dagger again. I'd never seen anything like the substance before. None of us had. Harder than lava rock and molded into whatever form the sailors needed, it was virtually indestructible. Surely such a thing had come from the gods.

Yet one of Cook's crewmen died while on shore—obviously a mortal. How could that be? And there seemed to be no end to the amount of food the sailors could eat. I'd seen some of our people patting the crews' stomachs in awe of their appetite. Did they come from a place where the food had failed? How could Lono live in such a place?

I wasn't the only one who questioned Cook's divinity. There were many relieved expressions among my people when the white men finally sailed their ships out to sea. There are only so many pigs one can hunt on an isolated island to give as gifts to the foreigners. I was beginning to worry we wouldn't have enough supplies for our own needs.

"Besides," Ikaika says, drawing my attention back to him. "The season of Lono is over. James Cook wouldn't return now that it's the season of Kū. Not unless he wants to start a war. They will not be back."

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His reasoning doesn't make me feel better. Kū is the god of war. This is the season when challenges can be made to the chief and his royal status, when a lesser chief of the island can wage war on us if he seeks a higher rank. My father has maintained peace for most of his years as high chief of our island. Though his men are trained to fight, they haven't had to for a long time. If James Cook really is the god Lono foretold, he will not return.

But what if he isn't Lono?

"Come here," Ikaika says, motioning to the spot next to him.

I move to his side and lean back against the edge of the canoe, letting him drape his arm over my shoulders. I run my hand over the large white whale tooth that hangs at his neck, sitting on his collarbone.

"I know you didn't like them being here." He squeezes my arm, trying to comfort me. "You avoided them as much as you could, stealing me away to the water just to get away." He smiles. "Not that I'm complaining about spending more time alone with you. But, Maile, they were a blessing."

I harrumph, not seeing how foreigners depleting our food stores was a blessing. We were doing just fine without them.

"They were a blessing." He nods, as though trying to convince himself, too. "Of all the beaches on our island, of all the beaches on all the islands that exist, Lono chose our bay. He chose to bestow the gift of metal on us. Think of the advantage our people have over all others now. We are a chosen people."

I try to see the white men as he does. As revered guests. As a blessing. But there's still a part of me waiting for the trick to reveal itself, the proof that they're really a curse in the end.

"Change can be a good thing." Ikaika squeezes my arm again. "We'll both be changing in a month. That's good, isn't it?"

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I smile, thinking of our wedding day. "You will not change," I tease. "You'll still be arrogant."

"Yes," he agrees.

"And reckless."

"Well . . ."

"And stubborn," I say. "Defiant. Irreverent. Selfish."

"You speak as though these are bad things."

I laugh. "You will be the same haughty boy who has sought to best me in everything, always."

"Yes." He runs his fingers down the length of my hair. "But I will be yours."

I look up at his dark eyes, a lock of black hair falling in front of them. I brush it away and say, "You've always been mine."

"I know." He holds my gaze. "I'll still be handsome, too. That won't change."

I swat him on the chest, scolding him for teasing me so readily. But at least he's made me forget about James Cook and his foreign sailors. For now.

"Twenty degrees," he says, bringing me back to the lesson I thought was over.

I hold my hand up in front of me, stretching my thumb and little finger as far apart as I can, one full handspan. It is exactly twenty degrees—one-eighteenth the distance around the entire sky. With my arm outstretched, I superimpose my hand against the sky.

"And ten degrees," he asks, testing me.

I clench my fist, my arm still outstretched. The width of my fist measures ten degrees in the sky.

"Five degrees?"

I hold up three fingers.

"One."

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I hold up my little finger. The width of the very tip measures one degree.

"Good," he says. He holds up his hand as well, extending his little finger like me. But because his arm is longer than mine, it's farther away from us, making up for the fact that his hand and fingers are larger as well. It's a trick he taught me many years ago. The measurement holds, even for children, because the length of our arms is proportional to the size of our hands.

He hooks his little finger with mine midair before pulling my hand toward his chest and holding it there. We've been out here most of the night. Dawn approaches on the horizon. I close my eyes and try to feel the calmness he said he'd felt from the ocean. But all I feel is the steady beat of his heart against my head as I rest against him. It lulls me to sleep after an entire night awake.

I dream I'm walking through the high forests of our island, following a well-worn path likely carved out by boars. A mild rain shower has just passed through, leaving droplets on the large green leaves of the trees surrounding me. The sunlight scatters down between the greenery, brightening the corners of the forest as its rays reflect off every wet surface. The constant *drip drip drip* of the water running off the high leaves and splattering onto lower ones creates a song that makes me want to raise my arms and dance to its melody.

A soft trill sounds, like that of a bird caught in a trap. I follow his cries, finally finding him on a high branch near a tube-shaped lobelia blossom. He's a golden finch, the only bird on the island able to reach the sweet nectar of lobelia thanks to his long, curved beak. Bird catchers like to brush a layer of breadfruit paste along the branches next to those blossoms, hoping to trap the birds—like this one—and collect a golden feather.

I reach up and carefully free him from the branch, gently

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removing the residue from his feet. Bird catchers pluck one feather from every bird they catch before they let the bird go, collecting another feather another day. They use the feathers for capes, head-dresses, *lei*, and other adornments. I don't have it in me to steal a feather, so instead I stroke him once, my touch sliding off him as easily as a drop of water. I open my hand and let him fly free. He disappears from my view so quickly, I regret not holding onto him a little longer. I know he doesn't belong to me, but there's an emptiness I feel now that he's gone. It makes no sense, but the feeling is there all the same.

"Where are we?" Ikaika's voice invades my dream, making me startle.

"What?" I blink my eyes open and lift my head from his chest, reality coming back to me.

"Did you fall asleep?" He tucks a length of hair behind my ear. Without waiting for my answer, he asks again, "Where are we?"

I rub at my eyes and look to the horizon, knowing the question is part of my training. I stretch my arm out again, my palm turned away from me. With my fingers close together, only my thumb is outstretched, parallel to the horizon. The fixed star in the north sits just above my index finger.

"We are in Hawai'i," I say. "We are home."

Ikaika lowers my hand and sits tall, looking out to the horizon I just measured. He blinks as though he, too, is waking from a dream. I strain my eyes to see what he does; his vision reaches farther than mine. All I see is the thin line of orange touching the surface of the water as the sun begins his daily climb.

"What is it?" I ask. The moment the words are out, I see it. Calmness abandons my body, leaving behind a turbulence that was hiding all along.

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This time, I know those white clouds low on the horizon are not clouds at all, but the large white sails of James Cook's *Resolution* and *Discovery*. And this time, I know he will not be welcomed.