A Sea-Skin Song
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The young mullet warble a single, bubbling song
mouth to tail, full spine. Eyes to sky,
greeting soft raindrops.
Swallow the falling glow of full moon’s light,
gills open wide, open and shut,
tasting whispers of ‘Ōhua Rain.

Mouth to tail, full spine, in echoing
low-tide song.
Against the currents and white-wash of high, sharp cliffs,
within the eddying, rolling waves,
while humpback whales croon
un-hurried lullabies to drowsy calves.

A disjointed melody to outside ears
it moves through lava’s cracks as
fresh water poised
between uplands and boulder beach.
Boulders churn in ever-dance
with solemn waves,
bringers of silver schools, the young mullets.
Crowding of open mouths at sea-skin’s break
as limu kala slow-tugs on
remnants
of alien-invaded forests.

Mouth to tail, full spine, the spirits’ song endures.
horizon to beach united voices
of sprats
and village and sea-skin
and now the moena,
soft woven leaves cradle child’s dreams.

The strange scurry of ‘a’ama crabs,
over crumbling cliffs,
past village-sites long gone.
memories carried in ti-leaf crowns
the iwi of soil flesh.

Grave sites meander into solemn-waves,
leaping off points for ancestors’ duty
while ever-more, mouth to tail, full spine,
the single, bubbling song prevails.
Winter through summer and winter again,

Sargassum spp. seaweed used in forgiveness ceremony
mat
bones
the ‘ōpīhi whisper a mournful hum
as the elders
slowly disappear.
with them follows practice, follows ola
as shadow to light.

Aging leaves turn dust to settle within
the scarred and resting pohaku,
the heiau hidden but not yet
forgotten,
their dreams soar over waves to horizon edge.
The pohaku stir uneasy as their people
become severed from land and sea and spirit,
the forest roots press deeper
to carry the kaumaha
ever growing.

Tentative, quavery
mouth to tail aligned
and stubborn with grace
the girl sings.

And hānai aunt strips,
quickly strips,
the thorns and ribs from sea-dried lauhala,
weaving moena,
weaving coast,
through mango-scented dusk,
and her stories murmur
to the heavy resting keiki heads.

And tutu wahine
scrapes the poi surface
with cowry shell before feeding guests,
and sometimes she smiles
a private, closed smile
as she listens to the singing girl.

The young mullets find their way to tidepool home;
dart amongst smooth lava walls
of light and air, of the tumbling blue
and hear her voice.
The sprats start
to sing
mouth to tail, full spine
as our song lives.

This poem is written in honor of and conversation with Peter Blue Cloud. It is my hope that this poem presents a way of knowing sea, of knowing coast, that is embodied, that prevails despite loss of land and way of life through practice and as family.
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